

Towards a Learner-Centered Paradigm: Reconstructing Arabic Language Curriculum for Multidisciplinary University Students

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Abstract

This study aims to reconstruct the Arabic language curriculum by integrating a learner-centered design paradigm. The reconstruction focuses on two core principles: aligning curricular objectives with specific departmental graduate profiles and accommodating the diverse characteristics of multidisciplinary learners. Conducted at the Department of Arabic, The New College, Chennai, India, the research employed a qualitative descriptive methodology. Data were gathered from 30 undergraduate non-Arabic major students—divided into two cohorts—through semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis. The findings propose a four-step reconstruction framework: (1) reformulating instructional objectives to prioritize context-relevant language skills (e.g., reading comprehension for Islamic Studies, speaking skills for Communication); (2) redesigning teaching materials around thematic, field-specific texts and vocabulary; (3) adopting differentiated instructional strategies, including diagnostic pre-testing, heterogeneous grouping, and multimodal methods; and (4) redesigning assessments to be skill-based and aligned with the new objectives. The study concludes that this reconstructed, learner-centric curriculum is essential for enhancing the relevance, effectiveness, and overall quality of Arabic language education in multidisciplinary university settings.

Keywords: Arabic language learning; curriculum reconstruction; differentiated instruction; graduate profile alignment



INTRODUCTION / المقدمة

The teaching of Arabic to non-specialist university students presents persistent pedagogical challenges. Theoretically, these can be categorized into two domains: linguistic challenges (e.g., complex morphology, diglossia) and non-linguistic challenges (e.g., low motivation, perceived irrelevance of content). A primary issue stems from applying a standardized, one-size-fits-all curriculum to a heterogeneous student body with diverse academic backgrounds and professional aspirations. Educators' awareness of these dual challenges is crucial for developing effective strategies to overcome learning obstacles. This study therefore seeks to reconstruct the Arabic language curriculum by placing the learner's specific academic and professional needs at the center of the design process, moving from a generic model to a purpose-driven, learner-centered paradigm. This paper will outline the methodological approach, present a four-pillar framework for reconstruction derived from qualitative data, and discuss its implications for curriculum design in multilingual, multidisciplinary higher education settings.

METHOD / المنهجية

This study employed a qualitative descriptive research design to investigate and formulate a reconstructed model for Arabic language learning. The research was conducted at the Department of Arabic, The New College, Chennai, India. The participant population consisted of 30 undergraduate students from non-Arabic major departments (e.g., Islamic Economics, Communications, Education), divided into two cohort groups based on their year of study for focused longitudinal analysis.

Data collection was triangulated through multiple methods. Primary data was obtained via semi-structured and in-depth interviews with three Arabic language instructors and ten purposively selected students to gather insights into learning challenges, perceptions, and expectations. Secondary data was collected through

document analysis, including a review of existing Arabic course syllabi, learning materials, and assessment tools used within the institution. Furthermore, non-participant observation was conducted over 12 classroom sessions to analyze the teaching-learning process, student engagement, and the application of existing methodologies.

Data analysis followed an interactive model, encompassing data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing (Sutopo, 1988). The collected information was systematically organized, categorized, and interpreted to identify recurring themes, core problems, and potential solutions. The analytical process focused on synthesizing findings from the field with theoretical frameworks on curriculum design and learner characteristics to develop a coherent reconstruction proposal.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION / نتائج البحث و المناقشة

The analysis revealed several critical areas requiring reconstruction to optimize Arabic learning for a diverse student body. The proposed framework, as visualized in Figure 1, consists of four integrated components.

1. Reformulating Instructional Objectives

The overarching yet vague objective of achieving general Arabic proficiency requires specification. Reconstruction begins by aligning course goals with departmental graduate profiles. For instance, for students in Islamic Terminology or History, the primary objective should be developing *Maharah al-Qira'ah* (reading comprehension) to enable access to classical legal and historical texts (Al-Fauzan, 2004). Conversely, for students in Communications or *Da'wah*, priority should be given to *Maharah al-Kalam* (speaking skills) to enhance rhetorical and presentation abilities (Tu'aymah, 1989). This shift from teaching "about the language" (theory) to teaching "the language for a specific purpose" ensures relevance and direction. The proposed alignment for key departments is summarized in Table 1.

