



## Factors which Predict Pedagogical Success: The case of Arabic Language Teachers

Mahdi Zamani and Sayyed Ebrahim Dibaji

Department of Arabic Literature, Science and Research Branch, Islamic Azad University, Tehran, Iran.

### ARTICLE INFO

#### Article history:

Received: 11 January 2014;

Received in revised form:

20 May 2014;

Accepted: 30 May 2014;

#### Keywords

Pedagogical,  
Arabic,  
Predict,  
Language.

### ABSTRACT

Arabic teaching, though prevailing in the educational system of Iran, remains extremely underexplored. This paucity of literature becomes more acute if one is aware of the enormity of literature that exists on English language teaching. To contribute to the scant literature on the quality of Arabic teaching this study set out to examine the efficiency of Arabic language teachers, knowing that teachers are the most crucial agent in the success or otherwise of educational innovations. Accordingly, an efficiency scale was developed by the researcher and administered to a group of Arabic language teachers, selected out of convenience. Besides, we collected data on teachers' gender, years of experience, first language, and educational qualifications. Findings suggest the latter three factors do play a role in determining the extent of teachers' efficiency. More specifically, it was revealed that Arabic teachers who are native speakers of Arabic are more efficient than their non-native counterparts. Moreover, there was a positive direct correlation between teachers' years of experience and their efficiency; more experienced teachers proved more efficient. Finally, results of ANOVA showed that teachers with different levels of experience attained significantly different scores on the efficiency scale, meaning that the higher the level of education, the more efficient teachers become. Conversely, male and female teachers were no different on the efficiency scale. The implications that such findings carry for Arabic language pedagogy are further discussed.

© 2014 Elixir All Rights reserved

### Introduction

The official language policy of Iran mandates the teaching of Arabic in the educational system of the country. This is not only true about the present day Iran, but holds true for the entire post-Islam era. Before the establishment of modern schools, literacy attempts were almost exclusively focused on Arabic teaching rather than Persian teaching. Literacy was totally in the hands of religious leaders and their main objective was to enable their students to learn Arabic so that they can read Quran and prayers. Therefore, it is no exaggeration to say that the history of Arabic teaching is far longer than that of Persian teaching in the centuries after the emergence of Islam to the present day Iran. It was only during the twentieth century that teaching Persian and other foreign languages other than Arabic did find their way in the education system of Iran (see Farhadi 2009). But such development never led to the disappearance of Arabic from the educational system of the country. Today countless hours of education time is allocated to Arabic teaching. In fact, it is on the curricula in one form or another at all levels of education from kindergartens to tertiary education.

Despite all the human and financial resources allocated to Arabic teaching, very few studies have examined the actual dynamics of Arabic language pedagogy. This dearth of studies is bizarre, compared with the huge amount of literature that exists on English language teaching in the country. In fact the number of studies dealing with various aspects of ELT is thousands of times more than that of Arabic teaching. Suffice it to compare the number of journals published on ELT and those that publish articles on Arabic teaching; the latter is almost nonexistent and the few studies that have to appear on other neighboring journals (see Mirhaji 1993).

This study is a pioneering attempt to empirically study the efficiency of Arabic teachers. There are many who maintain that the single most important factor that determines the success or otherwise of every educational project is the teacher. No matter how much goes into an educational innovation at other levels like policy making, resources, technology, etc if the classroom teacher is not efficient to implement the innovation all the efforts of administrators and policy makers do not make a difference. Given this important role of teachers, we decided to study the efficiency of Arabic teachers. In particular, we tried to address the following research questions:

1. Does gender moderate teacher efficiency?
2. Is there any correlation between teachers' years of experience and their level of efficiency?
3. Are teachers with higher degrees of education more efficient?
4. Is teachers' native language a factor in determining teacher efficiency?

### Methods

Drawing on the literature (see Pishghadam 2011 among others) in ELT we developed an efficiency scale comprising of 21 items on various dimensions of Arabic language teaching. The scale enjoyed a moderately high alpha Cronbach index of reliability (.73). It was administered to 53 Arabic teachers in a province in Southwest of Iran (Khouzestan). Teachers had a diverse range of experience with various levels of education (the details related to gender, level of education, years of experience, and native language are given in the next section. So in the interest of space we do not detail them here). They all taught in state schools and were either native speakers of Arabic or Persian speakers. Participants were all tenured employees of the Ministry of Education. All the questionnaires were given to the

participants in person by the lead author. Some were his students at college and others were accessed in the schools where they taught.

To analyze the data we used independent t-tests, bivariate correlation, and ANOVA. To this end, we used averaged composite scores of participants on the efficiency scale.

