

TEACHING ARABIC AS A SECOND LANGUAGE: AN EVALUATION OF KEY WORD METHOD EFFECTIVENESS

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Abstract. This study aims to examine the effectiveness and the practicality of the 'key word method' in teaching and learning Arabic as a foreign language within the Malaysian secondary school curriculum. The method is designed to overcome the challenges of learning Arabic, so that they become motivated in achieving their learning target and become innovative in their learning activities. The issue here is whether a learning method is really on par with its learning function, such as developing a memory learning strategy by understanding the working of the brain. The study conducted an experiment to see whether the memory learning strategy would have an impact on learners in a controlled environment.

Keywords: Key word method, learning Arabic, challenges and difficulties, learning strategy, experimental evaluation

Abstrak. Kajian ini bertujuan menguji keberkesanan dan kesesuaian "kaedah kata kunci" untuk diguna pakai dalam pengajaran dan pembelajaran bahasa Arab sebagai bahasa asing dalam sukatan pelajaran sekolah menengah di Malaysia. Kaedah kata kunci merupakan satu percubaan dalam mengatasi cabaran pembelajaran bahasa Arab, dan juga mengemukakan satu pilihan terbuka bagi mengatasi kerumitan yang dihadapi oleh para pelajar, dengan harapan ia menjadikan mereka lebih bermotivasi mengejar kejayaan dan berinovasi dalam kegiatan pembelajaran. Persoalan utama di sini adalah sama ada sesuatu kaedah pembelajaran yang diguna pakai adalah sejajar dengan kepentingan pembelajaran, seperti membangunkan daya ingatan sebagai strategi, yang berfungsi sebagai pemangkin keupayaan otak untuk bergerak aktif mendorong pelajar menuju kejayaan. Untuk tujuan itu, satu uji kaji terkawal telah dijalankan bagi menilai keberkesanan strategi pembelajaran mengingat terhadap pelajar bahasa Arab.

Kata kunci: Kaedah kata kunci, pembelajaran bahasa Arab, cabaran dan kerumitan, strategi pembelajaran, penilaian uji kaji

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Learning any second language needs hard work, commitment, practice, correct methodology in facilitating learners to understand the basic rules of that language and many other contributing factors. This paper intends to discuss important observation, which may be useful to those instructing Arabic as a second language

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in Malaysia. For this reason, this study tries to evaluate the effectiveness and practicalities of “key word method” in teaching Arabic as a second language in Malaysian schools, to identify its application and implication for the betterment of both parties; teachers and learners in their performance.

It has been observed that the achievement of Arabic studies at school is getting lower and weaker. While the concern bodies looking forward to identify its real cause and trying to find its way out, especially in developing and enriching the Arabic vocabularies. Indeed, to some extent, Arabic word can be regard as a difficult task to be memorized by Malay learners. See for example, Azhar (2003, 2006) and also Osman (1993).

At the same time, evaluating proven methods is a principal responsibility that will be enhanced further in this paper. Teachers everywhere strive to use their observations and evaluations to improve their teaching effectiveness and always looking forward to learn, develop or apply new research-based teaching practices within their teaching methods. Hence, hopefully this paper will be able to highlight the effectiveness of the ‘key word method’ which will facilitate the process of learning Arabic as a second language.

2.0 CHALLENGES OF LEARNING ARABIC IN MALAYSIA

In Malaysia, the significance of learning Arabic is regarded as part and parcel of the Malay Muslims religious duties. This can be reflected in learning the Koran as a compulsory process of growing up for all Malay children in Malaysia. Malays send their children to Madrasah/Religious School to learn to read verses of the Koran in their early age and at the same time learn to pray and other basic principles of Islam. Therefore, the philosophy of teaching Arabic has always developed together with the curriculum of teaching Islamic ethic and principles. For a believing Muslim, Arabic should be learned for self perfection as prescribed in the Koran (Sura 17: 80-81).

