

Mastering Arabic Language Skills: The Importance of Developing an Outstanding Textbook a Descriptive-Analytical Study of Arabic Language Textbooks for Non-Native Speakers

Dr. Elsayed Makki Elbishr Ali Hassan^{1*}, Prof. Dr. Sahkholid Nasution², Dr. Zarima binti Mohd Zakaria³, Assoc. Prof. Dr. Saipolbarin bin Ramli⁴, Dr. Mohammad Taufiq bin Abdul Ghani⁵, Dr. Abdallah Sabir Mahmoud⁶

^{1,3,4,5,6}Sultan Idris Education University, Malaysia

²Universitas Islam Negeri Sumatera Utara Medan, Indonesia

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2026.100800863>

Received: 2 September 2026; Accepted: 10 September 2026; Published: 19 September 2026

ABSTRACT

The quality of a textbook for learners of Arabic as a second or foreign language cannot be judged by the amount of linguistic information it contains alone. Its value depends on how effectively it translates linguistic, pedagogical, cultural, and assessment principles into a coherent learning experience. This descriptive-analytical study examines the role and design of Arabic language textbooks for non-native speakers, with particular attention to the relationship between the core textbook and its supporting materials. The analysis considers textbook organization, text and vocabulary selection, treatment of language skills, cultural content, written and phonetic practice, assessment, dictionaries, teacher guidance, and instructional media. The analysis indicates that an effective textbook should begin with a clear learner profile and a documented needs analysis, then sequence language and cultural content from accessible to more demanding forms while maintaining meaningful opportunities for communication. The study further argues that the textbook should be conceived as the central component of an integrated materials package rather than as a self-sufficient resource. Exercise materials, assessment instruments, teacher guidance, dictionaries, and audio-visual resources should be deliberately aligned with the learning outcomes of the core book. A further implication is that textbook development should be cyclical: needs analysis and language analysis should inform design, implementation should generate evidence about learner response, and that evidence should be used for revision. The study therefore proposes an integrated framework for developing Arabic textbooks that combines learner responsiveness, linguistic progression, cultural relevance, communicative practice, assessment alignment, and continuous review.

Keywords: Arabic language textbook; Arabic as a foreign language; non-native speakers; materials development; communicative language teaching; language assessment

INTRODUCTION

The growing international interest in Arabic has increased the need for instructional materials that can serve learners whose linguistic and cultural backgrounds differ substantially from those of native Arabic speakers. For these learners, acquiring Arabic involves more than memorizing vocabulary or grammatical rules. They must gradually develop the ability to interpret and produce language, participate in interaction, and understand cultural meanings that may not have direct equivalents in their first-language environments. This makes the design of instructional materials a central concern in Arabic language education.

A textbook occupies a particularly influential position in this process because it gives visible form to the curriculum. It determines, to a considerable extent, what learners encounter, the order in which they encounter it, the kinds of practice they receive, and the relationship between classroom work and independent study. The textbook, however, should not be treated as synonymous with the curriculum. Its effectiveness depends on its coordination with teachers, classroom activities, assessment, learning technologies, and the wider educational

environment. This distinction is especially important in Arabic as foreign-language settings, where learners may require additional support with pronunciation, script, vocabulary, grammatical structures, and culturally embedded expressions.

Earlier work on Arabic materials development emphasizes the need to establish clear principles before preparing a basic textbook and to connect the textbook with analysis of learners, language, and instructional objectives (Al-Naqah & Tu'aymah, 1983; Al-Naqah, 2006). The present study develops this position by treating textbook quality as a matter of alignment. In other words, learner needs, content selection, progression, activities, assessment, and supporting materials should not be designed independently. Their value emerges from the extent to which they work together to support identifiable learning outcomes.

The study also responds to a practical tension in contemporary textbook development. On the one hand, learners need structured progression and carefully controlled language. On the other, they need meaningful exposure to language as it is used in real communication. An effective textbook therefore has to manage the movement between controlled learning and authentic use rather than choosing one at the expense of the other.

Statement of the Problem

The availability of numerous Arabic textbooks does not necessarily mean that learners have access to materials that are systematically designed for their particular needs. Textbooks may differ in their organization, sequencing of language, treatment of the four skills, cultural representation, vocabulary selection, and provision of practice and assessment. Such variation can be productive when it reflects different contexts, but it can also create weaknesses when design decisions are based primarily on tradition, personal preference, or adaptation from materials intended for native speakers.

