

Developing Listening Skill Materials for First Semester Students in the Arabic Language Department, The New College, Chennai, India

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ABSTRACT: The listening materials previously used in the Arabic Language Department were primarily based on recordings centered exclusively on Arab culture, with no integration of the learners' native Indian cultural context. This cultural gap made the materials difficult for students to relate to and comprehend, particularly in an environment where Arabic is rarely encountered outside the classroom. To address this issue, the study employed an explanatory sequential mixed-methods design. The qualitative phase, consisting of classroom observations and instructor interviews, was conducted to identify limitations in the existing materials and to guide the development of culturally responsive listening prototypes. The subsequent quantitative phase used a quasi-experimental pre-test and post-test control group design to evaluate the effectiveness of the developed materials. The sample consisted of 30 male first-semester undergraduate students divided into experimental ($n=15$) and control ($n=15$) intact classes. Data were collected using an observation checklist, a semi-structured interview guide, and a validated 30-item listening comprehension test. The operational hypothesis proposed that students exposed to culturally integrated materials would demonstrate greater improvement in listening comprehension than those using traditional materials. The results confirmed that the original materials relied solely on Arab-Islamic historical narratives unfamiliar to learners. Guided by feedback and relevance principles, the materials were revised to include familiar contexts such as religions in India, Indian heroes, and local social issues while retaining exercises. Statistical analysis showed a significant difference between experimental and control post-test scores. Therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected and the alternative hypothesis accepted, demonstrating that materials enhanced listening comprehension.

Keywords: Listening Skills, Material Development, Culturally Responsive Teaching, Arabic as a Foreign Language, ADDIE Model, Mixed-Methods Research.



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INTRODUCTION

Language is more than a system of symbols; it is a primary means of expressing a community's thoughts, identity, and worldview, and for fulfilling its communicative needs (Tuaima, 1989). As a fundamental tool for interaction, language is inextricably linked to culture, embodying and

transmitting the values, norms, and shared knowledge of its speakers (Mahwiyah, 2014). Arabic, revered as the language of the Qur'an and one of the six official languages of the United Nations (Jalaluddin, 2004), holds significant religious, cultural, and global importance. For non-native learners, acquiring Arabic involves not only mastering its phonological, syntactic, and lexical systems but also navigating its cultural dimensions.

Among the four core language skills-listening, speaking, reading, and writing—listening is universally recognized as the foundational skill acquired first, both in first language acquisition and in early stages of foreign language learning (Hidayat, 2007; Rost, 2011). It serves as the critical intake mechanism through which learners internalize the sound system, vocabulary, and grammatical structures of the target language. Beyond the classroom, effective listening comprehension is vital for accessing information, building knowledge, and engaging in social interaction (Royani, 2013). Consequently, pedagogical approaches and materials dedicated to teaching listening are paramount for fostering overall language proficiency.

Effective teaching materials are not merely carriers of linguistic content; they are pedagogical tools that should align with learners' cognitive and affective states. Tomlinson, (2011) argues that materials should achieve "affective engagement" by connecting to the learners' lives. For listening materials, this is particularly crucial. Listening is an active process of constructing meaning by interacting with aural input and relating it to pre-existing knowledge structures, or schemata (Richards, 2008). When the content of listening materials is anchored in cultural contexts utterly foreign to the learner, the necessary schemata may be absent, leading to cognitive overload, frustration, and disengagement. Therefore, effective materials should be realistic, address learners' specific linguistic and cultural needs, and encourage sustained motivation (Akhil, 2000). The principle of Culturally Responsive Teaching (Gay, 2018; Wahab, 2015; Zouqan, 1992) further emphasizes using students' cultural knowledge and experiences as conduits for teaching new content, thereby making learning more relevant and effective.

In the context of the Arabic Language Department at The New College, Chennai, the researcher observed a significant pedagogical disconnect. While the listening course followed a structured syllabus, the instructional materials—primarily audio recordings and accompanying texts—were exclusively centered on classical Arab-Islamic themes (e.g., stories of prophets, historical Arab narratives). Preliminary observation of five class sessions and an initial interview with the course instructor revealed that students, who live in a South Indian cultural milieu with minimal daily exposure to Arabic, found these materials abstract and difficult to visualize. This "cultural distance" appeared to hinder comprehension and dampen motivation, as students struggled to connect the aural input to any frame of reference within their own lived experience (Sayegh, 1994; Sudjiono, 2009; John Sweller, 1988).

