



Oral Language Interventions

Background

The summary below presents the research evidence on oral language intervention in the Arab world.

The Teaching & Learning Toolkit focuses on impact on outcomes for learners; it presents an estimate of the average impact of oral language intervention on learning progress, based on the synthesis of a large number of quantitative studies from around the world.

This page offers a summary and analysis of individual studies on oral language intervention in the Arab world. In contrast to the Toolkit it includes studies which do not estimate impact, but instead investigate the implementation of interventions that could improve oral language for native speakers' pupils. This information is valuable for school leaders and teachers interested in finding out more about particular examples of oral language interventions that have been delivered in an Arabic context.



Summary of the research in the Arab world

A large body of international literature agreed that children with high levels of spoken and verbal oral language have high literacy skills due to their ability in transferring their knowledge of spoken language to written text. However, there is scarcity of research examining the effectiveness of school-based oral language interventions in improving students' verbal and/or literacy skills in the Arab world.

The diglossic nature of the Arabic language and the linguistic distance between the spoken Arabic (SA) and written/formal Arabic "Modern Standard Arabic" (MSA) had always impacted students' literacy development. While some studies like Shendy (2019) argued that SA and MSA are similar and that reading to children in their mother-tongue (SA) would not weaken their later grasp of MSA, there is a general consensus against this notion. That is why, researchers like Saiegh-Haddad et al. (2011), Schwartz et al. (2016), and Taha-Thomure (2019) investigated ways to improve students reading, writing, and formally communicating in the MSA. In fact, many researchers agreed that early and frequent oral exposure to MSA will fulfill this purpose. This would include using story reading and listening to MSA frequently via children's cartoons, for example, can boost children's oral language skills. For instance, in two experimental studies, Jamjoom (2015) investigated how story reading methods (i.e., listening to a teacher reading storybooks only in the formal language (MSA) repeatedly and hearing the stories again in MSA once followed by two readings entirely in the informal spoken language) enhanced the vocabulary words for kindergarten children in Saudi Arabia. Greater gains were found when the story read in MSA is preceded by a single telling of the story in the spoken Arabic. Results of his second study were evident that long-term exposure to story reading in MSA for an entire academic year facilitated literary Arabic vocabulary acquisition and enhanced its usage more than the traditional way of story reading in the spoken Arabic.

Literature showed that developing students' oral language and phonological awareness is positively associated with the development of their literacy skills. Some studies found that teachers training early years (grade 1) students on syllables, rhymes, and phonemes; as well as via a single word reading task, and letter knowledge task (letter-sound recognition) improved their literacy outcomes



(Al-Sulaim & Marinis, 2017). Such training improved students' oral language and supported their communication of ideas and verbal expression.

Nurturing learning communities in schools through creating book clubs or shared book reading are also effective approaches that enhance students literacy. For instance, creating book club for seventh graders significantly improved students Arabic literacy and authentic dialogue but also produced a community where learning can be shared and communication skills and relationship are strengthened (Alghamdi, 2013). Furthermore, testing the shared book reading approach boosted the phonological awareness abilities and print awareness skills, as well as fast mapping abilities for students in the experimental group (n=15) when compared with their peers in the control group (n=15) (Rochdi, 2010). While these skills were necessary for developing students literacy skill and oral language, the shared book reading approach showed modest gains on developing the long-term vocabulary acquisition for these students.

Studies showed that extending students' spoken vocabulary is at the core of improving their oral language skills and literacy skills. To this extent, Tibi and Kirby (2018) tested a model in which the use of a phonological awareness and naming speed model expanded vocabulary and reading ability of a sample of 201 Grade 3 Arabic-speaking children in the United Arab Emirates. The model was found to be effective in developing students vocabulary and reading skills. Similarly, integrating an Arabic picture vocabulary program for two months had significant impact on developing Lebanese first graders oral language, visual imagery and memory skills (Khaled, 2012).