### Results and Discussion

Table 1 gives the descriptive statistics for the three groups of teachers on the teachers efficiency scale. It is clear that the lowest mean (2.88) belongs to teachers with an AA degree. The second mean score (3.34) belongs to teachers who had a B.A and M.A teachers attained the highest mean score (3.61).

To examine whether the difference is big enough to be statistically significant, we ran an ANOVA test the result of which can be seen in the next Table.

It is clear that the difference is large enough to be statistically significant (.007). The norm in social sciences is to have a level of significance of .05. The level of significance we found indicates that the probability of attributing this difference to chance events is very slim, which allows us to safely claim that teachers with different educational qualifications enjoy different levels of efficiency.

The Scheffe test tells us where the difference lies. The above table demonstrates that the mean score for teachers with B.A degrees is significantly different from that for teachers with an A.A degree. So was the difference between M.A holders and those with A.A degrees. However, teachers with B.A and those with M.A although different, their mean score was not large enough to be significant. It then seems that educational qualifications do have ramifications on the level of Arabic teachers' efficiency.

The next question we posed was whether Arabic teachers of different genders are differentially efficient in their teaching career. The following table depicts the descriptive statistics for teachers' scores on the efficiency scale. The mean score for female teachers is 3.326 and that for male teachers is 3.339, seemingly different but to make sure the difference is not due to chance, we need to conduct a t-test.

Results of the independent sample t-test points that men and women are not significantly different in terms of their efficiency in teaching Arabic.

Our penultimate research question was the role that teachers' mother tongue plays in determining the efficiency of teachers. The issue of 'native speaker' has been around for a long time in language teaching. There are those who believe that the advantage assigned to native speakers is out of colonialist aims, not real differences. On the opposite camp are those who think that native speakers make better language teachers for a variety of reasons, obvious among which is their better command of language. There are scholars who challenge the assumption that native and non-native speakers are essentially different in their language proficiency (MacNamara 1998). Our findings in this study support the former camp although given our critical tendencies we preferred to find the opposite. Table 6 gives the descriptive statistics for native and non-native teachers. The mean score for native teachers is 3.76 while it is 3.12 for non-native teachers. To make sure that this difference is large enough to rely on there needs to be an independent t-test.

Table 7 illustrates the results of the independent t-test between native and non-native teachers. It shows that the difference between the two means exceeds a very low level of significance (.000), which indicates that the two groups are

obviously different on the efficiency scale, with odds being in favor of the native Arabic teachers.

Our final question addresses the issue of experience or seniority and the efficiency in teaching. As with the native speaker issue opinions are divided on the role of experience in the quality of teaching. There are some who argue that those teachers who are new to the job are better motivated, familiar with recent findings of the field and are more likely to teach efficiently. But those on the opposite camp argue against, believing that with more experience teachers become better teachers. They base their argument on the assumption that knowing a bunch of theories does not guarantee the quality of teaching. Teaching is a hands-on activity that can only be improved on the job. Alger (2009), for example, found that experienced teachers began their teaching career with a teacher-centered conception and over time moved to a learner-centered one, which can be taken as becoming more efficient as current theories of education indicate. Our findings on this issue are consonant with those of Alger and others who maintain that considerable benefits are reaped with more experience.

Table 10 shows the result of a correlation coefficient between experience and efficiency. It clearly shows that there exists a positive correlation between teachers' efficiency and their years of experience. Simply put, it tells us that teachers who have been in the teacher career for more years are more efficient. We are mindful of the fact that correlation does not mean causation (Bachman 2008), that is, this result should not be interpreted as longer years of experience necessarily lead to better teaching. Rather, it points to some degree of association, which might itself be mediated by a third factor.

### Concluding Remarks

A host of variables have bearings on the success or failure of educational endeavors, salient among which is teachers' efficiency. In this study we made an attempt to deduce evidence for the explanatory power of some relevant teacher factors in explaining teachers' efficiency. In particular, we investigated the bearing of gender, native language, years of experience, and educational credentials. It was found that with the exception of gender, the rest of variable do have effects on Arabic teachers' efficiency. In other words, we found that teachers with better educational qualifications are more efficient. So are teachers with more years of experience. Moreover, native language was also found to be a variable that is associated with more efficiency in Arabic teachers'; teachers who were native speakers of Arabic appear to more efficient in their Arabic teaching.

