

(Research/ Review) Article

Traditional Methods in Arabic Language Instruction: A Critical Review of Classical Pedagogies

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Abstract: This article examines the foundational role of traditional methods in Arabic language instruction by exploring classical pedagogies rooted in Islamic educational heritage. Amid the rising dominance of modern and communicative approaches, a critical reassessment of historical methods—such as *imlā'*, *talqīn*, *qirā'ah jahriyah*, *ḥifẓ*, and *tarjamah*—is necessary to understand their pedagogical strengths, limitations, and philosophical underpinnings. This study employs a reflective literature-based method that draws upon classical Islamic texts, modern comparative analyses, and recent academic contributions to reconstruct the theoretical framework of traditional instruction. Findings reveal that while classical methods emphasized memorization, authority, and textual mastery, they also embodied a coherent epistemology centered on ethical formation (*adab*), teacher–student transmission (*taqlīd*), and spiritual-intellectual integration. These methods were not only instructional techniques but were embedded within broader ontological and axiological assumptions about knowledge, language, and human development. The study argues that rather than being entirely outdated, elements of traditional pedagogy remain relevant and can be selectively integrated into modern educational models to balance structure with creativity, discipline with dialogue. By critically reviewing classical pedagogies, this article contributes to the discourse on Arabic language curriculum reform, especially in Islamic institutions seeking to preserve identity while engaging contemporary educational challenges.

Keywords: Arabic language instruction; traditional pedagogy; Islamic education; classical methods; *talqīn*; *imlā'*; *qirā'ah*; language curriculum.

1. Introduction

Arabic language instruction has undergone significant transformation in response to changing educational philosophies, linguistic theories, and global pedagogical trends. However, amid this evolution, traditional methods rooted in Islamic scholarship remain vital yet understudied components of Arabic pedagogy. For centuries, classical approaches such as *talqīn* (oral repetition), *imlā'* (dictation), *qirā'ah jahriyah* (loud reading), *ḥifẓ* (memorization), and *tarjamah* (translation) have shaped the transmission of Arabic within madrasahs and traditional educational institutions [1], [2].

These methods were not merely instructional techniques but reflected a holistic educational worldview that fused linguistic training with ethical development and spiritual formation. Scholars such as al-Zarnūjī and al-Ghazālī emphasized the role of discipline, sincerity (*ikhlaṣ*), and transmission (*taqlīd*) in the educational process [3], [4], [5].

In recent decades, the rise of communicative and digital pedagogies has shifted attention toward learner-centered approaches [6]. While these innovations offer undeniable benefits, the marginalization of traditional pedagogies risks neglecting their historical effectiveness and philosophical value. In particular, Islamic educational institutions often face a dilemma between preserving traditional frameworks and adopting modern instructional demands [7].

Previous studies have predominantly focused on modern teaching effectiveness, with limited comparative reviews of classical Arabic pedagogies and their continued relevance [8], [9]. As noted by Babak [1] and Wahba [10], there is a pressing need to revisit traditional

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methods not only as historical artifacts but as conceptual resources for contemporary curriculum design.

This article aims to (1) identify key traditional Arabic teaching methods; (2) analyze their pedagogical and philosophical underpinnings; and (3) assess their relevance in contemporary education. Through critical reflection on these methods, the article contributes to the ongoing discourse in Arabic pedagogy, curriculum reform, and Islamic educational theory.

2. Preliminaries or Related Work or Literature Review

2.1. Historical Roots of Traditional Arabic Teaching Methods

Traditional Arabic language pedagogy has its roots in the Islamic classical educational model, emphasizing methods such as *talqīn* (oral dictation), *ḥifẓ* (memorization), *qirā'ah jahriyah* (loud reading), *tarjamah* (translation), and *imlā'* (dictation). These methods were closely linked to the ethical, spiritual, and epistemological foundations of Islamic knowledge transmission [1], [3].

Al-Zarnūjī's influential manual, *Ta'lim al-Muta'allim Ta'riq at-Ta'allum*, serves as a cornerstone in understanding the ethos of traditional learning, emphasizing teacher authority, repetition, and moral discipline as keys to successful education [4]. Similarly, Al-Ghazālī underscored the interplay between moral cultivation (*adab*), spiritual development, and intellectual mastery in his comprehensive works such as *Iḥyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn* [5], [6].

These pedagogies emerged in a context where language was not only a tool of communication but also a medium for preserving religious, ethical, and cultural identity. Their aim extended beyond linguistic competency toward holistic formation of the learner [7].

