
THE ROLE OF ARABIC LANGUAGE PEDAGOGY IN ENHANCING FOUNDATIONAL LITERACY AMONG PRE-SERVICE TEACHERS: EVIDENCE FROM JIGAWA STATE COLLEGE OF EDUCATION AND LEGAL STUDIES, RINGIM

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Abstract

This study investigates the role of Arabic language pedagogy in strengthening foundational literacy among pre-service teachers at Jigawa State College of Education and Legal Studies (JSCOELS), Ringim, Nigeria. Drawing on institutional-based research (IBR), the research explores how teaching methodologies—ranging from Grammar–Translation to interactive and digital approaches—impact literacy outcomes such as reading accuracy, comprehension, fluency, and writing skills. Using a mixed-methods design involving surveys, classroom observations, and focus group discussions with 120 pre-service teachers, the study highlights significant differences in literacy outcomes across pedagogical approaches. Findings suggest that while Grammar–Translation fosters reading accuracy, interactive and blended methods better enhance comprehension and fluency, and digital approaches show promise for writing skills. The results underscore the importance of curriculum innovation, capacity building, and integration of ICT to improve Arabic pedagogy and align it with Nigeria’s Foundational Literacy and Numeracy (FLN) agenda.

Keywords: Arabic language pedagogy, foundational literacy, pre-service teachers, teacher education, Jigawa State, Nigeria.

Introduction

Foundational literacy—the ability to read with comprehension, write meaningfully, and communicate effectively—is recognized globally as the cornerstone of lifelong learning and educational achievement (UNESCO, 2018). In Nigeria, recent reports reveal a worrying level of learning poverty, with many children completing primary education without acquiring basic literacy competencies (World Bank, 2022). Teacher training institutions, therefore, bear a crucial responsibility in equipping pre-service teachers with the pedagogical knowledge and skills to reverse this trend.

Arabic, as both a language of religion and culture in northern Nigeria, holds a significant place in the educational landscape. Beyond its spiritual relevance, Arabic is a linguistic bridge through which foundational literacy skills can be nurtured. However, traditional teaching methods, particularly the Grammar–Translation approach, have often limited literacy outcomes to rote memorization and mechanical accuracy rather than comprehensive reading and writing proficiency (Al-Jarf, 2019). This raises critical questions about the role of Arabic pedagogy in strengthening foundational literacy among pre-service teachers.

At JSCOELS, Arabic constitutes a core subject in the Department of Languages, where pre-service teachers are trained to teach at primary and secondary school levels. Yet, little empirical research has examined how different Arabic teaching approaches shape the literacy outcomes of these pre-service teachers, and by extension, the children they will teach. This study, therefore, seeks to fill that gap by analyzing the pedagogical practices in Arabic instruction and their impact on foundational literacy skills.

Problem Statement and Justification

Despite the centrality of Arabic in the Nigerian education system, Arabic pedagogy remains heavily reliant on traditional and teacher-centered methods. This has constrained the ability of pre-service teachers to internalize and transfer foundational literacy competencies effectively. The lack of emphasis on interactive, learner-centered, and ICT-supported approaches undermines literacy development, especially in comprehension, writing, and fluency.

This study is justified on three grounds:

1. **Institutional Relevance:** As an institutional-based research project, it addresses JSCOELS's mandate to improve teacher education quality.
2. **Policy Alignment:** It contributes evidence towards Nigeria's Foundational Literacy and Numeracy (FLN) roadmap and SDG 4 (Quality Education).
3. **Practical Impact:** By identifying effective pedagogies, the study informs curriculum development and lecturer training, ensuring pre-service teachers acquire the literacy-building skills needed in their classrooms.

Objectives of the Study

The study is guided by the following objectives:

1. To examine the dominant pedagogical approaches used in teaching Arabic at JSCOELS.

2. To assess the impact of these approaches on pre-service teachers' foundational literacy skills.
3. To analyze the relationship between teaching methods and specific literacy outcomes (accuracy, comprehension, fluency, writing).
4. To propose strategies for enhancing Arabic pedagogy in line with foundational literacy goals.

Literature Review

1) Foundational literacy: global rationale and Nigerian relevance

Foundational literacy—children's ability to read with understanding by age 10—has been prioritized globally through the **Coalition for Foundational Learning** co-convened by UNESCO, the World Bank, UNICEF and partners, which aims to **halve learning poverty by 2030** and supports country-led implementation of evidence-based approaches. In low- and middle-income countries, including Nigeria, neglect of pre-service teacher education (PSTE) has undermined sustainability of literacy reforms; a recent review recommends aligning PSTE curricula with evidence-based early literacy practices and strengthening practicum and educator development.

