

Using Online Resources in Teaching Arabic as a Second Language in Non-Arab Countries

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Abstract

The forms and methods of education are closely related to the primary sources and forms of information transmission because information transmission is also one of the most essential components of knowledge transmission. During the last decade, when the Internet and online technologies and platforms have become available to almost everyone, they have actively penetrated the educational system, providing wider opportunities to make the educational process more continuous, diverse, and sometimes less tedious. In the case of teaching a foreign language, they also offer a chance to overcome the negative consequences arising from the lack of the target language environment and, at least, to minimize that. The main topic of this paper is the effective use of online platforms in the classroom and beyond, combining them with traditional textbooks and other educational materials in the context of guiding students' independent work. The paper seeks to highlight this problem by answering the following questions:

- Which online resources are the most effective, which resource is preferable to use in the classroom, which is for outside of the school, and what percentage of the classroom time should not exceed the use of such resources?
- What skills are these resources aimed at developing?
- What types of resources are preferable to use to develop specific skills in interactive and non-interactive skills development?

The problems mentioned above are addressed in the paper from the angle of teaching Arabic as a second language in non-Arab countries, considering the teaching of literary Arabic and its dialects.

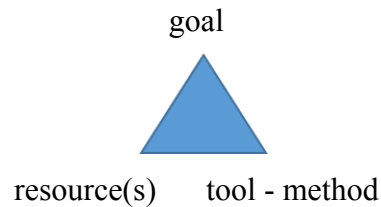
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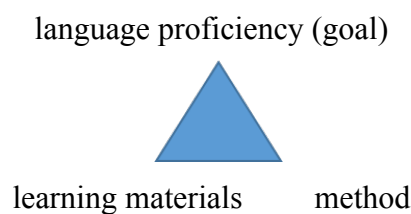
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Introduction

We came up with the following triangle to present any planning process that consists of a clear goal, resource(s), and tool(s) or method(s) by which these resources will be used to achieve the goal:



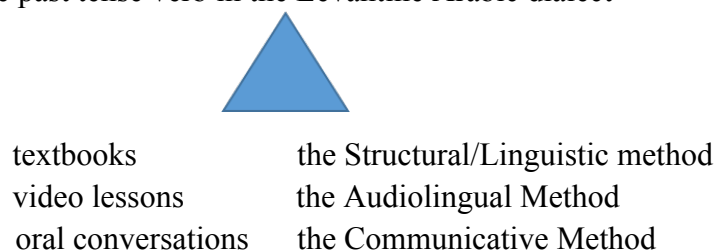
In the case of language learning, the goal is for the learner to master the language at one level or another, for the implementation of which learning materials (resources) are needed, and a method that will help turn the resource into knowledge:



Each lesson can be made up of several such triangles depending on the specific goal(s) it pursues.

For example, suppose the goal of the class is to explain or familiarize the students with the past tense verb of the Levantine Arabic dialect. In that case, several resources can be used, like textbooks, video lessons, oral conversations, etc. This can be delivered using various methods, such as structural, audio-lingual, and communicative methods.

The past tense verb in the Levantine Arabic dialect



It is important to note that it is essential to choose the right resources to achieve the goal of each class or lesson in the shortest possible time and with maximum benefit. This must be applied through the use of the appropriate method that will facilitate the process and make cohesion between all three factors.

During the last decade, the Internet and online technologies and platforms have become available to almost everyone; online resources have become an inevitable part of educational resources that are used in formal or informal settings.

This presentation will highlight the use of online resources in teaching a second or foreign language, taking Arabic as an example in an environment where Arabic is considered a foreign language.

The following sections are a brief literature review followed by a discussion that tries to answer several questions we raised.

Literature Review

Being a difficult language, having diglossia and complex grammar, Arabic is a language with challenges for non-native speakers (Abu-Haidar, 1996). Therefore, finding alternatives such as online resources, including multimedia methods, facilitates the learning process for both the instructor and the learners.

Moreover, teaching a language without emphasizing its culture is difficult. Teachers of Arabic teach the cultural part differently based on their experiences as learners of that language themselves, and according to the training they persuaded and with the transfer of the culture from their direct contact with the target language (Kovács, 2017). For this reason, it is inevitable to use online resources to teach the cultural context of a certain language as a part of the language class.