Language teachers recognize that the challenge of teaching Arabic today is not an easy task. It is in need of a major effort to improve and simplify the teaching and learning activities. Take for example the shortage of experienced teachers, equipment and resources. For this reason, the purpose of this study is to look into the possibilities of improving the aspect of methodologies in teaching Arabic, such as testing the effectiveness and the practicality of the “key word method”, leaving other matters for future research.

We also identify that among the most obvious problem faced by students in learning Arabic or other languages for that matter, is vocabulary. Some students seem to have an innate talent to be able to memorize new words while other seem to struggle forever. The differences might come from personal attitude and interest of the students themselves or it might come from the methodologies adopted by the teachers whenever conducting their classes. Though, this study is mainly concerned

about the latter hypothesis, where it purely refers to the nature of teaching process, its main focus is on conceptual basis and practicalities.

3.0 DIFFICULTIES IN TEACHING PROCESS

The teaching process is an important issue to both practitioners and thinkers. This fact is due to the importance and implication of the future of any nation. It is the cornerstone for social development and enhancement. Whenever teaching process goes smoothly in a nation, that nation has managed to establish an effective mechanism for its society to achieve stability and progress. The survival of a nation can in part be measured from the success of the language used in classroom.

From a conceptual perspective, the term “teaching” carries the meaning of introducing things comprehensively, or giving any skill in doing things accordingly, or making a person know or realize about himself, and identifying his specialization, or strong aspects and weaknesses (Khalil, 1991).

Essentially, teaching is a process of building human mind or developing their social skills through teaching values that contribute towards structuring the mind. These can be achieved whether through teaching or life experiences or observing for the purpose of uncovering blinds that prevent the heart from realizing the truth. In short, teaching and learning transcend the physical classroom in more than one way.

4.0 KEY WORD METHOD AS AN OPTION

Teaching and learning are not an easy process. The quality indicators of its successfulness goes to many factors involved in the process. Among them is the adoption of an appropriateness of teaching approaches. In this context, according to Hauptman (2004: 84) “when the ‘key word method’ is used in the classroom, the teacher has to ensure its effectiveness”. This will not be achieved without proper adherence to its characteristic and operational function.

4.1 Definition

Historical origin of the ‘key word method’ is untraceable. However, it has been popularized lately by the cognitive psychologists Atkinson and Raugh whom excitedly examined interest in the method and claim to successfully structure the operational principle of this approach.

Atkinson describes the ‘key word method’ as:

By a key word we mean an English word that sounds like some part of the foreign word. In general, the key word has no relationship to the foreign word except for the fact that it is similar in sound. The key word method

divides vocabulary learning into two stages. The first stage requires the subject to associate the spoken foreign word with the key word, an association that is formed quickly because of acoustic similarity. The second stage requires the subject to form a mental image of the key word, 'interacting' with the English translation; this stage is comparable to a paired-associate procedure involving the learning of unrelated English words.

(Atkinson, 1975: 821).

4.2 The Effectiveness of "Key Word Method"

The key word method is a systematic and practical approach in the teaching process. Its function is to strengthen the memorization process, i.e. helping learners to remember information that have been learned, or it is an approach in helping the process of memorization with the help of certain created images which have been stored at an earlier stage of life. See Afnan (1986: 158).

Indeed, there are some other methods such as the Method of Loci, the Pegword Hook Method, the Link Word Method and others, which can be used in the teaching process. The basic idea of "key word method" refers to the conceptual basis of remembering itself, or self-consciousness of learners in dealing with what had been learned, i.e. to strengthen the power of remembering new words and phrases. The similar discussion can be found in Hall, Wilson, and Patterson (1981), and also in Levin, Mcgivern, and Pressley (1985), Majid and Rafi' (1990), Hall, and Fuson (1988), Paivio, and Desrochers (1981) and Reed (1982). This method is extremely important because:

- (i) Observation is instrumental in "key word method" in teaching new vocabularies.
- (ii) Observation deals with active reaction between teaching strategies and memorization.
- (iii) Observation in adapting "loose key word method" or "non-specific transfer".
- (iv) Observation in proving the existence of transformation within classroom exercises.
- (v) The comparative studies between methods and strategies.
- (vi) Observation which is concerned about images that appears in mind.