The central problem addressed in this study is therefore the absence of a sufficiently integrated design perspective in which the Arabic textbook, supplementary materials, teacher guidance, instructional media, and assessment are planned as interconnected elements. The problem is not simply how to produce another textbook. It is how to determine the design principles that can make a textbook responsive to learners, pedagogically coherent, linguistically progressive, culturally appropriate, and usable across contemporary learning environments.

Significance of the Study

The study is significant in three ways. First, it contributes a structured account of the principles that should guide the development of Arabic textbooks for non-native speakers. Second, it emphasizes the supporting materials that are sometimes treated as secondary even though they influence practice, feedback, pronunciation, independent learning, and assessment. Third, it offers a practical development sequence that can be used by textbook authors, curriculum designers, teachers, and programme coordinators when reviewing or developing Arabic instructional materials.

Objectives of the Study

- To examine the role and design requirements of Arabic language textbooks for non-native speakers.
- To identify principles for selecting texts, vocabulary, linguistic structures, cultural content, and communicative situations.
- To examine how exercise books, phonetic practice, tests, dictionaries, teacher guides, and instructional media can complement the core textbook.
- To develop an integrated sequence for planning, designing, reviewing, and refining Arabic textbook materials.

Research Questions

- What linguistic, pedagogical, cultural, and learner-related considerations should guide the preparation of an Arabic textbook for non-native speakers?
- How should texts, vocabulary, structures, and communicative situations be selected and sequenced?

- How can supplementary materials be aligned with the objectives and content of the core textbook?
- What role should assessment, teacher guidance, dictionaries, and instructional media play in an integrated textbook package?
- How can textbook development remain responsive to changing learner needs and contemporary educational environments?

METHODOLOGY

The study adopts a descriptive-analytical approach. The analysis is based on the principles and issues represented in the source literature concerning Arabic language teaching, textbook preparation, language skills, instructional materials, and assessment. Rather than reporting experimental or survey data, the study synthesizes these principles and interprets their implications for textbook design. The analytical focus covers five connected domains: learner and context analysis; linguistic and cultural content; organization and progression; supplementary materials and technology; and assessment and quality review.

Analytical domain	Questions guiding the analysis
Learner and context	Who are the learners? What are their goals, backgrounds, difficulties, motivations, and learning environment?
Language and culture	Which vocabulary, structures, sounds, texts, communicative functions, and cultural content are appropriate?
Organization and progression	How should content be divided into units and lessons and sequenced from accessible to more demanding learning?
Supporting resources	How can exercises, phonetic practice, dictionaries, teacher guidance, and media reinforce the core textbook?
Assessment and review	How can assessment demonstrate achievement and performance, and how can evidence inform textbook revision?

This methodological position also places a boundary on the claims of the study. Because the paper does not report a controlled intervention, a questionnaire, or statistical analysis of learner achievement, the findings should be understood as analytical propositions and design principles rather than evidence of causal effectiveness.

Developing the Core Textbook

A textbook for non-native speakers should be designed differently from materials intended for learners who already possess the language and its cultural conventions. The difference is not merely a matter of simplifying Arabic. It concerns the selection and sequencing of linguistic input, the amount of contextual support provided, the balance between form and meaning, and the opportunities learners receive to use language for purposeful communication.

Textbook planning should precede the writing of individual lessons. A development plan should specify the target learners, learning outcomes, skill balance, content domains, progression, vocabulary load, grammatical scope, cultural themes, assessment strategy, and relationship between the student book and its supporting resources. Such planning can reduce inconsistency between chapters and prevent the textbook from becoming a collection of disconnected texts and exercises.

Textbook Organizational Models

Model	Strength	Potential limitation
Unit-based	Provides a broad thematic structure.	May become too general if lesson-level outcomes are not explicit.
Lesson-based	Provides clear sequencing for classroom delivery.	Can fragment broader themes and skill integration.
Unit-and-lesson based	Combines thematic organization with manageable lesson progression.	Requires careful coordination among language, skills, culture, and assessment.
Narrative/continuous	Allows flexible presentation of content.	Provides less visible progression and may be harder to navigate for beginners.

For the purposes of an integrated Arabic textbook, the unit-and-lesson model is the most defensible of these alternatives because it can connect a broader communicative or cultural theme with specific language outcomes. Its advantage, however, is conditional: a unit structure becomes meaningful only when each lesson has identifiable objectives and when activities progressively prepare learners for communication.

Selecting Textbook Content

Content selection should begin with the learners rather than with a predetermined list of grammatical topics. Learners need Arabic that is appropriate to their proficiency level and useful in the situations in which they are likely to communicate. This does not mean that every text must reproduce spontaneous everyday speech. Instead, texts should provide a purposeful progression from controlled language to increasingly natural and context-rich communication.

