

ARABIC FOR SPECIFIC PURPOSES IN MALAYSIA: A LITERATURE REVIEW

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ABSTRACT

Many universities have introduced Arabic language for specific purpose courses in order to help learners master the terminologies and language patterns used in specific fields. This paper reviews the rising popularity of learning Arabic for specific purposes among Malaysian students in view of more contemporary needs than decades ago when the Arabic language is learnt mainly for religious purposes. The qualitative approach has been adopted in conducting this literature review. This review provides input to help create a module for teaching Arabic for specific purposes. This study has a significant contribution to the field of Arabic teaching in Malaysia as it informs practitioners and researchers on how to improve the effectiveness of Arabic for specific purpose courses to help students gain academic and career advantages in the long run.

Keywords: Arabic language; Arabic for specific purposes

Introduction

The growth of English as the world's lingua franca has made English courses more popular worldwide. Consequently, English for specific purposes (ESP) courses have been introduced in the tertiary level to cater for the need of using English language skills in specific fields such as business and aviation. Apart from English, Arabic has become one of the most popular emerging foreign language, and as a result, there is an increasing number of institutions which offer Arabic for specific purposes (ASP).

ASP has emerged over the last few years, particularly in countries like Malaysia where Arabic is gaining popularity. ASP has been introduced across different fields, including Arabic for Islamic jurisprudence purposes (Daud, 1998), Arabic for Islamic theology purposes (Azad, 1998), Arabic for pilgrimage purposes (Saleh, 2005), Arabic for Islamic law purposes (Kadir, 2005), Arabic for economics purposes (Hashim, 2009), Arabic for nursing purposes (Zainudin, 2010), Arabic for science purposes (Ismail, 2012), Arabic for agro-technology purposes (Daud W. A., 2016), Arabic for tourism purpose (Adam, 2013; Ghani, 2016), and others. In line with this popularity, Chik (1998) mentioned that a number of researchers have recognised the importance of Arabic language and taken steps to conduct relevant studies on the teaching of Arabic for specific purpose (Chik, 1998) in schools and in universities.

The Definition of Arabic for Specific Purposes

According to Hutchinson and Waters (1987), language for specific purposes can be conceptualised as “an approach to language teaching in which all decisions as to content and method are based on the learner’s reason for learning” (p. 19). In this regard, ESP, refers to English language courses that are focused on the use of language in a specific field (Wright, 1992). By the same token, ASP presents a new domain of applied linguistics where Arabic language teaching takes on a new learner-centred approach and uses methodology catered to fulfilling the learners’ specific needs. Thus, the syllabus for ASP often has specialised objectives to fulfil specific requirements to allow learners to use the language for specific purposes. It can be deduced that ASP courses are geared towards helping students achieve communicative competence goals and are learning and learner oriented. In this light, ASP is in contrast with Arabic for general purpose where Arabic is taught in general and there is no specific requirement for learners to use Arabic in a specific context.

Arabic is a compulsory second language for students who are studying government funded in religious schools in Malaysia. Similar to English, Arabic language courses in schools are aimed to expose students to Arabic for general and communicative purpose language skills, rather than specific words or language use related to specialised field. In this regard, ASP courses will give new experience to tertiary students and help them to develop a deeper understanding of the language. Moreover, these courses will help them gain more opportunities in using the language in specific areas, increasing career prospects (Robinson, 1991). Arabic for specific purpose presents a specific approach to language teaching where knowledge is transferred from teacher to learners through particular teaching strategies. Thus, we need to align the method, materials, activities and language level with learner’s learning requirement (Robinson, 1991). Figure 1 shows the difference between Arabic for specific purpose and Arabic for general purpose.