There are numerous other avenues for research with regard to Arabic teaching, given its Cinderella sister status in today's globalized world, where English language teaching has pushed other languages to the margins. In particular, issues related to language policy issues are of prime importance to have a better picture of Arabic language teaching and the effectiveness of Arabic teachers. It might be that aspects of language policy such as language practices, language beliefs, and language policy interventions (see Spolsky 2005) are in conflict, making Arabic teachers incapable of sustaining their enthusiasm and this in turn reduces their efficiency. More studies are badly needed to probe into the actual practices of Arabic teachers, mainly through more qualitative approaches like observation, to see what makes the difference between Arabic-speaking and Persian-speaking teachers of Arabic in different areas of language teaching like writing, grammar, and vocabulary (see Mohebbi 2013; and Alipur, Gorjian, Gholampur Koravand 2012 among others).

Further areas of research could be the extent to which authentic practices in language assessment (see Birjandi and Ahmadi 2013), both in summative and formative forms, affects the productivity, creativity, and efficiency of Arabic teachers. In

the light of the our findings, it seems plausible say that promoting the level of educational credentials in Arabic teachers helps to make headway in enhancing the quality of Arabic language teaching

**Table 1. Descriptive statistics for teachers with different degrees**

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error
BA	36	3.34	.46	.07806
MA	9	3.61	.38	.12759
Total	52	3.33	.47	.06639

**Table 2. ANOVA results between teachers with different educational degrees.**

Total					
	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	2.128	2	1.064	5.452	.007
Within Groups	9.561	49	.195		
Total	11.689	51			

**Table 3. Scheffe test**

		Scheffe		95% Confidence Interval			
(I) Education	(J) Education	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	Lower Bound	Upper Bound	
dimension2	AA dimension3	BA	-.46485*	.18247	.047	-.9255	-.0042
		MA	-.72940*	.22261	.008	-1.2914	-.1674
	BA dimension3	AA	.46485*	.18247	.047	.0042	.9255
		MA	-.26455	.16463	.284	-.6802	.1510
MA dimension3	AA	.72940*	.22261	.008	.1674	1.2914	
	BA	.26455	.16463	.284	-.1510	.6802	

**Table 4. Group Statistics**

	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
total	Female	27	3.326	.45573	.08771
	Male	25	3.339	.51183	.10237

**Table 5. Gender: Independent Samples Test**

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
total		.545	.464	-.095	50	.925	-.01277	.13419	-.28230	.25676
				-.095	48.196	.925	-.01277	.13480	-.28377	.25824

**Table 6. Descriptive Statistics for Native and Nonnative teachers**

	MotherTong	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
total	Non-Native	35	3.12	.39	.06715
	Native	17	3.76	.32	.07822

**Table 7. Independent Samples Test**

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
total		1.850	.180	-5.756	50	.000	-.63810	.11085	-.86075	-.41544
				-6.189	38.445	.000	-.63810	.10309	-.84672	-.42947

**Table 9. Descriptive Statistics**

	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Years of Experience	14.0000	5.92436	52
total	3.3324	.47875	52

**Table 10. Correlations**

		Years of Experience	total
Years of Experience	Pearson Correlation		1.286*
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.042
	N		52 51
total	Pearson Correlation	.286	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.042	
	N	51	52

\*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

**References**

- Alger, C. (2009). Secondary teachers' conceptual metaphors of teaching and learning: Changes over the career span. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 25(5), 743-751
- Alipur, M., & Gorjian, B., *Gholampour Koravand*, L. (2013). The effects of pedagogical and authentic films on EFL learners' vocabulary learning: The role of subtitles. *Advances in Asian Social Science (AASS)*, 4(3), 734-738
- Bachman, L. (2008). *Statistical Analyses for language testers*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Birjandi, P., & Ahmadi, H. (2013). Authenticity in second language assessment: a social-constructivist perspective. *Advances in Asian Social Science (AASS)*, 4(3), 899-903
- Farhadi, H. (2009). Language assessment policy in Iran. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics*, 29, 132-141
- McNamara, T. (1998). *Measuring second language performance*. Oxford: Oxford University Press
- Mohebbi, H. (2013). Investigating vocabulary learning in second language classroom context: recent findings, future outlook. *Advances in Asian Social Science (AASS)* 4(3), 882-885
- Mirhaji, Hamidreza (1993). Obstacles in teaching Arabic. *Journal of Teaching Theology*. Accessed at Noormags.com
- Ghanizadeh , A. & Moafian, F. (2011). The Relationship between Iranian EFL Teachers' Sense of Self-Efficacy and their Pedagogical Success in Language Institutes. *Asian EFL Journal*, 13(2), 249-272
- Spolsky, B. (2004). *Language policy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press