2. Redesigning Teaching Materials

Following the redefined objectives, teaching materials must be specialized. A generic grammar syllabus should be supplemented with thematic, field-specific content. Students of Economics would engage with texts and dialogues on banking transactions, *mudharabah*, and *musyarakah*, while Education majors would study Arabic texts on pedagogical themes. This approach makes learning immediately applicable and pragmatically motivates students by connecting language acquisition to their core disciplines (Tuhfah, 2016). Examples of such thematic materials are provided in Table 2.

3. Adopting Differentiated Instructional Strategies

The heterogeneity of learners—varying from those with prior Arabic exposure from religious schooling to absolute beginners—necessitates differentiated instruction. Strategies must account for diverse learning styles: auditory, visual, and kinesthetic (Smaldino et al., 2011). Operational strategies include: (a) conducting pre-tests to map students' baseline proficiency for tailored instruction; (b) implementing heterogeneous small-group work to foster peer learning; (c) employing varied methods like communicative language teaching; and (d) assigning tasks that leverage students' primary field knowledge. The implementation of these strategies is outlined in Figure 2, and specific tactics for diverse learner characteristics are detailed in Table 3.

4. Redesigning Assessment Strategies

Assessment must be reconstructed to mirror the new skill-based objectives. If the goal is reading comprehension, evaluation should move beyond grammatical accuracy to measure a student's ability to identify main ideas, infer meaning, summarize, and translate field-relevant passages (Djiwandono, 1996). For speaking skills, assessment would focus on fluency, pronunciation, and the effective delivery of content-specific presentations. This alignment ensures that evaluation drives learning towards the intended practical outcomes.

The discussion underscores that these four components are interdependent. A change in objectives dictates a change in materials, which in turn requires appropriate teaching and assessment methods. This holistic reconstruction places the learner's needs and future professional application at the center, thereby addressing the common issues of student disengagement, low motivation, and the perceived irrelevance of language study in a multidisciplinary setting.

Table 1: Alignment of Departmental Graduate Profiles with Arabic Learning Objectives and Skills Focus

Department / Field of Study	Key Graduate Profile Examples	Primary Arabic Language Skill Focus	Secondary Skill Focus (if applicable)
Islamic Terminology / Sharia Studies	Legal Practitioner, Islamic Jurist, Researcher	Reading Comprehension (<i>Maharah al-Qira'ah</i>)	Writing (<i>Maharah al-Kitabah</i>)
Economics	Sharia Financial Analyst, Islamic Banker, Auditor	Reading Comprehension & Specialized Terminology	Speaking for professional communication
Communication / Da'wah Studies	Preacher (<i>Da'i</i>), Public Relations Officer, Media Practitioner	Speaking (<i>Maharah al-Kalam</i>)	Listening (<i>Maharah al-Istima'</i>)

Department / Field of Study	Key Graduate Profile Examples	Primary Arabic Language Skill Focus	Secondary Skill Focus (if applicable)
Education	Teacher, Curriculum Developer, Educational Researcher	Integrated Skills with focus on pedagogical vocabulary	Reading subject- specific educational texts
History & Islamic Civilization	Historian, Researcher, Archivist	Reading Comprehension of historical texts	Writing research summaries

1. Redesigning Teaching Materials

Following the redefined objectives, teaching materials must be specialized. A generic grammar syllabus must be replaced or supplemented with thematic, field-specific content. Students of Economics would engage with texts and dialogues on banking transactions, mudharabah, and musyarakah, while Education majors would study Arabic texts on pedagogical themes. This approach makes learning immediately applicable and pragmatically motivates students by connecting language acquisition to their core disciplines (Tuhfah, 2016).

Table 2: Examples of Thematic, Field-Specific Teaching Materials

Department / Skill Focus	Sample Thematic Topics for Arabic Materials	Examples of Content / Activities
Islamic Terminology (Reading Focus)	Contracts (<i>'Uqud</i>), Legal Testimony (<i>Shahadah</i>), Family Law (<i>Ahwal al-Shakhsiyyah</i>)	Annotated excerpts from classical fiqh texts, case study summaries, vocabulary lists for legal terms.
Economics (Reading & Terminology)	Islamic Banking Principles, <i>Zakat</i> Calculation, <i>Sukuk</i> Structures	Dialogues in a bank, annual reports of Islamic financial institutions, glossary of terms like <i>Murabaha</i> , <i>Ijarah</i> .
Communication (Speaking Focus)	Public Speaking, Interview Techniques, Media Broadcasting	Role-play scripts for sermons or news presentations, video analysis of speeches, debates on contemporary issues.
Education (Integrated Skills)	Classroom Management, Learning Theories, Lesson Planning	Reading passages about educational philosophers, designing a simple lesson plan in Arabic, peer-teaching activities.