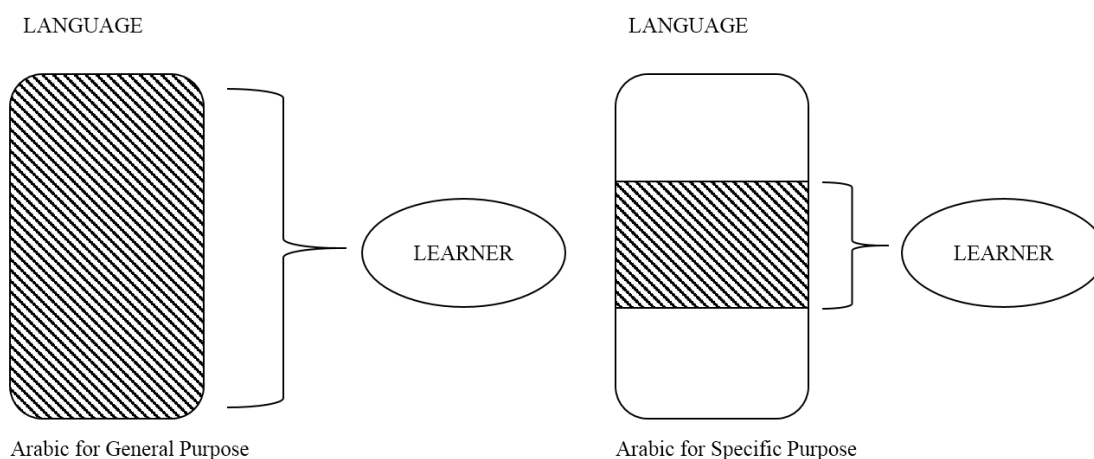


Figure 1. The learner-restricted syllabus

Jaafar (2013) identified three common types of ASP courses, which are Arabic Language for Professional Purposes, Arabic Language for Academic Purposes and Arabic with Specific Topic. It was also found that there is no apparent difference between Arabic for academic purposes and Arabic for professional purposes where people can work and study simultaneously. This is because the language learned in a study environment can often be used later for employment. Meanwhile, Arabic with specific topic courses have a higher emphasis on topic and their outcomes are based on prior needs analysis.

The Emergence of Arabic for Specific Purpose in Malaysia

Arabic for specific purpose is an area which has positively impacted students and garnered the interest of researchers especially in Malaysia. According to Nadwah (1998), the major difference between language for specific purpose and language for general purpose is need analysis which is an important aspect for the design of any language for specific purpose course. Hence, a needs analysis process should be done as an initial step for designing a courseware to streamline learning and equip students with the required language skills and vocabulary.

A study by Saleh (2005) concerned the Arabic language needs of Malaysian Hajj pilgrims as an initial step to design a special module to teach Arabic language for pilgrimage purpose. The study probed the main factors of pilgrims in learning Arabic, highlighting aspects like religion, Arab culture, economics or societal requirement. The designed module is focused on teaching speaking skill which is considered as the common skill used by Hajj pilgrims.

Another study by Hashim (2009) comprised a special Arabic language need analysis of economic students. The study examined the design of a special courseware to help economics students understand Arabic economic references. The courseware designed is based on the learning-centred approach proposed by Hutchinson and Waters (1987). The researcher also highlighted the students'

perceived importance of all four language skills (speaking, listening, reading and writing) and reported that a majority of economics students prefer to focus on reading skills compared to other skill as they believe that skills such as skimming and scanning the text, understanding the meaning and evaluating the text will help them the most in their studies.

Zainudin (2010) designed an ASP course for nurses at Putrajaya Hospital and nursing students at International Islamic University College Selangor (KUIS), Malaysia. The researcher raised several concerns about language needs among professionals and students as the study found several contradictions in language need of the nurses and the students; the nursing students prefer learning the speaking skill, followed by reading, writing and listening while the nurses prefer learning the speaking skill, followed by listening, reading and writing. The study deduced that nurses in the professional sector practice speaking and listening skills more often as they are required to converse with Arab patients.

Ismail (2012) advocated that the contents for ASP course must be aligned with learners' level and their need. A special module was designed to teach reading skill for scientific purpose which introduces vocabulary and language structure by processing and applying method. The study was aimed to identify learners' need and analyse vocabulary related to Arabic scientific references and science fiction as part of designing an appropriate module in learning reading skill for scientific purpose.

Rahim et al. (2015) analysed the needs of Syariah law students who are studying Arabic language in International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM). The study found that a majority of the learners perceive learning Arabic positively and its acquisition is related to understanding the Al-Quran and Hadith, which are considered as the main sources for Syariah law. Interestingly, the researchers discovered that learners face several problems and obstacles in learning Arabic; the main obstacles in learning Arabic for law purpose is the number of students in the class. This problem has demotivated the students and made them feel less confident to practise Arabic. The researchers suggested that practitioners should design Arabic for specific purpose modules that can be used to solve problems faced by learners. It was also suggested that instructors should create an Arabic environment in class and focus on the relevant language skills in order to boost their motivation and self confidence in practising Arabic language.