2.2 Contemporary Reflections and Academic Critiques

Recent studies have revisited traditional methods through critical and comparative perspectives. Babak [1] identified key strategies in classical Arabic instruction—memorization, grammar translation, and oral recitation—arguing for their functional sustainability in religious institutions. Wahba [10] elaborated on the grammatical tradition, showing how classical structures still influence modern Arabic instruction despite curricular reforms.

At the same time, scholars like Tamimi [8] have highlighted limitations in traditional models, particularly their lack of student autonomy and interactive engagement. The dominance of rote learning and passive reception has raised concerns over communicative competence in second language acquisition. However, researchers such as Binaghi [11] and Zelkina [2] argue that Arabic's grammatical and rhetorical traditions still offer deep cognitive and cultural insight when critically adapted.

The literature also reveals a lack of systematic comparison between classical and contemporary pedagogies, especially within the framework of Islamic education reform. This article addresses that gap by offering a philosophical and pedagogical reflection on traditional methods, assessing their relevance in modern contexts without dismissing their historical significance [12].

3. Proposed Method

This study adopts a qualitative, literature-based methodology grounded in reflective and analytical inquiry. The research aims to explore, categorize, and critically assess traditional methods of Arabic language instruction within the framework of Islamic educational thought and contemporary pedagogical discourse [1], [3].

3.1. Source Selection and Data Collection

The primary sources used in this research are classical Islamic texts that discuss teaching practices, including *Ta'lim al-Muta'allim* by al-Zarnūjī [4], and pedagogical insights from al-Ghazālī's works [5], [6]. These are supplemented by recent peer-reviewed articles and academic books focusing on Arabic language teaching, Islamic education, and traditional pedagogy [7], [8], [9].

Sources were selected based on their relevance, credibility, and contribution to the historical and theoretical understanding of traditional Arabic pedagogy. The inclusion of both primary and secondary literature allows for a comprehensive and multi-perspective analysis.

3.2. Analytical Framework

The study employs thematic analysis to identify and classify the dominant instructional methods historically practiced in Arabic language learning. These include:

- Talqīn (oral repetition),
- Imlā' (dictation),
- Qirā'ah jahriyah (loud reading),
- Tarjamah (translation), and
- Ḥifẓ (memorization) [1], [10].

Each method is analyzed according to three main philosophical dimensions:

- Ontological: What is assumed about the nature of knowledge and language?
- Epistemological: How is knowledge acquired and transmitted?
- Axiological: What values are embedded in the method?

3.3. Interpretation and Synthesis

In the final stage, the methods are critically reflected upon within modern pedagogical contexts. This reflection includes:

- Evaluating educational effectiveness in traditional and contemporary settings,
- Assessing compatibility with modern curricula,
- Identifying pedagogical tensions and opportunities for integration [2], [3], [11].

This methodological approach allows the study to move beyond descriptive historical review and toward a conceptual framework that is both analytically rigorous and pedagogically relevant.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Identification of Key Traditional Methods in Arabic Language Teaching

The traditional Arabic pedagogical system employed several core methods that were widely practiced across Islamic educational institutions. These methods include talqīn (oral repetition), imlā' (dictation), ḥifẓ (memorization) [13], qirā'ah jahriyah (loud reading), and tarjamah (translation) [1], [4], [5]. Each technique was designed to facilitate linguistic mastery, often in the context of religious studies and rote learning environments. These methods prioritized accuracy, grammatical precision, and repetition as fundamental pillars of language acquisition.

For instance, talqīn allowed students to internalize linguistic patterns by repeating words and phrases after the teacher. Imlā' reinforced orthographic accuracy and auditory comprehension, while ḥifẓ emphasized the importance of memorization not only for religious texts but also for syntactic structures and lexicons. The method of qirā'ah jahriyah encouraged correct pronunciation and rhythmic fluency through recitation. Tarjamah, often used in combination with grammatical explanation (i'rāb), introduced learners to lexical equivalency and cross-linguistic interpretation [7], [8].

These instructional strategies were not isolated techniques but parts of a broader pedagogical ecosystem, deeply intertwined with traditional conceptions of knowledge, language, and morality.

4.2. Pedagogical and Philosophical Foundations

The effectiveness and endurance of traditional Arabic teaching methods can be attributed to their grounding in a distinct epistemological and axiological framework. In classical Islamic education, language was not merely a tool of communication but a sacred medium of knowledge transmission—especially of Qur'anic revelation and prophetic traditions [3], [6], [14].

This understanding positioned teachers as moral exemplars and knowledge bearers (*murabbī*), and students as disciplined seekers (*ṭālib al-‘ilm*). The pedagogical emphasis was less on personal expression and more on preservation, imitation, and gradual mastery [9], [10], [15].

