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AUTHORS: Aykut Kismir

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### IN PURSUIT OF A NEW APPROACH TO TEACHING THE URDU LANGUAGE

### URDU DİLİ ÖĞRETİMİNDE YENİ BİR YAKLAŞIM ARAYIŞI

Aykut KİŞMİR\*

#### ABSTRACT

The renewal of educational programmes around the world within the framework of new student-centred approaches is also valid for Urdu language teaching. In Urdu as a foreign language reading and reading comprehension activities for a student, recall and memory work is one of the main issues to be considered. In addition, utilising Urdu literary texts has an important role in the teaching and learning process in terms of cultural learning/country knowledge. The concept of "cultural, literary text" expresses the norms and values of a community and points to their common identity. In this case, literary text analyses (fairy tales, poems, short stories, etc.) used in foreign language teaching contribute to the development of the student's learning strategy as a tool of cultural memory. In this study, the obstacles to the teaching of Urdu language and the necessity of new approaches in Urdu language teaching are discussed.

**Keywords:** *Foreign Language, Urdu, Memory, Reading Habit, Literary Texts*

#### ÖZ

Dünya genelinde eğitim programlarının öğrenci merkezli yeni yaklaşımlar çerçevesinde yenilenme çalışmaları Urdu dili öğretimi için de geçerlidir. Bir öğrenci için yabancı dil olarak Urdu okuma ve okuduğunu anlama aktivitelerinde, hatırlama ve hafıza çalışmaları dikkat edilmesi gereken temel konulardan biridir. Ayrıca Urduca edebi metinlerden yararlanmak da kültürel öğrenme/ülke bilgisi açısından öğretme ve öğrenme sürecinde önemli bir role sahiptir. "Kültürel, edebi metin" kavramı, bir topluluğun norm ve değerlerini ifade eder ve ortak kimliklerine işaret eder. Bu durumda yabancı dil öğretiminde kullanılan edebi metin çözümlemeleri (masal, şiir, kısa öykü vb.) kültürel belleğin bir aracı olarak öğrencinin öğrenme stratejisinin gelişimine katkı sağlamaktadır. Bu çalışmada, Urdu dilinin

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\* Assoc. Prof. Dr., Ankara University, Language and History-Geography Faculty, Department of Urdu Language and Literature, E-mail: [kismir@ankara.edu.tr](mailto:kismir@ankara.edu.tr), ORCID: 0000-0003-3686-9229, Ankara, Türkiye.

öğretilmesinin önündeki engeller ve Urdu dili öğretiminde yeni yaklaşımların gerekliliği tartışılmaktadır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** *Yabancı Dil, Urduca, Bellek, Okuma Alışkanlığı, Edebi Metinler*

## Introduction and Methodological Concern

For an extended period, educators and linguists have dedicated their efforts to discovering the most efficient approach to teaching the Urdu language. Particularly following 1947, teaching Urdu underwent a more scientific paradigm, resulting in the emergence of novel methods and objectives distinct from traditional approaches. The advancement of technology has also introduced new facets to learning and teaching, creating environments where more knowledge can be acquired and imparted in a shorter duration

Learning methods and approaches grounded in scientific principles have given teachers new responsibilities within the classroom. Currently, approaches that deviate from the conventional structure, prioritize student-centered learning, and necessitate teachers to assume novel roles are being embraced. Quoting from Davies (1996), Gömleksiz (2000: 254) outlines the obligations of language teachers as follows:

- To enhance the student's learning experience and broaden their perspectives through literature.
- To stimulate the student's imagination.
- To foster an appreciation for human emotions.
- To cultivate a sense of tolerance and understanding.
- To cultivate an awareness of social events.
- To help students recognize and develop their potential.

## Methods Employed in Urdu Language Teaching

Numerous theories and methodologies have been formulated in foreign language teaching, and many of these have also been utilized in teaching the Urdu language. The primary methods commonly employed in foreign language teaching include the following (Gömleksiz, 2000:255), (İkinci, 2019:14).

1. Grammar - Translation Method
2. Direct Method
3. Audio-Lingual Method
4. Cognitive-Code Approach
5. Communicative Approach
6. Elective Method

In Pakistan, in addition to Urdu, more than seventy languages and their many sub-dialects are spoken (Durgun 2023:221). In foreign language teaching, instead of teaching only structurally developing new methods by incorporating cultural and geographical elements can make teaching more efficient. Learners' use of different audiovisual teaching materials outside the classroom environment increases their motivation and readiness level. The rapid development of technology enables the preparation of language teaching materials that will help learners develop their different senses faster (Öcalmış&Başarır 2023: 217-218).