Meanwhile, Daud (2016) examined the practice of teaching Arabic for agro-technology in MARA Poly-Tech College (KPTM), Malaysia. The needs analysis was executed (Daud & Ghani, 2016) to examine students' needs as part of the proposed design for a special courseware for diploma students majoring in agro-technology. The finding is consistent with the findings of past studies by Daud et al. (2008) where students tend to learn vocabulary and language pattern related to their field of choice. The finding is also in line with Zainudin (2010) who found similar positive association between language acquisition and specific language skills. It was found that agro-technology students prefer to practise the speaking skill compared to other skills as they believe that they will need to use speaking skills in their future career.

In the field of tourism, Khalid Harun, the president of Malaysian Association of Tour and Travel Agents (MATTA) was quoted by The Star stating that "we cannot

just rely on higher institutions of learning to produce professional travel and tour executives, as they provide mostly academic content and superficial on-the-job exposure” (para. 2). Consequently, he advocated providing “specific education” and training in order to produce employable graduates with high level of professionalism in the industry (Lee, 2011). It can be deduced that “specific education” as mentioned by Khalid refers to learning language specific purposes, specifically for tourism and hospitality purposes.

Based on statistics provided by Tourism Malaysia with the cooperation of the Malaysian Immigration Department (Tourism Malaysia, 2016), Arab speaking tourists from various Arab countries such as Saudi Arabia, Oman, Egypt, Iraq, UAE, and Iran. There is also an influx of Arab students, expatriates and business owners migrating to Malaysia. The high number of Arab tourists and migrant arrivals to Malaysia highlights the importance of teaching Arabic for tourism purpose. Table 1 below presents the statistic related to the arrival of Arab tourists from January to August 2016.

Table 1
Arrival of Arab tourists Jan-Aug 2016

Country	No. of Tourists
Saudi Arabia	96 391
Iran	31 364
Egypt	20 371
Iraq	14 167
UAE	10 369

Realising the importance of Arabic for tourism purpose, Adam (2013) proposed the design and development of an Arabic for tourism module. A needs analysis was conducted with tourism professionals (Adam & Chick, 2011) to identify learners’ needs in learning Arabic for tourism purpose, to investigate its necessity and to collect opinions and suggestions that could benefit different parties, including Ministry of Tourism. A total of 292 respondents from various sectors including officers from Ministry of Tourism, airport personnel, travel agents, hotel staff, taxi driver and others participated in the need analysis. The study found that speaking skill is deemed as the most crucial skill for the tourism industry. Interestingly the researcher discovered the need to learn different variations of Arabic, especially the Saudi Arabian and Egyptian dialects.

Jaafar (2013) investigated the need analysis of students at Islamic Science University of Malaysia (USIM) in learning Arabic language for tourism purpose. The study employed descriptive and analytical research methodology to obtain the related data and showed the importance of learning spoken and written Arabic among tourism students. Based on this finding, he suggested designing and developing ASP module for the learners based on their needs.

In another study, Sahrir and Ghani (2016) designed and developed a special website to teach Arabic for tourism purpose for tourism students at MARA Poly-Tech College (KPTM), Malaysia. The website was designed by using the Joomla platform of website development and ADDIE instructional model was implemented. The website

was designed based on students' needs, opinions, and suggestions. The study revealed that a majority of the students have positive perception about learning the Arabic language for tourism purposes through a website. It was reported that the use of the website increased the students' desire and motivation to learn Arabic. It also provides them with more opportunities for self-learning.

Ghani et al. (2016) examined the efficacy of using websites in learning Arabic language for tourism purpose at the Department of General Studies, MARA Poly-Tech College (KPTM), Malaysia. The results are in line with what reported in previous studies (Samah, 2007; Sahrir & Ghani, 2016). It was reported that the use of internet and websites is an effective way to teach Arabic language through providing good, proactive support and authentic learning materials for students and teachers. The use of websites could also significantly motivate students in learning Arabic for tourism purpose in a second/foreign language environment. Students are able to acquire vocabulary, improve their language skills, and gain important information. In this regard, an effective website can expand the language skills taught in conventional classrooms.

Ahmad (2017) identified the characteristics of the academic unit or module that suit the Arabic language learning needs for Syariah officers working in Malaysian Islamic banks. The study is a descriptive analysis where the data were obtained from interviews held with five officers. The study found that the officers need to master Islamic banking and financial terms as part of their career requirement. Hence, all four language skills were added into the module with a greater focus on reading and writing to cater to the respondent's language learning needs.