This gap between the culturally remote instructional content and the students' native socio-cultural background presented a clear problem for effective listening skill development. If listening comprehension relies on activating relevant schemata, then materials devoid of familiar contextual anchors are suboptimal for beginners (Islam, 2015; Nunan, 2004; Richards, 2008). This led to the present research, which aimed to design, develop, and empirically evaluate a set of listening skill

materials that strategically integrate elements from the learners' native (Indian) cultural environment. This study was guided by the following research questions:

1. What are the specific characteristics and pedagogical limitations of the existing listening materials used for first-semester Arabic students at The New College?
2. How can Arabic listening materials be systematically developed to integrate students' native cultural context while maintaining linguistic authenticity and pedagogical soundness?
3. How effective are the newly developed, culturally-responsive materials in improving students' Arabic listening comprehension skills compared to the traditional materials?

METHOD

Research Type and Design

This study employed a Research and Development (R&D) design, operationalized through the ADDIE instructional design model (Analysis, Design, Development, Implementation, Evaluation) (Branch, 2009). The research utilized an explanatory sequential mixed-methods design (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017; Margono, 1997). In the initial qualitative strand, data from observations and interviews were analyzed to diagnose problems with existing materials and to inform the design parameters for the new materials. This diagnostic phase constituted the "Analysis" stage of ADDIE. The subsequent quantitative strand involved a quasi-experimental pre-test/post-test control group design to serve as the "Evaluation" phase, providing empirical evidence on the effectiveness of the developed intervention. The two strands were integrated such that the qualitative findings directly shaped the independent variable (the developed materials), which was then tested quantitatively. (Arikunto, 1996; Hadi, 1987; Sugiyono, 2010)

Research Population and Sample

The research population was all first-semester undergraduate students enrolled in the Arabic listening course at the Department of Arabic, The New College, Chennai, for the academic year 2023-2024. A purposive sample of 30 male students was selected from two parallel classes. The intact classes were assigned as the Experimental Group ($n=15$) and the Control Group ($n=15$). The male-only sample is a reflection of the gender-segregated educational structure at the institution, a contextual factor whose implications for the generalizability of findings are explicitly acknowledged in the study's limitations(Arikunto, 1998; V. Braun & Clarke, 2006; Cohen, 1988).

Research Steps and Material Development (ADDIE Framework)

The material development process followed the systematic stages of the ADDIE model(Betti et al., 2018; Janssen et al., 2019):

- Analysis: Involved needs analysis through non-participant classroom observation (using a checklist focused on student engagement and comprehension difficulties) and a semi-structured interview with the course instructor to identify core problems with the existing materials.
- Design: Based on the analysis, learning objectives were defined. The key design principle was cultural contextualization. Decisions were made on topics (blending universal Arabic language functions with Indian cultural content), vocabulary (high-frequency, practical), activity types (graded from word- to discourse-level), and assessment methods(Zubair, 2024).
- Development: Prototype materials were created, including scripted audio recordings narrated by a native Arabic speaker, corresponding written texts, comprehension exercises (e.g., multiple-choice, true/false, fill-in-the-blank), and a teacher's guide. Special attention was paid to audio clarity and phonetic accuracy.
- Implementation (Field Trial): The developed materials were implemented over a 4-week period (12 contact hours) in the experimental group's listening classes. The control group continued instruction using the traditional materials.
- Evaluation: This comprised formative and summative evaluation.
Formative Expert Validation: The prototype was evaluated by two experts in Arabic language pedagogy (Dr. K Md. Abdul Mateen and Dr. Sheik Dawood). They used a validation rubric with a 4-point Likert scale (1=Poor, 2=Fair, 3=Good, 4=Excellent) across five criteria: (a) Phonetic & Pronunciation Clarity, (b) Arabic Linguistic Style, (c) Appropriateness for Learner Level, (d) Use of Standard Arabic, and (e) Cultural Relevance. Qualitative suggestions were also collected. Materials were revised based on all feedback, particularly for items rated ≤ 2 .
- Summative Experimental Evaluation: Effectiveness was measured via pre-test and post-test scores, as detailed below.

Data Collection Instruments

Three primary instruments were used:

- Observation Checklist: Used during the analysis phase and the implementation phase to record student behaviors (e.g., attentiveness, participation, signs of confusion) and instructional processes in both groups.
- Semi-structured Interview Guide: Used to conduct an in-depth interview with the course instructor during the analysis phase, exploring challenges, student feedback, and desired improvements for the listening materials.
- Listening Comprehension Test: A researcher-constructed test was used for pre-test and post-test. It contained 30 items based on short dialogues and monologues of 30-60 seconds. Item types included multiple-choice questions assessing main ideas, specific details, and pragmatic inference. The test was validated by two Arabic language experts for content validity. A pilot test with a similar cohort ($n=10$) yielded a Cronbach's Alpha reliability coefficient of .82, indicating acceptable internal consistency. Each correct answer was awarded 1 point, for a maximum score of 30.