2. Adopting Differentiated Instructional Strategies

The heterogeneity of learners-varying from those with prior Arabic exposure from religious schooling to absolute beginners-necessitates differentiated instruction. Strategies must account for diverse learning styles: auditory (lectures, discussions), visual (images, charts, videos), and kinesthetic (role-plays, language games) (Smaldino et al., 2011). Operational strategies include: (a) conducting pre-tests to map students' baseline proficiency for tailored instruction; (b) implementing heterogeneous small-group work to foster peer learning; (c) employing varied methods like communicative language teaching to enhance engagement; and (d) assigning tasks that leverage students' primary field knowledge.

Table 3: Differentiated Instructional Strategies for Diverse Learner Characteristics

Learner Characteristic / Challenge	Instructional Strategy	Practical Application in Arabic Class
Varied Proficiency Levels (Beginner s vs. Intermediate)	Tiered Activities & Flexible Grouping	Pre-test to group students; beginners work on basic greetings and script, while intermediates analyze simple field-specific texts.
Different Learning Styles (Auditory, Visual, Kinesthetic)	Multimodal Delivery	Teaching vocabulary via: Audio (listening to correct pronunciation), Visual (flashcards with images), Kinesthetic (writing words in air or with clay).
Low Motivation / Perceived Irrelevance	Contextualized & Communicative Tasks	Assign a project to create a short Arabic video presentation on a topic from their major (e.g., a finance student explains a <i>Mudarabah</i> contract).

Learner Characteristic / Challenge	Instructional Strategy	Practical Application in Arabic Class
Lack of Engagement in Grammar Drills	Focus on Form within Meaningful Context	Teach grammatical cases (<i>i'rab</i>) not in isolation, but through analyzing the structure of a short, relevant legal or historical sentence.

3. Redesigning Assessment Strategies

Assessment must be reconstructed to mirror the new skill-based objectives. If the goal is reading comprehension, evaluation should move beyond grammatical accuracy to measure a student's ability to identify main ideas, infer meaning, summarize, and translate field-relevant passages (Djiwandono, 1996). For speaking skills, assessment would focus on fluency, pronunciation, and the effective delivery of content-specific presentations. This alignment ensures that evaluation drives learning towards the intended practical outcomes.