The rapid growth of technology and the widespread use of the internet have transformed the learning process, allowing students to gain knowledge in new ways. Online resources, including language teaching websites, mobile applications, and other several language teaching interactive platforms, provide flexibility by allowing language learners to access content at their convenience and tailor their learning to their own learning style with or without the supervision of the instructor (Haleem et al., 2022; Huda et al., 2023).

Web resources allow non-native language learners to communicate with native speakers continuously, up to 24 hours a day. This, in turn, allows the learner to engage in an ongoing process of actively using a foreign language and gives them the freedom to select the type, time, and location of their training, as well as a native speaker teacher, based on their individual needs. The importance of the didactic potential of the internet is highlighted as a tool for meeting linguistic and educational goals for all stakeholders of the learning process. The role of the teacher becomes a facilitator of the process and one of the tools the teacher uses in foreign language settings (Nizamove, 2021).

Discussion

In terms of foreign language teaching resources, online resources may be irreplaceable today. Over the past decade, with access to technology and Internet access, it has been difficult to imagine teaching a language without using Internet resources, especially in environments where a language is taught as a foreign language. Being a massive open source, the Internet is not subject to clear regulations. Therefore, it is important to use the right tools and methods to select literate sources and use them correctly and as efficiently as possible so as not to waste time in vain.

At the university level, the case of this study is teaching Arabic in a non-Arabic speaking environment, particularly in the experience of foreign institutions, where Arabic teaching

begins at a zero level. This paper is not intended to present all available resources, which is essentially impossible. We aim to classify resources and answer the following questions:

- What types of online resources are used in teaching/learning languages?
- What is the purpose of using online resources in language teaching?
- How to choose a resource?
- Which resources should be offered to students in class, and which should be used as self-paced homework?
- What should the ratio of online resource use during a class be?
- What linguistic skills are most active as a result of the use of online resources?

Q1: What types of online resources are used in teaching/learning languages?

The online resources used in language teaching are numerous and huge in variety.

Below, we classified them into three main categories:

1. Resources suggested to be used by teachers:
 - Resources designed for teachers they consist of lesson plans or methodologies for working on specific textbooks, such as the Al-Kitaab Arabic Language Program.¹
 - Resources that do not have language activities on their own and are used merely as an assisting resource. For example, 360stories.com,² 360cities.net,³ earth.google.com.
2. Resources for Students
Resources that present complete lessons of their own and with which the learner can learn independently without a teacher. Some of them are:
 - Online versions of textbooks such as Leipzig University Modern Standard Arabic,⁴ Madinah Arabic.⁵
 - Online courses with certificates, including language courses through global online learning platforms that offer online courses with certificates from leading universities and institutions. Like Coursera,⁶ Khan Academy,⁷ and Udemy.⁸
 - Non-formal platforms that offer structured courses and interactive exercises. Websites like Online Arabic,⁹ Learning Arabic,¹⁰ Learn Arabic Online Videos,¹¹ SpeakArabic: Advancing Arabic as a Global Language,¹² Busuu,¹³ and applications like Duolingo, Mango, and Memrise.
 - Platforms for language practice offered on social media networks

¹ Al-Kitaab Arabic Language Program. <https://alkitaabtextbook.com/teachers/teaching-resources>

² For example: Museum of Islamic Art in Doha <https://360stories.com/qatar/place/museum-of-islamic-art>

³ For example: Museum of future in Dubai <https://www.360cities.net/image/museum-of-the-future-ii>

⁴ Modern Standard Arabic. <https://modern-standard-arabic.net/en>

⁵ Madinah Arabic. <https://www.madinaharabic.com>

⁶ Coursera. <https://www.coursera.org>

⁷ Khanacademy. <https://www.khanacademy.org>

⁸ Udemy. <https://www.udemy.com>

⁹ Arabiconline. <https://arabiconline.eu/first-steps-arabic>

¹⁰ Learning Arabic. <https://learning.aljazeera.net/ar>

¹¹ Master Arabic with real-world videos. <https://playaling.com>

¹² Teach, Learn, And Speak Arabic: Advancing Arabic as a Global Language. <https://www.qfi.org>