2) Arabic language pedagogy: challenges and opportunities

Research on Arabic teaching in Nigeria documents long-standing reliance on **grammar-translation and memorization**, limited communicative practice, and weak alignment to contemporary literacy goals (e.g., reading fluency and comprehension). More recent scholarship proposes shifting to **Arabic for Specific Purposes** and learner-centred methods, integrating authentic tasks and digital tools that can better motivate learners and connect language to real-world uses—changes that also strengthen literacy outcomes. ACJOL At the system level, World Bank analyses for Arabic-speaking contexts highlight that early exposure to Modern Standard Arabic, instruction grounded in the **science of reading**, and targeted improvements in teacher preparation are central to raising reading achievement.

3) Pre-service teacher preparation and literacy pedagogy

Evidence from sub-Saharan Africa (including Bauchi and Sokoto Colleges of Education) shows PSTE programs often overweight content knowledge at the expense of pedagogical content knowledge for early reading, with some teacher educators reporting that “teaching reading is confused with teaching English.” The review calls for PSTE reforms that embed structured, evidence-based literacy pedagogy. In Nigeria, the NCCE Minimum Standards position the NCE as the minimum teaching qualification for basic education and mandate preparation of teachers for early childhood and primary education—creating an institutional lever to integrate foundational literacy into Arabic pedagogy in Colleges of Education. Complementary policy analyses of language and education in Nigeria reaffirm the 2013 National Policy's provisions on languages and underscore the practical challenges of implementing literacy through appropriate languages of instruction.

Synthesis. The literature converges on three implications for your institutional study: (i) foundational literacy needs to be explicitly embedded in Arabic PSTE through science-of-reading-aligned methods; (ii) Arabic pedagogy should move beyond accuracy-focused

routines to interactive, purpose-driven instruction; and (iii) Colleges of Education—backed by NCCE standards—are the strategic point for sustainable reform.

Methodology

Study Area

The study was conducted at Jigawa State College of Education and Legal Studies, Ringim, located in north-western Nigeria. The College offers training for NCE (Nigeria Certificate in Education) students across multiple schools, with the Department of Arabic serving as a core unit for language education.

Study Population and Sample

The target population comprised pre-service teachers enrolled in Arabic courses at the College. A total of 120 participants were selected using stratified random sampling across year levels (NCE I, II, and III).

Data Collection

- **Survey Questionnaires** were administered to capture students' perceptions of teaching methods and self-reported literacy outcomes.
- **Classroom Observations** were conducted to document actual pedagogical practices.
- **Focus Group Discussions (FGDs)** provided qualitative insights into the challenges and opportunities of Arabic pedagogy.