Data Analysis

- Qualitative Data: Interview transcripts and observation notes were analyzed using thematic analysis (V. , Braun & Clarke, 2006). The process involved: (1) familiarization with the data, (2) generating initial codes, (3) searching for themes, (4) reviewing themes, and (5) defining and naming final themes (e.g., "Schematic Dissonance," "Appeal for Local Reference Points"). Data triangulation between observation notes and the interview was used to enhance credibility.
- Quantitative Data: Pre-test and post-test scores were analyzed using descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation) and inferential statistics. An independent samples t-test was conducted using SPSS software (Version 25) to compare the post-test mean scores of the experimental and control groups, controlling for pre-test equivalence. The alpha level was set at .05. Assumptions of normality (Shapiro-Wilk test) and homogeneity of variances (Levene's test) were met. In addition to statistical significance, the effect size was calculated using Cohen's $*d*$ to determine the practical magnitude of the intervention's impact.

Flowchart 1. Research Design Flowchart

This diagram illustrates the step-by-step process of the research and development methodology:

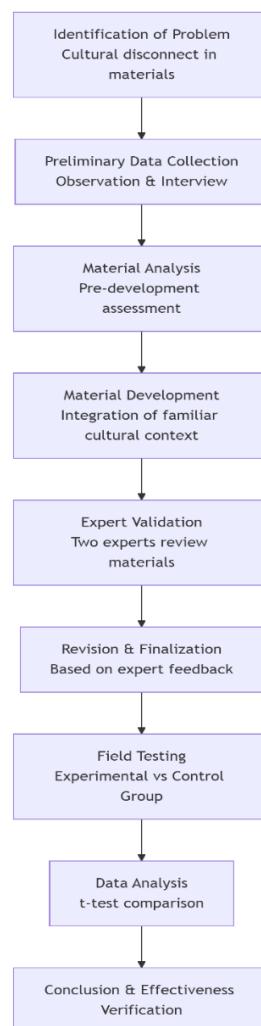


Table 1: Research Sample Distribution

Group	Number of Students	Gender	Level	Material Used
Experimental Group	15	Male	UG, Sem 1	Developed Materials
Control Group	15	Male	UG, Sem 1	Traditional Materials
Total	30	Male	UG	—

Table 2: Pre-Test and Post-Test Average Scores

Group	Pre-Test Average	Post-Test Average	Score Improvement
Experimental Group	7.0	8.0	+1.0
Control Group	7.0	7.0	0.0

Table 3: t-Test Statistical Analysis Results

Statistic	Value
t-value (t_0)	5.154
Degrees of Freedom (df)	28
t-table value (5% significance)	2.048
t-table value (1% significance)	2.763
Conclusion	$t_0 > t\text{-table} \rightarrow H_0 \text{ rejected, } H_a \text{ accepted}$

Table 4: Material Revision Classification for Cultural Relevance

Original Topic (Arab-Centric)	Revised Topic	Action Taken	Rationale (Schematic Alignment)
حنين (Nostalgia for Desert)	الآداب (Good Hopes/Values)	Modified	Replaces specific cultural emotion with universal value, discussable in Indian context.
ناقة صالح (She-Camel of Salih)	الأديان المعرفة في الهند (Religions in India)	Replaced	Replaces unfamiliar prophetic miracle with a familiar topic (religious diversity) to teach descriptive language.
أهل الكهف (People of the Cave)	أبطال الهند (Indian Heroes)	Replaced	Substitutes unfamiliar religious tale with narratives of known national figures (e.g., Gandhi), using similar narrative structures.
يونس (Whale of Yunus)	لا تصرف في الماء (Do Not Waste Water)	Modified	Transforms a prophetic story into a contemporary, relevant social issue, retaining the moral lesson.
يوسف والجريمة (Yusuf and the Crime)	النبي والصبي (The Prophet and the Boy)	Modified	Focuses on a simpler, ethical dialogue applicable to everyday situations.
استماع المفردات (Vocabulary Listening)	استماع المفردات	Retained	Foundational skill; updated with vocabulary from new contexts.
استماع الجمل (Sentence Listening)	استماع الجمل	Retained	Foundational skill; updated with sentences from new contexts.