Another study investigated the needs of mosque officers and workers of four mosques in Kuala Lumpur and Selangor in learning Arabic Language related to religious matters (Mohamad, 2017). The data were collected through questionnaires and interviews. The study found that all four skills of language are similarly important, but most respondents regarded that mastering speaking skills is the most important to them. Based on this result, a special academic module was proposed to aid them in handling mosque related matters. The module should be based on learners' needs and is focused on training the officers to use Arabic terms, linguistic structures and grammatical rules.

Ghani and Daud (2018) explored the significance of Arabic language among students of early childhood education. The data were collected using close-ended questionnaires which were administrated to diploma in early childhood education students in MARA Poly-Tech College (KPTM), Kota Bharu, Kelantan, and open-ended questionnaires which were distributed among pre-school teachers. The study found that developing the capacity to understand basic terms related to early childhood education is one of the most important needs of early childhood education students, as these terms are used in their studies and in their workplace as they are required to teach Arabic in kindergarten. In addition, Arabic language proficiency provides value added advantage for them as they can improve their communication skill and use them in the classroom. Meanwhile, the pre-school teachers suggested that early childhood graduates should master an additional language, such as the Arabic

language. This is because mastering the language will not only help them to teach Arabic but also help them to teach religious subjects.

Similarities and Differences between Arabic for Specific Purpose and General Purpose

There is a big difference between the teaching of Arabic for general purpose and ASP. The main difference between these two subjects lies in the content itself (Tengkari, 2007). Previous studies have pointed out several differences between ASP and Arabic for general purpose (Ahmad, 1983; Abdullah, 1990; Jamil, 2006; Tu'aimat, 2003). Arabic for general purpose provides general knowledge and basic skills of Arabic language without focusing on any field or purpose. It focuses on enabling learners to master the commonly used language skills. ASP is taught using a general approach which has been determined by the individuals or institutions. Moreover, it concerns learners' linguistic ability and often taught in heterogeneous groups and its contents are based on the students' level of proficiency such as primary, intermediate and advanced, which is often determined by individual institutions.

In the meantime, ASP can be viewed as a specialised form of teaching Arabic for general purpose with the main goal to equip learners with necessary Arabic language skills to face their real communication challenges in their future professional careers. Furthermore, according to Potocar (2002), it incorporates practical linguistic skills to enable learners for the successful performance and professional task. The contents of ASP focus on the students' need in their fields, such as what the language items they need to excel in their field (Tengkari, 2007). ASP courses are designed for a more homogeneous group where members share same area of specialisation. It also focuses on the language pattern and the curriculum is focused on certain skills. Moreover, ASP courses are largely designed for adults.

Needs Analysis in Language for Specific Purpose

As mentioned, the difference between language for general purposes and language for specific purposes is the needs analysis process (Daud N. H., 1998). In an academic context, need analysis is a process of identifying the needs of learners involved in a course. Learners' needs analysis must be undertaken prior to designing Arabic for specific purpose module and courseware, in order to achieve learning objectives, choosing the appropriate pedagogy and words related to the field (Daud & Ghani, 2016; Abdullah, Shifaah Nurul & Salih Mahgoub Eltingari, 2016; Nadwah et al., 2008). Analysing learners' needs is vital in teaching language for specific purposes (Brown, 1995; Daud, 1998; Dudeley-Evans & St. John, 1998; Daud et al., 2008; Daud & Ghani, 2016; Hutchinson & Waters, 1987; Jordan, 1997). Researchers have also advocated that needs analysis should be an on-going process (Harding, 2007) which is done from time to time based on target situation, learning situation, or other factors that may influence the learners instead of being a one-off activity.

In the study of Language for Specific Purposes (LSP), the word “needs” is synonymous with “wants” to express the learners’ desire (McDonough, 1984). McDonough (1984) defined “needs” as “the demand of others” that refer to needs of teachers, practitioners, designers and institutions. Another definition was provided by Chambers (1988) which noted that “needs” is the first stage in determining priorities, whereas “analysis” implies what the elements are and how they are to be identified. In the same context, Richards et al. (2010) defined needs analysis as a process of determining the needs of a group of learners that requires a language and arranging the needs according to priorities which use both subjective and objective information. Learners’ wants are the most crucial input in the need analysis process in designing language for specific purpose (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987). This aspect is considered as very important because it will determine learners’ determination and whether the course is effective (McDonough, 1984; Nunan, 1988). It is posited that ignoring learner’s needs and wants might hinder learners from learning which could demotivate them. Learners’ motivation towards the course also depend on whether their needs are considered in the development of the materials (Abudhahir et al., 2014).