Many methods employed in Urdu language teaching are considered to utilize the most effective and complete approaches. However, the continuous emergence of alternative methods indicates no particular, flawless technique. These methods necessitate teachers to possess extensive knowledge of diverse teaching strategies, procedures, and practices, enabling them to make informed choices between effective and ineffective approaches. Consequently, the quality of instruction becomes highly dependent on the teacher. Teachers must collaborate and collectively select the most suitable method or incorporate beneficial aspects from various methods to create a new synthesis. It is impractical for students to adapt to constantly changing and evolving methods and demonstrate proficiency in each.

### **Negative Attitudes, Distress, and Prejudice**

The primary objective of Urdu language teaching is to enable individuals to attain a level of proficiency in the language that approaches that of their mother tongue when used as a foreign language. Fluency in a foreign language and reading comprehension become crucial at this stage. When students are introduced to the Urdu language for the first time, they often perceive it as a complex set of rules and a puzzle to solve. This situation is an expected reaction in foreign language teaching. Additionally, it is common for students to experience feelings of fear and anxiety while strongly desiring to learn the Urdu language. It is worth noting that, drawing from Sigmund Freud's concept of the uncanny, some students may encounter negative emotions such as fear, anxiety, astonishment, and uneasiness during the initial stages of learning Urdu. The Urdu language can be perceived as uncanny for individuals due to the complex system it presents as a foreign language, as foreign languages are unfamiliar territory. "Language anxiety is associated with students' negative emotional responses to language acquisition." Students who are uncomfortable with the language may sometimes even frequently shut down during learning and resort to involuntary psychological defense mechanisms (Tezel, 2012: 642). When introduced to Urdu as a new language, an individual's ability to adapt to and internalize this language relies on the amount of exposure time.

### **Recalling and Forgetting**

As is commonly known, remembering and forgetting, which encompass the two aspects of memory, elucidate human memory's biological and psychological facets. Indeed, when we examine the definitions of remembering and forgetting, we find that these two dimensions of memory take precedence. Memory is defined in both Turkish (Eyüboğlu, 2004: 83-84) and Urdu dictionaries as the repository where signs, traces, and perceptions

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are accumulated and stored. Its synonymous term, recollection, is derived from "hifz," which denotes a place of keeping, storing, retaining, and remembering. In essence, it is a process of storing our experiences, behaviors, and information and reproducing them. Draaisma proposes a metaphorical representation of memory, suggesting it resembles a spacious room illuminated by high windows. This room's memories are precisely organized, cataloged, and meticulously preserved on extended shelves attached to the walls (Draaisma, 2015: 9).

Indeed, contrary to the analogy presented, our memories or information are not neatly arranged and readily accessible in such an orderly manner within our memory. Instead, they operate in a much more intricate and enigmatic fashion. At unexpected moments, our memories and information can be triggered, often through evocative cues such as a photograph, a book, a word, a sentence, or other sensory stimuli. These triggers act as keys, unlocking the door to the past and causing memories to resurface suddenly. Therefore, it can be said that everything a person perceives through hearing, seeing, feeling, tasting, and smelling is stored as involuntary memory and remains vigilant in the vast depths of our memory.

Furthermore, it can be argued that forgetting, the twin of remembering, serves an essential function within the realm of memory (Kismir, 2021: 3). Through the process of forgetting, memory undergoes a necessary reconfiguration and reformatting. Astrid Erll, a literary scholar and memory researcher, emphasizes that remembering and forgetting are intertwined, likening memories, experiences, and acquired information to small islands amidst the vast sea of forgetting (Erll, 2005: 7-8). Therefore, the question arises: "Why do individuals forget, and why are they unable to remember?" There are three potential reasons for this. First, it may be forgotten if the information is not repeated, mentioned, or communicated. Second, if the information or events are like other situations, the brain may deem it unnecessary to encode them into memory. Indeed, one of the significant factors influencing forgetting in language learning is the failure to adopt and internalize the target language as a foreign language. The third reason for forgetting pertains to experiences that can be forgotten and repressed, often due to individual barriers encountered during the learning process. These obstacles may include:

1. Emotional Factors: According to Freud, emotions such as fear, anxiety, and unease play a crucial role in memory. If these emotions are present during the learning process, they can hinder the encoding and retrieval of information.
2. Perceiving a Foreign Language as Uncanny: Unlike one's mother tongue, accepting a foreign language as an unfamiliar territory both linguistically and culturally can create a sense of strangeness or uncanniness. This perception can impede the learning and retention of the language.
3. Inhibition: Certain events and information can inhibit recalling other events and information. This inhibition may occur when there is interference or competition between different memories or when students psychologically shut themselves down due to language anxiety during the learning process.