Ontologically, knowledge was seen as pre-existing and divinely sourced. Thus, *talqīn* and *ḥifẓ* aligned with a worldview that prioritized receptivity and fidelity. Epistemologically, learning was a hierarchical process grounded in teacher-student transmission. Axiologically, learning was inseparable from ethical formation—acquiring language also meant cultivating virtues like patience, humility, and discipline [2], [11].

This triadic framework—ontology, epistemology, and axiology—underpins the coherence of classical Arabic pedagogy, even if modern educational theory often challenges its rigidity [16].

4.3. Relevance in Contemporary Contexts

In modern Arabic language education, particularly outside the Arab world, there is a growing preference for communicative and constructivist approaches. Nevertheless, the traditional methods continue to influence teaching practices in *madrasahs*, *pesantrens*, and Qur’anic schools [12], [17]. Their strength lies in the structured repetition, cultural rootedness, and moral intentionality they embody.

Several scholars have argued for a reevaluation of traditional pedagogies, not to return wholesale to the past, but to adapt and integrate elements that foster focus, memorization, and grammatical depth—skills that are often underemphasized in modern methods [7], [18]. For example, *imlā’* can be incorporated into writing skill instruction, and *qirā’ah jahriyah* into pronunciation and listening exercises.

However, limitations remain. Traditional methods tend to marginalize learner autonomy, creativity, and interactive learning—features central to current SLA (second language acquisition) theory. Therefore, selective hybridization is necessary: traditional methods should be critically reframed to serve contemporary language education goals without detaching from their original spirit [8], [19], [20].

5. Comparison

A key aspect of this study is to position traditional Arabic language teaching methods in contrast with contemporary instructional models, particularly those influenced by communicative language teaching (CLT) and learner-centered paradigms.

Modern approaches emphasize student autonomy, functional communication, and contextualized learning, often supported by digital platforms and real-life interaction. In contrast, traditional methods focus on structured repetition, memorization, and teacher authority—anchored in a moral-epistemological worldview [1], [3].

While modern methods foster engagement and adaptability, they often struggle with deep grammatical mastery and long-term retention, especially in contexts where Arabic is not the primary language. Traditional pedagogies, despite being teacher-centered and less interactive, have demonstrated success in developing textual fluency, orthographic precision, and classical literacy among students [5], [13].

Table 1 below summarizes the major differences:

Feature	Traditional Methods	Modern Methods
Instructional Focus	Grammar, repetition, memorization	Communication, creativity, interaction
Role of Teacher	Central authority	Facilitator
Student Involvement	Passive-receptive	Active-participatory
Use of Technology	None	High
Cultural-Ethical Integration	Strong	Often minimal
Strengths	Structure, discipline, precision	Engagement, motivation, real-world use
Limitations	Rigid, non-interactive	Superficiality, weak linguistic foundation

This comparison highlights the potential for **pedagogical hybridization**, where elements of both models may complement each other. Selective incorporation of traditional practices—such as *imlā'* for spelling accuracy, *qirā'ah jahriyah* for pronunciation, and *ḥifẓ* for vocabulary retention—can enrich modern Arabic curricula, particularly in Islamic educational settings [6], [7].

6. Conclusions

This study has revisited traditional Arabic language teaching methods within the broader context of Islamic pedagogy and modern educational discourse. By analyzing classical approaches such as *talqīn*, *imlā'*, *ḥifẓ*, *qirā'ah jahriyah*, and *tarjamah*, it becomes clear that these methods were grounded in a coherent philosophical framework rooted in epistemological fidelity, moral development, and linguistic precision.

The findings reveal that traditional pedagogies, though often criticized for their rigidity, possess enduring pedagogical value—particularly in cultivating textual fluency, discipline, and reverence for knowledge. Their ontological and axiological coherence stands in contrast to many fragmented and overly pragmatic modern models. At the same time, the study acknowledges the limitations of traditional methods, particularly their lack of learner engagement and adaptability to contemporary communicative needs.

The comparison between classical and modern approaches suggests that pedagogical integration, rather than replacement, offers a promising path forward. Traditional methods can complement modern innovations when adapted thoughtfully and critically. In doing so, educators can preserve the ethical and intellectual heritage of Islamic education while addressing the linguistic and cognitive demands of today's learners.

This article contributes to Arabic pedagogy by providing a theoretical and reflective framework for re-engaging with classical methods—not merely as relics of the past but as dynamic tools for curriculum reform, especially within Islamic educational institutions. Future research is encouraged to develop empirical models that implement and evaluate such hybrid approaches in diverse learning contexts.

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The authors declare no conflict of interest related to the publication of this article..

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