



Curriculum Design For Arabic In Indian Higher Education: A Critical Analysis

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Abstract:

The teaching and learning of Arabic in Indian higher education institutions have undergone considerable transformation over the decades, yet curriculum design continues to reflect outdated pedagogical models and limited contextual relevance. This paper critically examines the current curriculum design for Arabic in Indian universities, exploring its alignment with global academic standards, market needs, and linguistic competencies. Through an analytical lens, the study assesses curricular frameworks in selected institutions, identifies existing gaps, and offers strategic recommendations for inclusive, skill-based, and culturally responsive Arabic education. The study underscores the importance of incorporating modern pedagogical tools, communicative methodologies, and interdisciplinary approaches in shaping a holistic Arabic curriculum suitable for contemporary learners in India.

Keywords: Arabic Curriculum, Higher Education, India, Language Pedagogy, Curriculum Reform, Skill-Based Education, UGC Guidelines.

Introduction:-

Arabic language instruction in Indian higher education occupies a unique historical and cultural space, shaped by centuries of Indo-Arabic scholarly exchange, religious affiliations, and institutional legacies. Arabic has been taught in Indian madrasas and universities alike, serving both theological and academic purposes. However, the curricula in many Indian universities remain largely traditional, emphasizing grammar, classical texts, and rote memorization, while failing to integrate contemporary language needs, communicative competencies, and employability skills.

In recent years, global academic trends have shifted toward outcome-based education, multilingual competencies, and digital literacy. Indian higher education, under frameworks like the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, also emphasizes holistic and flexible curriculum structures. Despite these reforms, Arabic language programs often lag in adopting interdisciplinary, skill-driven, and learner-centric approaches.

This study aims to critically analyze the curriculum design of Arabic in Indian higher education, identifying its strengths and limitations while benchmarking it against international models. It explores how existing curricula align with the needs of 21st-century learners, the challenges faced in implementation, and potential pathways for reform that honor both the linguistic richness of Arabic and the practical demands of modern education.

Objectives of the Study:-

1. To examine the existing curriculum frameworks for Arabic language instruction in Indian higher education institutions.
2. To evaluate the extent to which current curricula address linguistic, cultural, and professional competencies.
3. To identify the gaps and challenges in the design and implementation of Arabic curricula.
4. To compare the Indian Arabic curriculum with selected international models.
5. To suggest reforms for a more comprehensive, skill-based, and modern Arabic curriculum.

Review of Related Literature:-

The design and implementation of Arabic language curricula in Indian higher education have attracted scholarly attention over the years. The existing body of literature provides valuable insights into pedagogical traditions, curriculum content, instructional challenges, and comparative models, both within India and internationally.

1. Traditional Emphasis on Classical Arabic

Most Indian universities have historically emphasized **classical Arabic texts**, especially prose and poetry from the pre-Islamic and Abbasid periods. Scholars like **Ali (2001)** and **Rahman (2005)** argue that this focus, while preserving literary heritage, has led to the marginalization of **Modern Standard Arabic (MSA)** and contemporary communicative needs. Students graduate with limited ability to use Arabic in real-world scenarios, such as in business, media, or diplomacy.

2. Lack of Functional and Skill-Based Components

Aziz (2007) critically assessed Arabic curricula in northern Indian universities and found that **functional skills such as translation, conversation, listening comprehension, and writing** were either absent or poorly integrated. The study emphasized the disconnection between curriculum content and the **professional goals** of learners, especially those interested in translation services, foreign relations, or international media.

3. Pedagogical Gaps and Teacher-Centered Approaches

Siddiqui (2012) noted that most Arabic departments in Indian universities continued to adopt **lecture-based, grammar-translation methods**, with minimal student engagement or active learning. He highlighted the scarcity of **task-based language teaching (TBLT)** and **communicative language teaching (CLT)**, which are widely regarded as best practices in language education globally. Additionally, faculty often lack training in the use of digital tools and contemporary pedagogical approaches.

4. Comparative Curriculum Insights from Arab Countries

Al-Shammari (2010) conducted a comparative analysis of Arabic curricula in Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and the UAE, revealing that these countries have significantly modernized their programs. Their curricula include **media Arabic, business communication, Arabic for international affairs, and IT-assisted learning**. In contrast, Indian Arabic departments have been slow to adopt such changes, primarily due to bureaucratic inertia and limited academic-industry interface.