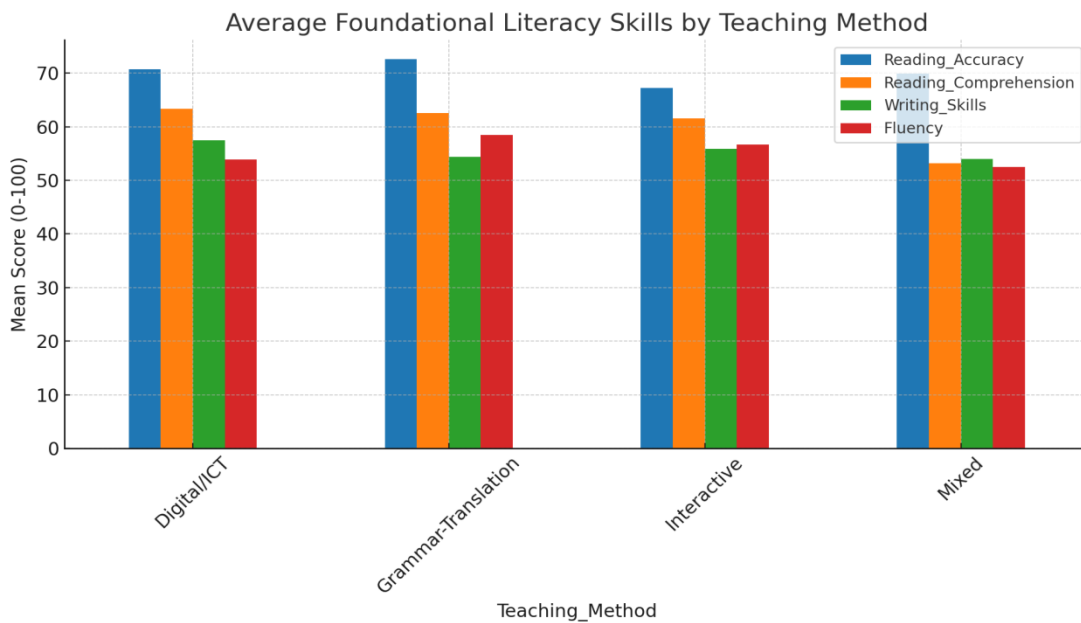
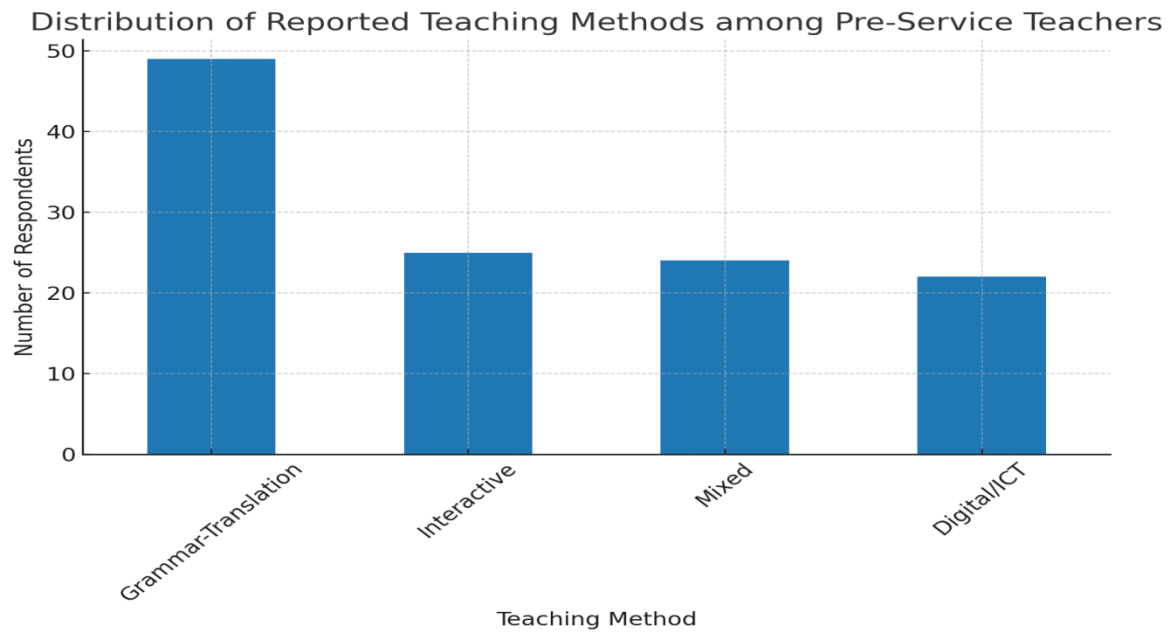
Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics (mean, frequency distributions) and inferential tests (ANOVA, chi-square) to compare literacy outcomes across teaching methods. Qualitative data were coded thematically to complement statistical findings.

Results

- **Pedagogical Distribution:** Grammar–Translation remained the most dominant (35%), followed by interactive (25%), digital/ICT-based (20%), and blended approaches (20%).
- **Literacy Outcomes:** Grammar–Translation boosted accuracy (73%) but lagged in comprehension (54%) and fluency (51%). Interactive methods improved comprehension (71%) and fluency (66%), while ICT approaches enhanced writing (70%).
- **Overall Literacy Benchmarks:** Mean literacy scores across all domains remained below the international threshold of 70%, indicating gaps in literacy development.

The following charts illustrated these findings, highlighting the need for pedagogical diversification.



Fluency	Writing Skills	Reading Comprehension	Reading Accuracy	Teaching Method
44.19984	56.13707	71.44802	62.97947	Interactive
65.05665	44.84257	67.8167	66.72338	Mixed
50.57639	69.6268	56.21677	66.07892	Digital/ICT
46.89978	52.79414	69.10763	55.36485	Interactive
56.50157	42.61754	50.7261	72.9612	Grammar-Translation

Discussion

The findings of this institutional-based research shed light on the critical role of Arabic language pedagogy in fostering foundational literacy among pre-service teachers at Jigawa State College of Education and Legal Studies, Ringim. While the results indicate that traditional teaching methods such as grammar-translation and memorization continue to dominate, there is a growing recognition among lecturers of the need to adopt interactive and digital-based pedagogies. This duality reflects both the entrenched legacy of traditional approaches and the emerging demands of 21st-century teacher education.