This study describes the effectiveness of this method and its application in teaching Arabic as a second language in Sekolah Menengah Kebangsaan Agama Sultanah Bahiah, Kedah Darul Aman, Malaysia, with the hope that it could put forward some practical approaches in the context of teaching Arabic in Malaysia.

In general, the concept of teaching strategy in using key word method comprises two important steps:

- (i) To form a connection between foreign words with any word in the mother tongue. The nature of this connection is fully based on the physical basis, where Raugh and Atkinson (1975) regarded it as “key word”. The only condition for this connection is the existence of similarities and reasonable matching that can relate the two words together in the mind of learners.
- (ii) To form a semantic connection between the two words. In this step, learners have to design a semantic mental image in his/her mind that relate the two words together and become interactive in certain way in the mind.

In reality, the first step is the most important one since it represents the starting point for the establishment and effectiveness of this method as a strategy in the process of memorizing and remembering foreign words. In fact, this will not be achieved without fulfilling the following three conditions:

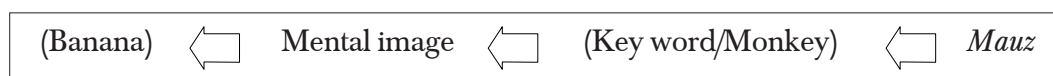
- (i) The degree of similarities between the two words should be very high.
- (ii) The “key word” should be designed specifically for a specific word which should be learned.
- (iii) The semantic mental image should be functioning interactively between the two words and should be spontaneous in nature.

The effectiveness of this method is proven by many studies such as Atkinson and Raugh (1975), Hauptman (2004), and others especially in terms of improving memorization power. This is due to the fact that is not only true from the theoretical fundamental, but also from the practical point of view. Many language practitioners have explored and expanded this method in various fields and subjects, which lead them to suggest that this method can be used in teaching any abstract or philosophical subjects. They call it “FACE NAME” which is specifically to be used in memorizing name of persons or things. Through this method, the learner can easily remember the name of a person or a thing once he or she sees them.

4.3 Operational Function of “Key Word Method”

For the purpose of introducing “key word method”, we can assume that an English speaker wants to learn an Arabic word {*mauz*} which means ‘banana’, where the word (monkey) can be used as a key word in memorizing the word {*mauz*}, with the condition, that the student can create the semantic mental image of monkey that loves eating banana so much. This process can be summarized as follow:

The transliteration format used in this study is taken from *The Hans Wehr Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic* Cowan (1994).



Another example is to introduce a Malay speaker to an Arabic word such as {*rakiba*} which means ‘riding’. For this purpose, the Malay word ‘*rakit*’ (floating on wood) can be used as a key word in memorizing the word {*rakiba*}, because both words carry similar meaning of riding on some thing. The same concept can be used to learn the word {*tuffāh*}, which means ‘apple’. In this case, the Malay word ‘*tupai*’ (squirrel) can be used as a key word in understanding the word {*tuffāh*}, because it is easy to remember that squirrel like to eat apple. This process can be summarized as follow:

(Ambition)	←	Mental image	←	(Key word/ <i>amali</i>)	←	<i>Amal</i>
(Door)	←	Mental image	←	(Key word/ <i>babu</i>)	←	<i>Bāb</i>
(Apple)	←	Mental image	←	(Key word/ <i>tupai</i>)	←	<i>Tuffāh</i>
(Freezer)	←	Mental image	←	(Key word/ <i>sejuk</i>)	←	<i>Thalājah</i>
(Soldier)	←	Mental image	←	(Key word/ <i>judi</i>)	←	<i>Jundiyyah</i>

From the above discussion, we agree that the process is not simple, but it needs serious effort. Therefore, it is in need of training, skill and support from teachers to enable the method to be fully workable. In this case, the student has to pass through all the steps in designing an effective ‘key word method’.