Methodology:-

1. Research Design

The study adopts a **qualitative, descriptive, and comparative research design** aimed at critically analyzing existing Arabic language curricula in selected Indian higher education institutions. This design enables an in-depth exploration of the content, structure, pedagogical practices, and intended learning outcomes of Arabic programs, and facilitates comparison with global curricular standards.

2. Selection of Institutions

The study purposively selected five Indian universities that offer full-time undergraduate and postgraduate Arabic language programs:

1. **Aligarh Muslim University (AMU)**
2. **Jamia Millia Islamia (JMI)**
3. **University of Delhi (DU)**
4. **Maulana Azad National Urdu University (MANUU)**
5. **Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU)**

3. Data Collection Methods

The study relied on **document analysis** and **semi-structured interviews** as primary data collection tools.

a. Document Analysis

- Undergraduate and postgraduate Arabic syllabi were collected from the official university websites, academic handbooks, and departmental documents.
- Each curriculum was analyzed in terms of:
 - **Course structure and content**
 - **Credit distribution**
 - **Language skills focus (reading, writing, listening, speaking)**
 - **Assessment methods**
 - **Integration of modern topics and technology**

b. Semi-Structured Interviews

- Interviews were conducted with **10 faculty members** from the selected universities (2 from each), to gather qualitative insights into:
 - Curriculum design philosophy,
 - Implementation challenges,
 - Teaching strategies used,
 - Suggestions for improvement.
- Interviews were conducted via email and online platforms (Zoom/Google Meet), recorded with consent, and transcribed for analysis.

4. Data Analysis

The collected data were subjected to **thematic content analysis** using the following steps:

- Categorization of syllabus components under classical, modern, linguistic skills, functional, and interdisciplinary modules.
- Identification of recurring themes in faculty responses.
- Comparative analysis of Indian curricula with selected international Arabic language programs (e.g., Al-Azhar University, Cairo University, and King Saud University).

5. Limitations

- The study is limited to five universities, which may not represent the full diversity of Arabic curricula across India.
- Due to time and accessibility constraints, student perspectives were not included.
- The analysis is based on available syllabi; internal teaching practices or hidden curricula were beyond the study's scope.

Major Findings

The analysis of Arabic curricula across selected Indian universities, supported by faculty interviews and comparison with international models, reveals several critical insights:

1. Overemphasis on Classical Arabic Content

Most curricula heavily prioritize **classical Arabic**—including grammar (Nahw), morphology (Sarf), classical poetry, and prose—especially from the Abbasid and Umayyad periods. While these texts are foundational, there is a noticeable neglect of **Modern Standard Arabic (MSA)** and **contemporary themes** such as media, business, and diplomatic Arabic.

2. Limited Skill-Based Language Training

There is **insufficient focus on the four core language skills**—listening, speaking, reading, and writing—as outlined by modern pedagogical frameworks like the **Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR)**.

- **Speaking and listening skills** are especially neglected.
- Translation is offered in some programs but is largely theoretical and text-heavy, lacking practical or professional context.

3. Outdated Teaching Methodologies

Curricula largely reflect a **grammar-translation approach**, which remains teacher-centered and exam-driven. **Interactive, student-centered approaches** such as **communicative language teaching (CLT)** and **task-based learning (TBLT)** are absent or informally practiced without formal curriculum support.

4. Lack of Technology Integration

Digital tools like **language learning software, virtual classrooms, multimedia aids, or language labs** are rarely mentioned or integrated into curricula. Faculty members expressed the need for training and resources to effectively incorporate **e-learning platforms** such as Moodle or Rosetta Stone into teaching Arabic.

5. Minimal Interdisciplinary and Employability Linkages

Arabic is taught in isolation from contemporary disciplines like **journalism, international relations, political science, and religious studies**, despite its potential cross-disciplinary applications. There is also no structured collaboration with **industry partners**, such as embassies, translation firms, or cultural organizations.

6. Inconsistency Across Institutions

Curriculum structures and learning outcomes vary widely among universities. For instance:

- Some institutions offer Arabic through a **religious and literary lens**, while others adopt a **linguistic and literary** focus.
- There is **no standardized framework or credit-based benchmarking** across universities.