Literature also showed that the use of structured questioning to develop reading comprehension supported students oral language development. Abu-Hamour (2013) tested explicit teaching of reading comprehension strategies through visualization, making connections, asking questions before, during, and after reading, making inferences and drawing conclusions during and after reading, and analysis and synthesis of ideas to have greater gains on student scores in the experimental group. Designing structured questions for reading comprehension enhanced students reading fluency and Arabic vocabulary and improved their oral language skills. Students oral language developed mainly because this



teaching strategy gave them the opportunity to connect their own experiences and personal knowledge with the texts which in turn motivated them to share their opinions and communicate and express their ideas (Alshehri, 2014).

Other initiatives were taken by researchers to change the traditional textbooks produced by the ministries of education for the aim of improving teachers instruction and methodologies. To this purpose, Thomure and Speaker (2018) developed the Arabic Language Arts (ALA) standards and tested them for the period of one year in six schools in three countries in the Arabian Gulf region (Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, and United Arab Emirates). Using ALA standards seemed to have a positive effect on teachers' instruction, in addition to improving students' oral language and overall learning in Arabic language. Teachers also reported that following the integration of the ALA standards in their teaching helped them collaborate with each other in planning, minimized the time needed to prepare the lessons, and allowed them to better choose suitable resources.

On another note, teachers of the Arabic language underlined their need for professional development programs to enhance their teaching skills and improve students' overall literacy in Arabic language and reading fluency. Teachers reported that they need training and guidance in designing activities for lesson planning, implementation, and evaluation of students learning (Alzahrani, 2019). Additionally, teachers needed continuous support to help them implement new knowledge in their classrooms after participating in these professional development programs (Al Ghamdi, 2015). This concern was reported from teachers in the public schools which main language of instruction is Arabic as well as in private bilingual and international schools.

Using technology supported the teaching of Arabic language and showed effective gains on elementary and secondary students' literacy skills. In an experimental study conducted by Alsulami (2016), first grade students who studied Arabic using the ipad showed greater gains in their cognitive and reading skills more than the control group who studied based on the traditional approach. However, teachers and parents reported that providing the iPad for each student might weaken their handwriting skills of students at young age and lessen their communication and cooperation between students in classrooms. In addition to these concerns, 100 Arabic language teachers from 40 secondary schools in Saudi



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Arabia claimed that they were not able to effectively use the digital resources for teaching Arabic language. Through a mixed-method study design, Alasaadi (2014) revealed that the lack of coordination, lack of training, lack of technical support, and unsuitable modern educational technologies infrastructure in the schools were the main barriers to the use of technology in learning Arabic.

Despite the existence of evidence-based interventions that support the improvement of K-12 students' oral language, research in this area is still scarce and further investigations are needed. Researchers are recommended to replicate existing studies on a larger Likert scale and use random sampling to increase the generalizability of the results. A call was also made by Al-Sulaim and Marinis (2017) for the necessity of developing standardized tests in the Arabic language to evaluate students' oral, written, and comprehension skills.



Summary

The diglossic nature of the Arabic language on one side and the limited exposure of Arabic language learners to the Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) on the other side are challenging in the development of pre-literacy skills for children in the Arab world. In fact, Arabic speaking students struggle in reading, writing, speaking, and comprehending the MSA. To date, research in developing oral language interventions in this region is limited and mostly focused on extending the vocabulary learning as an approach to improve students oral and verbal literacy skills.

Interventions like creating book clubs for older students and story reading to early years students or even implementing technology in Arabic instruction appear to have been effective on extending their vocabulary and improving their oral language skills. There is evidence that designing structured questioning to develop reading comprehension can enhance students reading fluency and Arabic vocabulary and can improve students' oral language skills. Teachers might also consider introducing students to MSA at an early stage or strengthening young children' phonological awareness skills to improve oral and verbal literacy skills.



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Databases searched:

Education Source

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Search Terms:

Oral language interventions; dialogic/interactive reading; joint book reading;

Arabic literacy; vocabulary acquisition