- The linguistic characteristics of Arabic, including sound, vocabulary, morphology, syntax, and variation.
- The learners' purposes, interests, proficiency levels, first-language backgrounds, and expected communicative contexts.
- Cultural content that gives learners meaningful access to Arabic-speaking communities without reducing culture to isolated facts.
- Vocabulary and expressions with clear functional value in academic, social, and everyday communication.
- Individual differences, including differences in pace, prior knowledge, learning strategies, and preferred modes of engagement.
- The educational environment and the resources actually available to learners.

The analysis supports combining dialogue-based material with reading passages rather than treating them as competing alternatives. Dialogues can foreground interaction and functional language, while reading passages can provide sustained input, cultural context, and opportunities for interpretation. The appropriate balance should vary with proficiency level and instructional purpose.

The Supporting Materials Package

The core textbook should function as the organizing centre of a wider instructional package. A supporting resource is useful when it solves a learning problem that the core book cannot address adequately on its own. The purpose, therefore, is not to increase the number of materials but to distribute instructional functions intelligently across them.

Component	Design contribution
Written exercise book	Provides graduated practice, consolidation, and opportunities for independent work.
Phonetic/listening practice	Gives systematic attention to sounds, listening discrimination, pronunciation, and oral production.
Language assessment	Provides evidence of progress, achievement, proficiency, strengths, and areas requiring further support.
Learner dictionary	Extends lexical learning through meanings, examples, related words, and accessible explanations.
Teacher guide	Makes objectives, procedures, differentiation, assessment, and pedagogical rationale explicit.
Audio-visual/digital resources	Extends exposure to listening, dialogue, pronunciation, visual context, and cultural material.

Written and Phonetic Exercises

Exercises should be linked directly to the objectives of the lesson rather than added as repetitive practice. A useful progression can move from recognition to controlled production and then to communicative use. For pronunciation and listening, activities should include sufficient repetition while also requiring learners to discriminate and produce meaningful language. Written tasks such as matching or gap filling can be useful for language learning, but they should not be assumed to serve the same purpose as listening and speaking practice.

Language Testing and Assessment

Assessment should be planned at the same time as the textbook objectives. A test is more useful when its purpose is explicit and when the tasks represent the abilities that the course intends to develop. The source literature identifies validity, reliability, objectivity, discrimination, practical administration, clarity, adequate coverage, appropriate difficulty, and suitable scoring as important qualities of language assessment (Shakir, 2007). These principles suggest that assessment should not be attached to a textbook only at the end of development; it should help shape the content and learning activities from the beginning.

Principle	Application in textbook assessment
Purpose	Define whether the task measures achievement, proficiency, progress, diagnosis, or readiness.
Alignment	Ensure that tasks correspond to stated learning outcomes.
Coverage	Sample the language and skills that were actually taught.

Clarity	Use instructions and items that do not introduce irrelevant difficulty.
Difficulty and variety	Include an appropriate range of task demands.
Scoring	Provide transparent criteria and marks appropriate to the task.
Validity and reliability	Use evidence-based procedures to support meaningful score interpretation.

Cognitive Demand in Arabic Language Assessment

Assessment should not be restricted to recall of vocabulary and grammatical terminology. A progression of cognitive demand can help textbook writers design tasks that require learners to understand, apply, analyse, create, and evaluate. The classic taxonomy of Bloom et al. (1956) remains useful as a planning device, although the revised taxonomy is now commonly expressed with the categories remember, understand, apply, analyse, evaluate, and create.

Cognitive level	Illustrative Arabic-learning task
Remember	Identify a word, form, rule, or factual detail.
Understand	Explain the meaning of a sentence or paraphrase a short passage.
Apply	Use a grammatical pattern or vocabulary item in a new context.
Analyse	Identify relationships, causes, patterns, or differences within a text.
Evaluate	Judge the appropriateness or effectiveness of a linguistic choice and justify the judgment.
Create	Produce an original dialogue, paragraph, presentation, or solution using the target language.

The Dictionary and Teacher Guide

A learner-oriented dictionary can extend textbook learning by giving students a manageable lexical resource that reflects the vocabulary they actually encounter. Definitions, examples, related words, and word-family information can help learners move from recognition to independent use. For non-native learners, accessibility is particularly important: explanations should be understandable at the target level rather than simply reproducing the complexity of a general reference dictionary.

The teacher guide should similarly explain not only what to teach but why and how. It should identify learning outcomes, target learners, lesson procedures, differentiation options, assessment approaches, and possible sources of difficulty. In contexts where teachers have different levels of preparation, the guide can provide consistency without removing teachers' professional judgment.