¹³ Busuu. <https://www.busuu.com>

3. Resources for teachers and students

- Platforms allow a teacher to create classes or use the lessons created by other teachers, and students can use these lessons with and without the help of a teacher. Some of these provide a wider range of opportunities for making fully-equipped classes, such as nearpod.com, kahoot.com, quizlet.com, and other platforms aimed at Games and activities, like flashcards,¹⁴ and vocabulary related activities.¹⁵
- Resources that are not complete courses for independent language learning, but contain video lessons on specific topics.
- Resources that are not designed for an educational purpose, but can be used in language learning. They are divided into the following two groups:
 - Audio and video resources: songs, movies, vlogs, podcasts, reels, news sites, digital radio and television.
 - Websites providing various services, dictionaries, corpora, for example reverso.net, almaany.com, various concordances for the development of writing skills.

Q2: What is the purpose of using online resources in language learning?

The use of resources during lessons can pursue a number of, including highly individual, goals. We highlight the main ones.

- They make the lesson more interesting and diverse: Of course, the lesson can be diverse without using online resources, but considering youth's connection to the internet in their daily interactions, online resources provide greater opportunities for interesting and attractive learning settings. It does so by speeding up many processes and getting over the traditional old tools previously used.
- They promote students' extracurricular independent work: The purpose of using online resources should be to teach a language in the classroom, prepare the student outside the classroom, and continue learning the language independently. Therefore, students need to know the resources most useful for them.
- They compensate for the lack of a language-bearing environment: In addition to the teacher's pronunciation, the students listen to the pronunciation of many other people, mainly native speakers, and not only professionals, but also ordinary people who may also have language defects, which happens when students are in the environment of native speakers.

Q3: How to choose a resource?

The following criteria are important for selecting resources appropriate to the objectives of a language course:

- Compliance of the resource with the required standards; in the case of teaching Arabic, it is first of all the correspondence to the taught version of the language (literary language or any of the dialects, or the combination of more than one version, depending on the taught material), the degree of literacy, etc.
- It should also be noted that the selected resources may contain certain errors, but in that case, depending on the purpose of the taught material, these errors are used as a

¹⁴ Studystack: Arabic Flashcards. <https://www.studystack.com/arabic>

¹⁵ Wordwall: Create better lessons quicker. <https://wordwall.net/ar>

teaching tool, drawing special attention to them, performing additional tasks, or using them in order to enhance the grammar rules.

- The degree of complexity should be appropriate to the language level of the students, it is desirable that the unfamiliar vocabulary does not exceed the accepted percentage.
- Compliance with academic standards

Q4: Which resources to offer for students in-class and which to use as self-paced homework?

The resources are separated in two points of our classification: resources only for lecturers and resources for lecturers and students are mainly used in the classroom, but they can also be assigned as homework, and in the first case, the task must be clearly formulated by the lecturer. For example, for descriptions of places posted on 360stories.com, students are given the main points to talk about in their description. It is desirable not to have a translation for the material used in the classroom for this activity so that the student can focus on the target language and try to use the context to guess the meaning of unfamiliar words which also contributes to the development of the student's linguistic thinking in the target language. Not having translation creates an additional opportunity to explain new vocabulary in the target language.

As for online resources used for homework, they may have a translation or additional comments in the intermediate language. In this sense, the choice of resource depends on the objectives of the given task.

Long movies and series can be used both in-class and out of it. Outside the classroom, they are used to perform several tasks, in particular, to pre-watch the movie for discussion in the classroom (it should be noted that for such a discussion it is desirable to prepare questions in advance so that the discussion is more meaningful and detailed), watching the movie, writing out the most frequently encountered vocabulary, or trying to guess unfamiliar words and write their explanation in the target language, etc. Moreover, depending on the level of the student's language knowledge, one can choose movies and TV series that have subtitles in a language familiar to the student or in the target language.

Q5: What should be the ratio of online resource use during a class?

The online resources are a component of the course and lessons, but the portion of using online resources should not be a whole lesson or a chapter. There should be a reasonable balance between using online sources and other materials.

In our opinion, the desired ratio is 1 to 2, in which case every 20 minutes of using the online resource is followed by 40 minutes of practicing the content gained during that time and active analysis and application of the vocabulary.

Q6: What linguistic skills are most active as a result of the use of online resources?

This depends on the type of resource because all four language skills can be developed through the use of different types of resources. It is important to logically connect the opportunities provided by the resource with the development of a certain skill.