Hutchinson and Waters (1987) presented a very comprehensive learning-centred approach to needs analysis by making basic distinction between “target needs”, such as what learner needs to do in target situation, and “learning needs” or what the learner needs to do in order to learn. On the other hand, target needs refers to knowledge and abilities the learners require in order to be able to perform to the required degree of competence in the target situation (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987). Three important elements in needs analysis, which are necessities, lacks and wants. Necessities refer to “what the learner has to know in order to function effectively in the target situation” (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987). In the context of this research, learner might need to give information to Arabic speakers, respond to any enquiries or complaints, and engage in persuasive conversation to attract them in specific industry and sector. The next aspect is the learners’ lack which can be identified by finding the gap between the learners’ existing knowledge or ability and the needs of the target situation (Hutchinson, & Waters, 1987). In order to determine what the learner lacks; pre-course placement test need to be done. However, most practitioners do not implement this due to time constraint (Yeoh, 2006). The last aspect is want. According to Hutchinson and Waters (1987), learners may have clear idea of the “necessities” of the target situation, and determine what they “want” based on their “lack”, but learners’ views will conflict with the perception of other parties. such as the course designers, sponsors, and teachers. Thus, the learners’ “wants” should be given priority to provide an effective ASP course.

ASP as a Learner-Centred Approach

Learner-centred teaching approach is an approach to teaching that is increasingly being encouraged in higher education. This approach emphasises student’s interests, abilities and learning styles. It shifts the role of instructors or teachers from givers of information to facilitators of student learning. It is characterised by

innovative methods of teaching which aim to promote learning and communication between teachers and learners. In recent years, the learner-centred learning pedagogy has received attention and it has become the key component for effective online learning. Learners should become active participants in their own learning to allow them to foster transferable skills such as problem-solving, critical/reflective thinking, and decision making. Hedge (2000) noted that the learner-centred approach has four main characteristics, which are, it allows learners to actively participate in the whole process of designing the course content and selecting learning procedures, it allows learners to participate in designing language activities, it acknowledges that learners are largely responsible for their own learning, and learners' autonomy is increased.

A learner-centred classroom allows learners to choose what they will learn, how they will learn and how they will assess their own learning. This approach requires learners to be active and responsible participants in their own learning. Moreover, learning is based on the students' own learning pace. This contrasts with a teacher-centred classroom where teachers choose what the students will learn, how the students will learn, and how the students will be assessed.

The learning process for ASP should be adjusted as required to meet the learner's abilities, needs, and interest. In other words, different amount of time, materials, target groups, and level must be provided in order to support learners. This process requires the negotiation and flexibility of both teachers and learners (Wajnryb, 1992) The syllabus contents and methods used for ASP is an approach of language teaching based on learners' intention for learning. It emphasises learner-centeredness where learners decide what they want to learn and how they want to learn the language. In this regard, needs analysis is an imperative process in the design of ASP courses. In addition, learner's potential and the skills and knowledge needed are important to overcome constraints such as aptitude, time and technical resources.

Benefits of ASP

The benefits of teaching Arabic for general purpose is different from teaching ASP. Teaching ASP deals with topics needed by learners, different skills, methods, and objectives to help the learners in learning speed, efficiency and effectiveness. In regard to language acquisition, ASP courses could facilitate faster language acquisition as student learn what they need, when they need it in an authentic, content-based context. This mimics the pattern of the native speaker's acquisition of language for specific purposes.

Second, as for learning efficiency of ASP, there are steps that should be followed by practitioners before providing the course. Obviously, the need analysis is of vital importance here as it enables the practitioner to determine the specific needs and objectives of learners. Third, there is learning effectiveness. On completion of the course, the learners are ready to practise the language appropriately and correctly in field related, which have been identified prior to the course. Besides, the learners are well prepared for their career and employment as they can use ASP immediately in their job.