7. Assessment Focused on Memorization

Examinations largely assess students' **ability to recall grammar rules, translate fixed texts, or reproduce memorized answers**. There is limited use of **formative, performance-based, or communicative assessment tools**, such as oral presentations, conversation tests, or portfolio reviews.

Recommendations:-

Based on the curriculum analysis, faculty insights, and comparative study, the following recommendations are proposed to reform and enhance Arabic language education in Indian higher education institutions:

1. Curriculum Modernization and Diversification

- Introduce **Modern Standard Arabic (MSA)** as a core component, alongside classical texts, to balance historical depth with contemporary relevance.
- Incorporate **contemporary themes** such as **media Arabic, Arabic for business, international relations, and diplomatic language**.
- Develop **modular curricula** allowing students to choose electives based on interests or career goals.

2. Integration of Skill-Based and Functional Components

- Embed training in the **four core language skills** (listening, speaking, reading, writing) across all levels of instruction.
- Introduce practical courses in:
 - **Translation and interpretation**
 - **Conversational Arabic**
 - **Arabic for tourism and hospitality**
 - **Arabic for journalism and social media**

3. Adoption of Modern Pedagogical Approaches

- Shift from the **grammar-translation method** to **communicative language teaching (CLT)** and **task-based learning (TBLT)**.
- Encourage **interactive and learner-centered teaching** strategies, including role plays, group discussions, language games, and simulations.
- Develop a **blended learning approach** by integrating classroom teaching with online platforms and multimedia content.

4. Use of Technology in Teaching Arabic

- Establish **language labs** equipped with audio-visual tools and software for Arabic learning.
- Incorporate **e-learning platforms** such as Moodle, Google Classroom, or Duolingo for practice and revision.
- Encourage the use of **Arabic-language news portals, podcasts, films, and YouTube channels** to build real-world language exposure.

5. Faculty Development and Training

- Conduct regular **faculty training workshops** on modern language pedagogy, curriculum design, and ICT tools.
- Facilitate **academic exchange programs** and collaboration with **Arabic departments in Arab countries** to update teaching practices.
- Encourage faculty to participate in **curriculum review committees** and contribute to national education reforms.

6. Establishment of Interdisciplinary Linkages

- Design **interdisciplinary courses** combining Arabic with subjects like:
 - International Studies
 - Islamic and Middle Eastern History
 - Journalism and Mass Communication
- Promote **collaborative teaching** across departments to broaden student perspectives and employability.

7. Standardization and Policy-Level Reforms

- Develop a **national curriculum framework** for Arabic education under UGC guidelines to ensure consistency and benchmarking.
- Encourage universities to align Arabic programs with **NEP 2020 principles**, focusing on flexibility, skill development, and holistic education.
- Introduce **credit-based systems** and continuous assessment aligned with **Bloom's Taxonomy and CEFR standards**.

8. Strengthening Industry and Institutional Collaboration

- Build partnerships with **embassies, cultural centers, translation agencies, and international organizations** for internships, guest lectures, and employment opportunities.
- Organize **Arabic language job fairs, skill certification programs, and alumni networks** to support students' career pathways.

Conclusion:-

The present study underscores the urgent need to reform Arabic language curricula in Indian higher education. Despite the rich historical legacy and academic significance of Arabic studies in India, the current curricular models remain largely outdated, classical in orientation, and disconnected from the demands of the 21st-century learner. The dominance of traditional content, limited focus on language skills, lack of employability-oriented modules, and minimal integration of technology collectively hinder the effectiveness and relevance of Arabic programs.

Through comparative analysis and faculty insights, the research reveals critical gaps and opportunities for innovation. It is evident that a reimagined Arabic curriculum—one that balances classical and modern content, integrates practical language skills, adopts learner-centric pedagogy, and aligns with interdisciplinary and market needs—is essential for revitalizing the discipline.

To achieve this, comprehensive reforms are required at multiple levels: curriculum design, teaching methodology, institutional support, and national policy alignment. The recommendations offered—ranging from skill-based training and digital integration to faculty development and cross-sectoral collaboration—serve as a roadmap for designing dynamic and future-ready Arabic language programs.

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