4.4 An Experience of Using Key Word Method

The focus of our discussion here is to introduce the background of Arabic studies within the Malaysian school curriculum. Between year one and six, Malaysian students are supposed to have learnt around 3000 words. This is further summarized in the table below:

Table 1 Vocabularies enrichment for arabic subject in Malaysian school

Level	Subject	No. of vocabularies
One	Communicative Arabic	800
Two	Communicative Arabic	700
Three	Communicative Arabic	600
Four	Communicative Arabic	500
Five	Communicative Arabic	1000
Total	Five levels of the subject	3600

Looking forward of the objective of teaching Arabic language as designed by the education ministry, we realized that the main objective is to enable students to enrich their Arabic vocabularies and terminologies, especially in the beginning of their studies up to the end of secondary level. See Malaysian Education Ministry (2003).

However, from the general observation, this figure is quite difficult to be achieved by students. Even though the main objective is for students to acquire an adequate working vocabularies for the purpose of improving the standard of student performance in studying Arabic, they are unable to do so. This clearly requires an explanation. We should identify this problem whether it is due to the syllabus or the curriculum?

The hypothesis of students' inability suggests that the problem lies in the teaching method and strategy. The method and strategy chosen should be effective and suitable with the nature of the subject and its learning objectives.

This paper is assuming that 'key word method' is a good choice to fulfill the need and objective of learning Arabic in Malaysian school. Nevertheless, this is not a new method because it has been around for quite some time, especially among English language teachers. For this reason, the study would like to evaluate the suitability of this method in teaching Arabic in Malaysian schools. The Sultanah Bahiah School has been selected as a sample of study in testing this method because of the willingness of its teacher and students to cooperate in conducting the test. Therefore, the success of this study is owed to the openness and well understanding of the school members, who gave their participation and support.

By using the 'key word method', the first test was conducted on 34 students in Form One. They are almost of the same age and same level of Arabic background. They were provided with the 'key word method' to learn a number of Arabic words and its function of usage is shown in Appendix 1. While the second test using a standard method (that has been used by all schools in Malaysia) was conducted on 27 students in Form Two from the same school. After analyzing the data, the result of the test is shown in the following table:

Table 2 The percentage of statistical analysis of the test

Grade Groups	Excellence 90-100	Very good 80-89	Good 70-79	Pass 60-69	Fail 50-59
Group one 34 students	34 100%	-	-	-	-
Group two 27 students	7 7%	12 44.4 %	3 11.1%	5 18.5%	-

From Table 2, the comparison between the two groups is very obvious, i.e. the differences between the key word group and the control group that used their own learning strategies. Group one (i.e. with the 'key word method') achieved a resounding 100% success with 90% up to 100% marks. While in Group 2 (i.e. without the 'key word method'), only 7 out of 27 students were able to achieve positive results. The result of the distribution of cumulative frequency of group one is:

Table 3 The distribution of cumulative frequency of Group 1

Frequency percentage	Cumulative	Frequency	Marks
41.2%	34	14	100
26.5%	20	9	98-99
2.9%	11	1	96-97
23.5%	10	8	94-95
2.9%	2	1	92-93
2.9%	1	1	90-91

Table 3 shows that 14 students out of 34 achieved full marks of 100%, with a frequency percentage of 41.2%. While the lowest marks was represented by only one student who obtained 90 to 91 marks with the frequency percentage of 2.9%. While the result of the distribution of cumulative frequency of Group 2 is:

Table 4 The distribution of cumulative frequency of Group 2

Frequency percentage	Cumulative	Frequency	Marks
7.4%	27	2	95-99
18.5%	25	5	90-94
18.5%	20	5	85-89
25.9%	15	7	80-84
3.7%	8	1	75-79
7.4%	7	2	70-74
7.4%	5	2	65-69
11.1%	3	3	60-64

Table 4 shows that the highest percentage in Group 2 was represented by 2 students who obtained 95-99 marks, with the frequency percentage of 7.4%. While the lowest performance obtain 60-64 marks, and represented by 3 students with frequency percentage of 11.1%.