Figure 1: The Arabic Curriculum Reconstruction Process

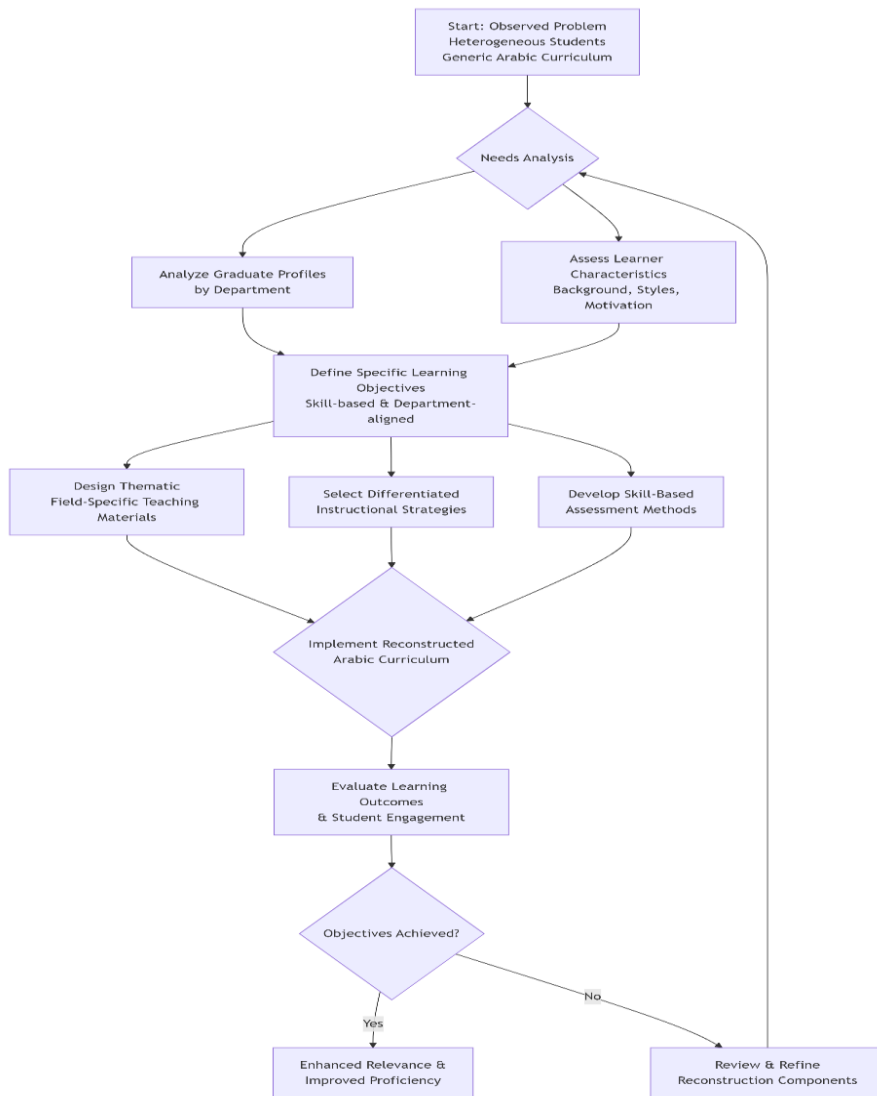


Figure 2: Differentiated Instructional Strategy Implementation

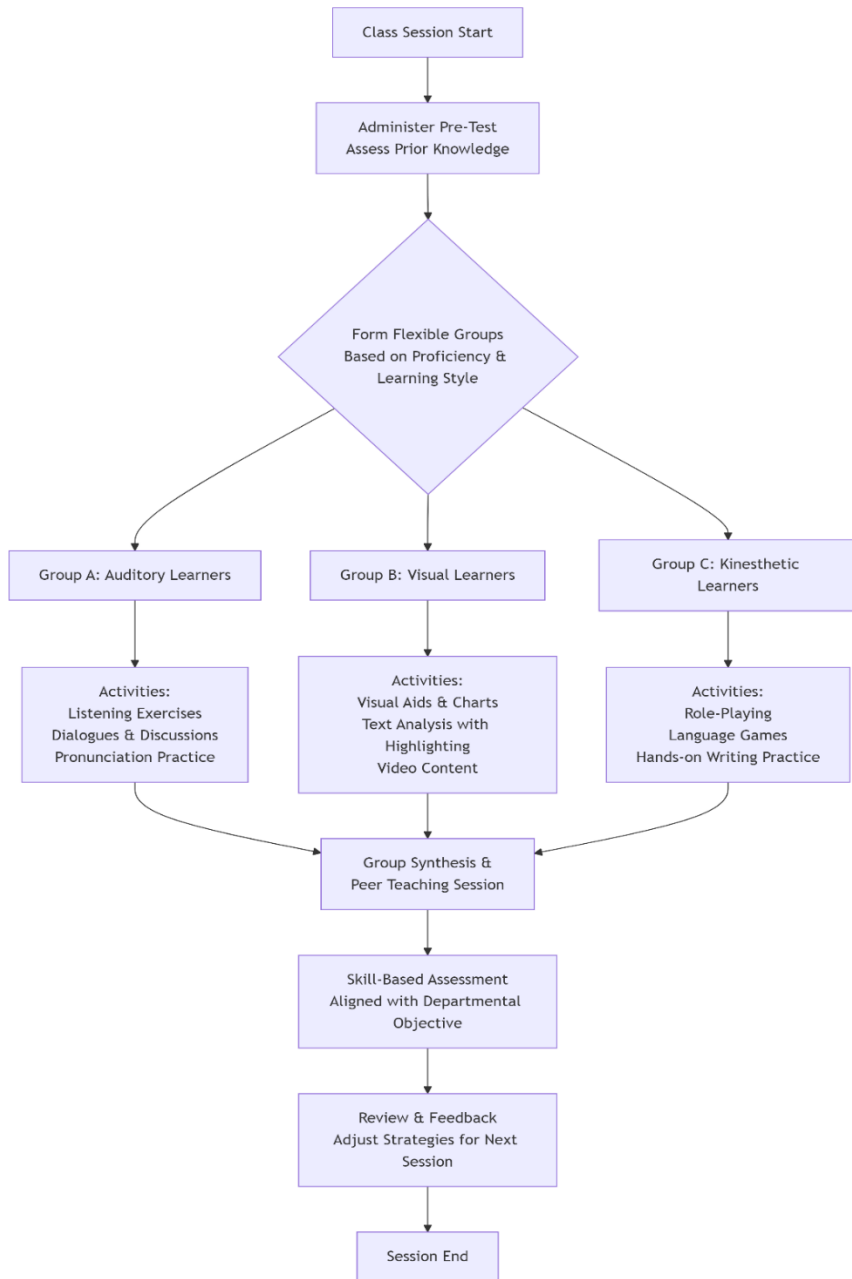


Figure 3: Department-Specific Arabic Learning Pathway

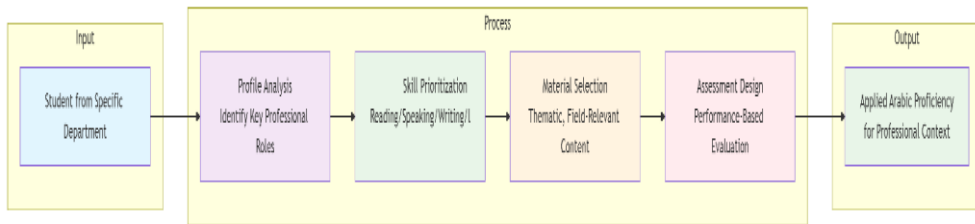
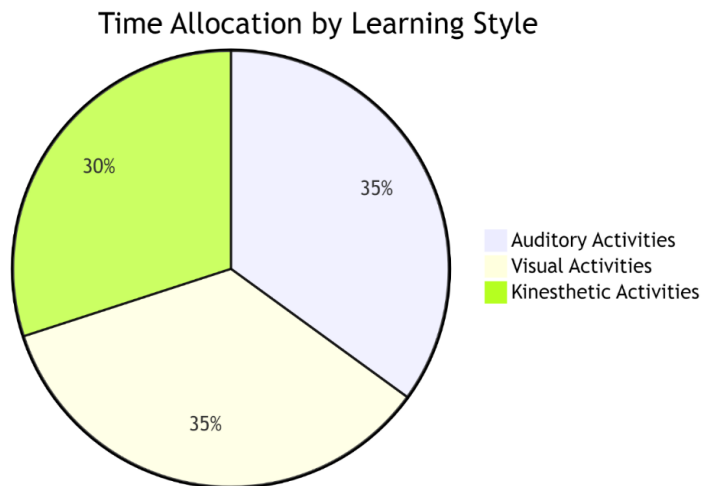


Figure 4: Learning Style Integration in Arabic Instruction



The discussion underscores that these four components are interdependent. A change in objectives dictates a change in materials, which in turn requires appropriate teaching and assessment methods. This holistic reconstruction places the learner's needs and future professional application at the center, thereby addressing the common issues of student disengagement, low motivation, and the perceived irrelevance of language study in a multidisciplinary setting

CONCLUSION / الخلاصة

This study concludes that the effective teaching of Arabic to a non-specialist, heterogeneous student population requires a fundamental reconstruction of the curriculum and pedagogical approach. A standardized curriculum is inadequate. Instead, success depends on a learner-centric model built on two pillars: alignment with specific departmental and professional goals, and responsiveness to individual learner characteristics and styles. The proposed four-step framework—reformulating objectives, redesigning materials, adopting differentiated instructional strategies, and realigning assessments—provides a practical pathway for implementation. By making Arabic learning relevant, applied, and accessible, institutions can significantly enhance learning outcomes, student motivation, and the overall quality of education, ultimately empowering students to use Arabic as an effective tool in their respective academic and professional fields. Future research could quantitatively measure the impact of implementing this reconstructed framework on student proficiency and engagement metrics.

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