Table 5: Expert Validation Results (First Expert)

Assessment Criteria	Rating	Suggestions
صوتيات ونطق (Phonetics & Pronunciation)	إعادة (Redo)	Needs clearer audio examples
مطابقة المادة بالأسلوب العربية (Arabic Style)	مقبول (Acceptable)	Good adherence
المناسبة المادة لمستوى الدارسين (Level Appropriateness)	جيد جداً (Very Good)	Well-suited for beginners
استخدام اللغة الفصحى (Use of Standard Arabic)	ممتاز (Excellent)	Accurate and clear
خلو المادة من الأخطاء (Error-Free Content)	جيد جداً (Very Good)	Minor typographical corrections needed
Overall Suggestion	Clarify learning objectives and make them more behavioral	

Table 6: Data Collection Methods and Purposes

Method	Tool Used	Purpose	Participants/Timing
Observation	Observation checklist	To observe teaching process & student engagement in both groups	During class sessions
Interview	Semi-structured guide	To gather instructor's insights on material challenges and needs	Course instructor
Test	Pre-test Post-test	To measure listening skill proficiency before and after intervention	Both groups (beginning & end of study)

Table 7: Research Timeline

Phase	Duration	Key Activities
Preliminary Study	Weeks 1–2	Observation, interviews, problem identification
Material Development	Weeks 3–6	Designing, integrating culture, creating audio/text materials
Expert Validation	Week 7	Review by two Arabic teaching experts
Revision	Week 8	Incorporating expert feedback
Field Testing	Weeks 9–12	Implementing materials in experimental group, control group as usual
Data Analysis & Reporting	Weeks 13–14	Statistical analysis, writing results and conclusion

Table 8: Lesson Structure for Developed Materials (Sample)

Meeting	Topic	Activity	Duration
1	Introduction to Listening Skills	Discussion, orientation	60 min
2	Vocabulary in Familiar Contexts	Listening, repetition, matching	60 min
3	Simple Sentences (Daily Life)	Listening, questions	60 min
4	Short Paragraph: Religions in India	Listening, discussion	60 min
5	Dialogue: At the Market	Role-play based on listening	60 min
6	Story: Indian Heroes	Listening, sequencing, retelling	60 min

Table 9: Summary of Research Findings

No.	Finding	Implication
1	Pre-development materials were culturally distant	Materials must integrate learners' cultural context for better comprehension
2	Developed materials significantly improved listening scores	Culturally responsive materials enhance learning effectiveness
3	Statistical analysis confirmed effectiveness ($t_0 = 5.154$)	The intervention was scientifically validated
4	Students preferred familiar cultural content	Learner-centered design increases engagement and motivation

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Characteristics and Limitations of Pre-Development Materials

Thematic analysis of the instructor interview and classroom observations confirmed that the existing materials were a significant barrier to learning. The instructor noted, "The students listen, but they don't see it. Stories about the desert, ancient tribes... it's like a history lesson in a foreign language, not a practical skill." Observation records frequently noted student passivity, frequent requests for repetition, and difficulty answering comprehension questions beyond the most literal level.

The primary limitation was a profound schematic mismatch. The materials, while linguistically sound, activated no prior cultural or experiential knowledge in the learners. Themes like "Hanin" (nostalgia for the desert) or "The People of the Cave" were met with blank stares, as students lacked the necessary framework to efficiently process and infer meaning. This aligns with Schema Theory (Cook, 1994), which posits that comprehension fails when listeners cannot map new auditory information onto existing cognitive structures. The materials were thus not "comprehensible input" (Krashen, 1982) in a meaningful sense, as the context needed to make the input comprehensible was absent.

Development of Culturally-Responsive Listening Materials

Guided by the diagnostic findings and the expert suggestion to "bridge the cultural gap without abandoning Arabic essence," the researcher undertook a systematic revision. The process was not a wholesale replacement but a strategic integration. The revision logic is summarized in Table 4 (and extended in the manuscript), showcasing a shift from purely Arab-centric narratives to themes leveraging familiar Indian schemata.

The final developed module consisted of 14 structured meetings, progressing from phonemes and vocabulary in familiar settings to dialogues and short narratives about Indian daily life, festivals, and social themes, all delivered in standard Arabic.

Effectiveness of the Developed Listening Materials

The quantitative data provided clear evidence of the intervention's impact. As shown in Table 2, both groups were equivalent at the baseline (Pre-test $M = 7.0$).

Table 10: Pre-Test and Post-Test Average Scores (Out of 10).