Instructional Media and Technology

Technology should be selected according to pedagogical purpose rather than novelty. Audio can provide models for pronunciation and listening; video can contextualize dialogue and cultural practices; digital exercises can provide additional practice; and online resources can extend interaction beyond classroom time. At the same time, unequal access to devices, connectivity, and digital experience means that a textbook package should not make essential learning dependent on technology unless the learning context can reliably support it. The appropriate principle is therefore complementarity. Digital resources should add forms of input, interaction, practice, or feedback that strengthen the textbook rather than simply reproduce its pages on a screen.

Preparatory Studies Before Textbook Writing

The strongest design decisions are made before authors begin writing chapters. The preparatory stage should generate evidence about the learners and the instructional context. The following investigations are particularly important:

- Needs analysis: identify learners' goals, motivations, expected uses of Arabic, prior learning, and difficulties.
- Language analysis: identify vocabulary, structures, pronunciation features, and likely areas of transfer or interference.
- Context analysis: examine the social, academic, institutional, and technological environment in which the materials will be used.
- Cultural analysis: determine which cultural themes are relevant and how they can be presented accurately and meaningfully.
- Error analysis: use available learner-performance evidence to anticipate recurring difficulties.
- Material review: examine existing textbooks critically rather than assuming that commonly used materials are automatically appropriate.

Proposed Integrated Development Framework

On the basis of the descriptive analysis, the study proposes a seven-stage development cycle. The framework is intended as a practical synthesis of the principles discussed above rather than as a claim that one sequence is universally applicable.

Stage	Main activity	Output
1. Needs analysis	Study learners, goals, difficulties, interests, and context.	Learner and context profile
2. Language analysis	Specify vocabulary, structures, sounds, functions, and likely difficulties.	Language-content specifications
3. Cultural analysis	Select and contextualize relevant cultural content.	Cultural-content plan
4. Curriculum and content planning	Define outcomes and organize content into units and lessons.	Textbook blueprint
5. Materials development	Create texts, exercises, assessments, dictionary support, teacher guidance, and media.	Integrated materials package

6. Implementation and evidence	Observe learner response, task performance, teacher feedback, and usability.	Evidence for revision
7. Review and refinement	Check linguistic, pedagogical, cultural, technical, and assessment quality.	Revised textbook package

The addition of an implementation-and-evidence stage is important. A textbook should not be regarded as complete when the manuscript has been written and printed. Its real test occurs when learners and teachers use it. Evidence from implementation can reveal problems in pacing, vocabulary load, task difficulty, instructions, cultural explanation, and assessment alignment that may not be visible during authoring.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis leads to five interrelated findings. First, textbook quality is fundamentally an alignment issue. A well-written text can still be ineffective if its activities, assessment, and supporting materials do not reinforce its learning objectives. Second, learner analysis should precede content selection. The same Arabic item may be highly useful in one context and peripheral in another, depending on learners' purposes and anticipated communication needs.

Third, progression should be understood as more than a movement from easy vocabulary to difficult vocabulary. Progression also concerns the increasing complexity of functions, discourse, interaction, cognitive demand, and learner independence. A beginning unit may ask learners to identify and reproduce language, whereas later units should increasingly require them to select language, negotiate meaning, interpret texts, and communicate independently.

Fourth, culture should be integrated into language learning rather than presented as an appendix. Cultural material becomes pedagogically meaningful when learners use language to interpret practices, perspectives, social situations, and texts. This approach also requires sensitivity to diversity within Arabic-speaking communities rather than presenting Arabic culture as a single homogeneous entity.

Fifth, textbook evaluation should be continuous. Validity and usability cannot be established solely by author judgment. Teacher feedback, learner performance, task completion, and evidence from assessment can reveal whether the intended design is functioning as expected. This makes textbook development a process of iterative improvement rather than a one-time production task.

Implications for Arabic Textbook Authors and Programmes

- Write explicit learning outcomes before drafting each unit and lesson.
- Balance controlled language practice with opportunities for meaningful communication.
- Use learner needs and the instructional context as evidence for content selection.
- Integrate cultural content with language functions and skills.
- Design assessment tasks alongside learning activities rather than after the textbook is completed.
- Treat exercise books, teacher guides, dictionaries, and media as coordinated parts of one package.
- Pilot materials where possible and revise them on the basis of learner and teacher evidence.
- Maintain a transparent record of sources so that linguistic, cultural, and factual claims can be checked.