Tu'aimat (2003) listed several advantages of learning ASP courses, which include a clear methodology which ensures largely practical work as well as performance, efficiency and quality as ASP courses have precise steps to follow to ensure the learning outcomes are achieved. Moreover, these courses identify students' needs and objectives, which in turn, present a good time investment for language learning. These courses also increase students' future career productivity as they learn concepts and common terminology in their field. Undoubtedly, this will help to students to demonstrate good career performance. Another advantage of ASP courses is that they can strengthen the relationship between the homogeneous learners in these courses and help them build networks and mutual relationships. These courses also help increase students' opportunities and abilities when dealing with authentic Arabic related materials. Lastly, these courses increase the level of motivation among students, as they learn something valuable which can directly impact their career.

Suggestions to Carry Out ASP

The teaching of ASP combines the teaching of a specific subject matter and Arabic language skills. This combination is highly motivating for the students as they become more aware of how Arabic language skills will be used in the real context in specialised fields such as tourism, medicine, economics, and science. The integration of language skills into the teaching of these subjects help expose students to the accurate terminology and language structures in a meaningful context. Consequently, this could reinforce the language skills taught and help increase students' motivation and interest towards Arabic language.

Educators should be committed in order for the ASP programme to be conducted effectively. They are required to be actively involved in conducting need analysis, planning the course outline and learning outcomes, determining the pedagogy, establishing a positive learning environment, and evaluating the progress and achievement of the students.

The process of planning an ASP course involves comparing, selecting, and designing the syllabus based on the learning goals and objectives of the course. Long-term goals and short-term objectives should be set so that the students' progress and achievement can be tracked. In this regard students' current level of proficiency, learning potential and their prior knowledge should be taken into account when setting learning goals and objectives. Furthermore, the subject content-knowledge should expose them to the real context of language use and the language structure to be used inside and outside of the classroom. All of these aspects will heavily influence the selection, adaption and design of the course materials, and assessment procedures.

Using a suitable and interesting pedagogy in classroom is crucial to sustain learner's interest and motivation. As acquiring a new language requires learners to work harder, faster and more efficiently, the student-centred approach seems to benefit them as it gives them opportunities to communicate and share information in class, develop soft skills and increase their motivation towards learning Arabic language. Second language learners also benefit from the use of technology in the

class. This is because technology such as the internet provides students with access to authentic materials that they can use to learn independently even outside the classroom.

To optimise their acquisition of the second or foreign language, learners need to practice to communicate using Arabic language for them to acquire that language. In this light, ASP courses can help establish a positive learning environment that encourages students to practise their communication and mediation skills. It also facilitates two-way communication between educators and learners in classroom. As a result, students will be able to acquire the language faster as they have more opportunity to practise the language in the classroom.

Thus, in planning ASP courses, practitioners should consider activities that can enhance learners' language skills. One way to determine the suitable activities is through needs analysis to gather information on the needs of the learners, instructors and the institutions. It allows educators to identify general and specific problems experienced by learners and propose the best solution to them. It is important to note that need analysis is not a one-off process, hence, information needs to be continuously collected to assess and improve the contents of the course and the teaching and learning activities.

In regard to evaluating the effectiveness of the learning and teaching process, educators play a role in helping students to identify the problems they face in language learning and find the best solution to these problems. Educators should also determine the skills that need to be focused on, and make choices on what and how to learn the language. Moreover, educators should find the most suitable assessment to measure the students' level of language acquisition. Authentic assessment has been recommended as it requires students to perform real-world tasks that demonstrate how the students can use the knowledge and skills they learn in a meaningful way.

Conclusion

Undoubtedly, ASP courses are useful but their teaching is marred by lack of instructional tools. In general, researchers agreed that the method to teach Arabic language should be changed and transformed to equip students with Arabic communication skills (Samah, 2007; 2016). Several studies have focused on the teaching of ASP and designing special module and courseware to teach ASP based on analysis of learners' needs. These studies posited that the need analysis phase is imperative in determining the most suitable module contents, words and language patterns and pedagogy are used to ensure their effectiveness. The studies also highlighted the importance of aligning language skills and exposing learners to new language use contexts.

Several researchers have used the internet technology for learning and teaching process by modifying existing pen and paper module into electronic forms. In this light, the researchers suggested the use of the internet as learning aid, specifically using websites provided for teaching Arabic for specific purpose to assist students in their language acquisition. The importance of internet in providing and offering teaching and learning materials should not be ignored. Search engine such

as Google and Yahoo must be fully utilised by students and teachers as it provides sufficient materials for teaching and learning process. A proper experimental method should be implemented to measure the effectiveness of module itself as well as the teaching of ASP among the students. A study should be done on the effectiveness of ASP among students in terms of their academic and career advancements.

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