Group	Pre-Test Mean (SD)	Post-Test Mean (SD)	Mean Gain
Experimental	7.0 (1.1)	8.0 (1.2)	+1.0
Control	7.0 (1.0)	7.0 (1.1)	0.0

The experimental group improved by a full point on the 10-point scale, a 14% relative improvement, while the control group showed no change. The independent samples t-test comparing post-test scores revealed a statistically significant difference (see Table 3).

Table 11: Independent Samples t-Test Results for Post-Test Scores

Statistic	Value
t-value	5.154
Degrees of Freedom (df)	28
p-value (2-tailed)	< .001
t-table ($\alpha=.05$)	2.048
t-table ($\alpha=.01$)	2.763
Cohen's d (Effect Size)	1.88
Conclusion	$t_0 > t\text{-table}; p < .01 \rightarrow \text{Reject } H_0, \text{Accept } H_1$

The null hypothesis (H_0 : no difference between groups) was rejected at the 1% significance level. The p-value of less than .001 indicates that the probability of observing such a large difference by chance is extremely low. More importantly, the Cohen's d of 1.88 signifies a large effect size (Cohen, 1988). This suggests that the intervention did not just produce a statistically significant

result, but a practically meaningful one. The integration of familiar cultural content had a substantial impact on listening comprehension performance.

The significant improvement in the experimental group's scores can be robustly explained through the theoretical lenses of Schema Theory and Culturally Responsive Teaching. The revised materials provided students with "contextual anchors." When listening to a dialogue about "At the Market," students could activate their rich schematic knowledge of Indian marketplaces—the sounds, bargaining styles, common items—allowing them to dedicate more cognitive resources to decoding the Arabic language itself, rather than struggling to imagine an unfamiliar setting. This reduced cognitive load facilitated deeper processing and better retention (J Sweller, 1988).

Furthermore, the observed increase in engagement during implementation (noted in observations) aligns with the affective principle of Culturally Responsive Teaching. Materials that reflect and value students' own cultural background enhance their sense of belonging and intrinsic motivation (Zubair, 2025). This affective engagement is a critical, often overlooked, component of successful language acquisition.

The large effect size ($d=1.88$) is particularly compelling for a short, 4-week intervention. It underscores the potential leverage gained by aligning instructional materials with learners' pre-existing knowledge. The finding challenges the assumption that Arabic teaching for beginners must be rooted exclusively in Arab-world contexts and demonstrates that linguistic goals can be effectively achieved through culturally familiar content.

CONCLUSION

This study set out to address a pedagogical gap in Arabic listening instruction at The New College, Chennai. The research questions have been answered as follows:

1. The pre-development materials were characterized by a cultural and schematic distance from the learners' background, which acted as a barrier to comprehension and engagement.
2. Arabic listening materials can be effectively developed by following a systematic R&D model (ADDIE) and applying a principle of strategic cultural contextualization, whereby familiar cultural schemata from the learners' environment are used as the thematic vehicle for delivering target language input.
3. The newly developed, culturally-responsive materials demonstrated significant effectiveness in improving listening comprehension. The experimental group outperformed the control group with a statistically significant and large-effect-size difference, providing empirical support for the intervention's value.

Implications and Future Research

The primary implication for practice is that Arabic language instructors and material developers should actively consider the schematic background of their learners. Conducting a simple needs

analysis to identify familiar cultural themes can inform the adaptation or creation of materials that are both linguistically authentic and pedagogically comprehensible.

Future research should aim to overcome the present limitations by: (a) conducting multi-site studies with larger and mixed-gender samples, (b) employing randomized controlled trial (RCT) designs for stronger causal claims, (c) investigating the longitudinal impact of such materials, and (d) exploring the transfer of benefits to other language skills like speaking and writing. Furthermore, research could examine the differential effects of various types of cultural content (e.g., daily life vs. historical narratives) on listening gains.

In conclusion, this study provides evidence that embedding beginner-level Arabic listening instruction within the familiar cultural landscape of the learner is not merely a motivational tactic but a cognitively sound pedagogical strategy that can lead to substantial improvements in listening skill acquisition.

Limitations

While the results are positive, this study has limitations that must be considered when interpreting the findings and planning future research:

1. Sample Characteristics: The sample was relatively small (N=30) and drawn from a single institution, limiting the statistical power and generalizability of the results.
2. Gender Specificity: The sample consisted exclusively of male students due to the college's structure. The effectiveness of the materials for female learners remains an open question.
3. Research Design: The use of intact classes rather than random assignment, while pragmatic, means that pre-existing differences between the two groups (though not evident in pre-tests) could potentially confound the results.
4. Intervention Duration: The field trial was brief (4 weeks/12 hours). The long-term effects on listening proficiency, retention, and transfer to other language skills require investigation.

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