In the following, we will discuss what online resources enhance each linguistic skill:

Online resources that enhance the listening skill:

The use of online resources is indispensable for developing listening skills in the first place because, when the language is taught as a foreign language, online media resources are perhaps the only way to create diversity for this skill in the classroom. The development of listening skills, in turn, contributes to the development of the ability to speak, because listening enables learners to reproduce vocabulary and phrases more easily in a similar situation.

As a result, the student gains greater self-confidence and ease. However, in order to make the obtained result more lasting, the lecturer should once again pay attention to these words and expressions in the classroom, record the situations in which they are used and create as many similar situations as possible so that the students can apply what they have already learned.

Online resources that enhance the speaking skills:

Online resources can be used to develop the speaking skill, and we are classifying them as the following:

- Materials for further replication (for levels A1 and A2), for example, simple dialogues, short texts, or stories representing different life situations, which students are able to paraphrase by telling about their daily life, or reproducing similar dialogues.
- Materials for further discussions (for B1 and higher levels). Those can be documentaries, feature movies, series, short stories, and various educational materials.
- Special programs on separate topics, based on which students can prepare their own material and present it to their classmates.
- Pictures or short films without texts that students can turn into stories.

Online resources that enhance the reading skill:

Arabic is a language of the Semitic languages family and has a discontinuous morphology, based mainly on the concept of a root consisting of three consonants. Words are derived from the root through internal inflection and internal vocalic patterns that are used to indicate grammatical processes. There are three main elements in Arabic vocabulary: the root, the vowel, and the auxiliaries: prefixes, suffixes, and inflections. The Arabic script is consonantal, accompanied by diacritical marks, which include short vowels used above or below letters to indicate correct pronunciation and grammatical categories.

Although vowels indicate grammatical categories, the short vowels are absent from authentic texts, while in materials prepared for educational purposes, they are often placed.

Therefore, Arabic orthography is considered deep if it is not vowelized but shallow if it is vowelized. The deep orthography needs a good knowledge of grammatical categories and lexical norms; otherwise it is impossible not only to understand the text, but also to read it correctly. For this, from the very first stage, it is necessary to gradually teach students to read the unvoiced text correctly, which can be helped by the online resources that provide the unvoiced text with parallel literate reading, so that students can try to read independently and check themselves with the attached recording.

Online resources that enhance the writing skill:

The use of online resources can also significantly contribute to the development of writing skills in teaching a foreign language, such as Arabic. Starting from letters to learning to write at different levels and developing what has already been learned. Various phone applications, websites, and other online platforms help not only to learn the Arabic alphabet, but also to write in different Arabic scripts.

Learners at higher levels are able to check spelling, use a large number of video lessons that explain various grammar structures and rules, and gain access to a large variety of texts that can act as models for creating similar texts on their own, as well as develop writing skills through reading a wide range of content. Additionally, various forums are also important, where native speakers help to write competent texts.

Conclusion

As the teaching experience showed, it is inevitable to achieve the goals of language classes without the use of online tools and resources. The abovementioned showed the advantages and benefits online resources have in a foreign language teaching class setting. Thus, using the appropriate resources makes the class more interesting for the learners of the 21st century and helps the teachers to meet their objectives.

Using various online resources in foreign language classes is useful from another point of view. It enables the student to deal with the language in its natural, authentic state, with mistakes, slang expressions, and jargon language which are absent in classical language textbooks.

It prepares the student for authentic communication with the target language. In this context, it is very important to teach students to critically approach various resources, and distinguish between useful and less useful, or perhaps not useful ones.

The use of online resources in the teaching process should have clear purposes in themselves. With all the advantages listed, using online resources does not take less effort from the lecturer to deliver the classes as their application must be associated with specific tasks that must be completed either during or as a result of their application. It is desirable that the tasks be multiple and, in the end, give an opportunity to use the words and phrases used in the resources independently of the given resource, also in a different context.

Every time after using new resources, it is necessary to reflect on how well they served their purpose, whether there is a need to change or adjust each resource, and assess how time was spent on each resource and whether they were effective and therefore, their use was justified. Lastly, it is very helpful to have online resources as a tool in language classes as discussed in this paper. However, they do not replace the role of the lecturer who chooses, adapts, and adjusts each resource so they facilitate the learning process.

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