CONCLUSION

Developing an effective Arabic language textbook for non-native speakers is a curriculum-design task, not simply a writing task. The textbook must translate learning outcomes into a coherent progression of input, practice, interaction, and assessment while remaining responsive to learners' linguistic backgrounds and educational contexts. Its effectiveness is strengthened when the core book is connected to carefully designed exercises, phonetic and listening practice, assessment, dictionaries, teacher guidance, and instructional media.

The central contribution of this study is the emphasis on integration and iterative review. A strong textbook begins with evidence about learners and context, uses linguistic and cultural analysis to determine content, organizes that content into a purposeful progression, and then tests the design through implementation and revision. This perspective shifts attention from the question of whether a textbook contains sufficient material to the more important question of whether its different components work together to help learners use Arabic meaningfully.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- Arabic language programmes should conduct systematic needs analyses before adopting or developing core textbooks.
- Textbook authors should document the rationale for selecting vocabulary, structures, texts, cultural themes, and communicative tasks.
- Publishers and institutions should provide coordinated supporting resources rather than treating the student textbook as a stand-alone product.
- Assessment specifications should be aligned with textbook learning outcomes and should include appropriate productive and receptive skills.
- Teacher guides should include practical differentiation and assessment guidance for diverse learner groups.
- Digital resources should be adopted according to instructional need, accessibility, and reliability rather than novelty.
- Future research should pilot the proposed framework and examine its effects on learner performance, teacher usability, and learner engagement across different Arabic-learning contexts.

REFERENCES

1. Al-Batal, M. (2018). Arabic as one language: Integrating dialect in the Arabic language curriculum. Georgetown University Press.
2. Al-Naqah, M. K. (2006). Ta'lim al-lughah al-'Arabiyyah li-al-nāṭiqīn bi-lughāt ukhrā: Ususuhu, madākhiluhu, ṭuruquhu, wa wasā'iluhu. Jāmi'at Umm al-Qurā.
3. Al-Naqah, M. K., & Ṭu'aymah, R. A. (1983). Al-kitāb al-asāsī li-ta'lim al-lughah al-'Arabiyyah li-al-nāṭiqīn bi-lughāt ukhrā: I' dādahu, taḥlīlulu, taqwīmu. Ma'had al-Lughah al-'Arabiyyah, Jāmi'at Umm al-Qurā.
4. Ausubel, D. P. (2000). The acquisition and retention of knowledge: A cognitive view. Kluwer Academic Publishers.
5. Bandura, A. (1997). Self-efficacy: The exercise of control. W. H. Freeman.
6. Bloom, B. S., Engelhart, M. D., Furst, E. J., Hill, W. H., & Krathwohl, D. R. (1956). Taxonomy of educational objectives: The classification of educational goals. David McKay.
7. Brown, H. D., & Abeywickrama, P. (2019). Language assessment: Principles and classroom practices (3rd ed.). Pearson.
8. Brown, H. D. (2007). Principles of language learning and teaching (5th ed.). Pearson Education.
9. Ellis, R. (2003). Task-based language learning and teaching. Oxford University Press.
10. Krashen, S. D. (1982). Principles and practice in second language acquisition. Pergamon Press.
11. Littlewood, W. (1981). Communicative language teaching: An introduction. Cambridge University Press.
12. Nation, I. S. P. (2013). Learning vocabulary in another language (2nd ed.). Cambridge University Press.
13. Nunan, D. (2004). Task-based language teaching. Cambridge University Press.
14. Richards, J. C., & Rodgers, T. S. (2014). Approaches and methods in language teaching (3rd ed.). Cambridge University Press.
15. Shakir, S. (2007). Usus binā' al-ikhtibārāt wa al-maqāyīs al-naṣiyyah wa al-tarbawīyyah. Dar Dībūnū.
16. Snow, M. A., & Brinton, D. M. (Eds.). (2017). The content-based classroom: New perspectives on integrating language and content (2nd ed.). University of Michigan Press.
17. Ṭu'aymah, R. A. (2004). Al-mahārāt al-lughawīyyah: Mustawiyātihā, tadrīsihā, ṣu'ūbātihā. Dar al-Fikr al-'Arabi.

18. Ṭu‘aymah, R. A., & Al-Naqah, M. K. (2006). Ta‘līm al-lughah ittiṣāliyyan bayna al-manāhij wa al-istrātījiyyāt. Dar al-Fikr al-‘Arabi.
19. Tomlinson, B. (Ed.). (2011). Materials development in language teaching (2nd ed.). Cambridge University Press.
20. Ur, P. (2012). A course in language teaching: Practice and theory. Cambridge University Press.