From the comparison between the two tables, we can see that even though Group 1 came from a lower level compared to the Group 2, the application of 'key word method' had been successful in helping them with the new vocabulary development.

5.0 CONCLUSION

It is recommended that using the appropriate methods and strategies such as 'key word method' is essential in the teaching and learning process. It has been proven in the comparative study conducted in Sekolah Menengah Kebangsaan Agama Sultanah Bahiah, Kedah Darul Aman that the method can succeed in improving vocabulary learning among Arabic learners. The added concern of this test was to understand and identify the causes of difficulties in teaching and learning Arabic as a second

language. The study managed to identify the root of the problem. However, to achieve a more meaningful outcome in the learning process, we suggest that this method of teaching and learning should be applied with some adjustment:

- (i) Similarities of academic background within the group.
- (ii) Identification of student memorization power.
- (iii) Creation of a working practice environment.
- (iv) Proper preparation of adaptation of 'key word method'.
- (v) Identification of external blockage that might obstruct the effectiveness of this method.

Finally, an evaluation of any educational strategies and learning effectiveness is a vital job of every instructor. It is their duty that needs to be done continuously and cannot be handed over or neglected.

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Appendix 1

Sample of a group words have been used for the test.

In Malay	Arabic word	No.	In Malay	Arabic word	No.
<i>Buka</i>	(<i>fataha</i>) فتح	.٦	<i>Ilmu</i>	علم (<i>'ilm</i>)	.١
<i>Belajar</i>	(<i>darasa</i>) درس	.٧	<i>Pen</i>	قلم (<i>qalam</i>)	.٢
<i>Makan</i>	(<i>akala</i>) أكل	.٨	<i>Kereta</i>	السيارة (<i>sayyāra</i>)	.٣
<i>Tulis</i>	(<i>kataba</i>) كتب	.٩	<i>Epal</i>	تفاح (<i>tuffah</i>)	.٤
<i>Naik</i>	(<i>rakiba</i>) ركب	.١٠	<i>Peti</i>	صندوق (<i>ṣunduq</i>)	.٥

Appendix 2

Sample of experiment test in remembering Arabic words:

**Special Test In Remembering and Learning Arabic Words
No. 1**

First question: Arrange the following words in a correct and complete sentence.

{صندوق، ركب، كتب، أكل، تفاح، سيارة، علم، رسالة، فتح، درس}

20 marks	Sentence	No.
		.١
		.٢
		.٣
		.٤
		.٥

Second question: Underline the correct meaning of the following words.

Marks	2 nd meaning	1 st meaning	Arabic words	No.
	<i>Kotak</i>	<i>Senduk</i>	صندوق (<i>ṣunduq</i>)	.١
	<i>Pandai</i>	<i>Ilmu</i>	علم (<i>'ilm</i>)	.٢
	<i>Naik</i>	<i>Pergi</i>	ركب (<i>rakiba</i>)	.٣
	<i>Surat</i>	<i>Berita</i>	رسالة (<i>risāla</i>)	.٤
	<i>Makan</i>	<i>Minum</i>	أكل (<i>akala</i>)	.٥
	<i>Sekolah</i>	<i>Kereta</i>	سيارة (<i>sayyāra</i>)	.٦
	<i>Epal</i>	<i>Rumah</i>	تفاح (<i>tuffah</i>)	.٧
	<i>Tahu</i>	<i>Belajar</i>	درس (<i>darasa</i>)	.٨
	<i>Lakar</i>	<i>Tulis</i>	كتب (<i>kataba</i>)	.٩
	<i>Buat</i>	<i>Buka</i>	فتح (<i>fataha</i>)	.١٠