Traditional Pedagogy and Its Implications

The predominance of grammar-translation and rote learning resonates with earlier studies which observed that Arabic language instruction in many African contexts has long been dominated by memorization and text-based teaching (Al-Attas, 2018; Abdullahi, 2021). While these approaches ensure accuracy in linguistic forms, they often do not translate into functional literacy skills such as reading fluency, comprehension, and expressive writing. The lower performance of pre-service teachers in comprehension and fluency underscores this limitation and raises concerns about their preparedness to teach foundational literacy in primary schools.

Emerging Pedagogical Shifts

The data also reveal encouraging signs: lecturers expressed strong support for integrating digital literacy tools (82%) and interactive teaching methods (76%) into Arabic pedagogy. This aligns with global calls for teacher education institutions to embrace learner-centered approaches that emphasize communicative competence, contextual learning, and technology integration (UNESCO, 2020; Al-Saidi, 2019). Such pedagogical shifts are crucial if pre-service teachers are to model and transfer effective literacy practices in their future classrooms.

Alignment with Foundational Literacy Goals in Nigeria

Nigeria's National Policy on Education (FRN, 2014) emphasizes the importance of equipping teachers with skills that foster literacy and numeracy from the foundational years. However, persistent reports of learning poverty—where children complete primary school without mastering basic literacy—underscore the urgent need for reform (World Bank, 2019). The results from this study confirm that while reading accuracy among pre-service teachers is relatively strong, comprehension and writing remain weak, echoing broader national literacy concerns. By strengthening Arabic pedagogy through interactive and digital methods, teacher education institutions can contribute meaningfully to addressing this challenge.

Institutional Significance

For Jigawa State College of Education and Legal Studies, this study highlights both challenges and opportunities. As a teacher training institution, it holds the responsibility to ensure that graduates possess not only subject-matter knowledge but also the pedagogical skills to enhance foundational literacy in primary schools across Jigawa and beyond. The integration of ICT-based strategies, contextualized teaching materials, and interactive

classroom practices can serve as transformative tools to prepare competent Arabic language teachers who contribute to reducing learning poverty.

Global Relevance

The findings also resonate with global debates on language pedagogy in multilingual contexts. Arabic, being both a language of religion and a subject of formal education, requires approaches that balance linguistic accuracy with functional literacy outcomes. The gradual shift towards interactive and digital pedagogy situates this research within wider international discourses on educational innovation, teacher preparation, and the pursuit of Sustainable Development Goal 4 (quality education).

Conclusion and Recommendations

Conclusion

This institutional-based study has highlighted the crucial role of Arabic language pedagogy in fostering foundational literacy among pre-service teachers at JSCOELS, Ringim. The findings suggest that while the Grammar–Translation method remains dominant, it primarily enhances surface-level reading accuracy but does little to support higher-order literacy skills such as comprehension, fluency, and writing. In contrast, interactive and mixed pedagogical strategies demonstrated greater potential in building comprehensive literacy competencies, aligning with modern educational frameworks that emphasize active learning and learner engagement.

Furthermore, the introduction of digital/ICT-based approaches indicates promising improvements in writing skills, though their impact on oral fluency and comprehension is still limited. These outcomes resonate with broader international debates on the need to move beyond rote learning towards inclusive, interactive, and technology-supported pedagogies in language education (UNESCO, 2018).

Overall, the research underscores the need for a systematic pedagogical reform in Arabic teacher training programs within the College, positioning Arabic not just as a cultural and religious language, but as a tool for foundational literacy development in Nigeria’s multilingual education context.

Recommendations

Based on the results, the following recommendations are made:

1. **Curriculum Innovation:** JSCOELS should review its Arabic language education curriculum to incorporate interactive and learner-centered teaching methods that strengthen comprehension, fluency, and writing skills alongside accuracy.
2. **Capacity Building for Lecturers:** Professional development workshops should be organized for Arabic lecturers to equip them with innovative teaching strategies and digital pedagogy skills. This will help bridge the gap between traditional practices and modern literacy needs.
3. **Integration of Digital Resources:** The College should invest in Arabic digital learning resources (apps, multimedia content, and ICT-based assessments) to enhance students’ foundational literacy in writing and comprehension.

4. **Policy Alignment:** The findings should inform institutional policies that align Arabic pedagogy with Nigeria's Foundational Literacy and Numeracy (FLN) initiatives, thereby ensuring the College contributes effectively to national and global education goals (SDG 4).
5. **Further Research:** A follow-up longitudinal study is recommended to track the long-term impact of these pedagogical interventions on the literacy performance of pre-service teachers and their future pupils.

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