Hence, it can be concluded that remembering and forgetting are intricately intertwined, forming an inseparable whole. Forgetting, like remembering, possesses both positive and

negative aspects. However, in the context of foreign language teaching and learning, minimizing the negative aspects of forgetting is preferable. Ultimately, memory is closely linked to the concepts of remembering and forgetting. Their relationship enables us to encode, preserve, revive, and derive meaning from memory's ever-changing and variable structure. Additionally, it allows for suppressing or temporarily deleting unwanted records and making them more acceptable.

Sociologist Harald Welzer and his team at Hannover University, who have been studying memory since 2000, propose that biological, psychological, and social factors influence memory development. They emphasize that memory is shaped through interpersonal relationships and communication and evolves over time, possessing a "dynamic" structure. Welzer and his team highlight the significance of language and emotions in the memory process, asserting that emotions are intricately linked to lived experiences. Consequently, it can be inferred that a stronger sense of language in foreign language teaching leads to more robust and more enduring knowledge retention.

Literary scholar Astrid Erll explores the interplay between memory, reminiscence, and language characteristics. According to Erll (2005: 7), remembering is a dynamic process, and the information we acquire is expressed and narrated through our experiences. Hence, memory possesses a flexible structure that undergoes constant renewal. In foreign language teaching, students' language proficiency can be enhanced by using various materials and engaging in group activities within the classroom environment. These approaches contribute to developing students' language skills and overall language sense.

### **Use of Literary Texts**

Literary texts play a crucial role in teaching and learning, particularly in cultural learning and acquiring knowledge about a country. The concept of "cultural, literary text" refers to the norms and values of a community, reflecting their shared identity. Therefore, incorporating literary texts, such as tales, poems, and short stories, into foreign language teaching is a tool for cultural memory. It not only aids in the linguistic learning process but also provides insights into a country's socio-cultural and economic background, contributing to the overall understanding of its culture. Descriptive literature, including letters, biographies, autobiographies, and memoirs, reveals the reflections of societal experiences and events embedded in collective memory (Kismir, 2019: 220). Additionally, continuous exposure to various materials such as magazines, newspapers, movies, TV series, music, and games influences students' ability to adopt and internalize a language. These resources contribute to communicative and cultural memory, enriching the language-learning experience and facilitating a deeper understanding of the target culture.

When considering literary works as part of the materials used in foreign language teaching, they can serve as mnemonic devices, activating and retrieving stored information while facilitating language updates. Through recollection and reminiscence, literature becomes a subject that draws from and enriches experiences, traditional knowledge, images, myths, language patterns, characters, and scenarios. In this sense, literary texts can actively act as "actors" in language learning. Students can reflect on their

circumstances and abilities by engaging with literary texts and addressing any gaps or deficiencies. They can empathize with the characters and themes presented in the texts through group work and discussions. As a result, vocabulary, grammar, sentence patterns, and cultural information can be effectively stored and preserved by exploring literary texts.

Literature plays a significant role in memory production and is a symbolic self-representation of cultures. It provides alternative perspectives and interpretations. When considering the integration of literary texts into foreign language teaching, it becomes crucial to examine how these texts are approached and utilized within the needs analysis. The materials embedded in literary texts should be incorporated into the curriculum, ensuring that they align with language learning objectives. If we view foreign language teaching as a system of symbols and rules, the significance of form becomes crucial in the context of fictional texts.

Indeed, language can be seen as the medium through which individuals can effectively communicate their thoughts and ideas. However, language differences can create barriers and disconnect between minds. Individuals who aspire to learn a foreign language should be regarded as those who aim to bridge this gap and overcome the disconnection. When encountering a foreign language, it is essential to understand that its rules and systems serve as a guide.

Acquiring one's mother tongue occurs naturally within the natural environment. However, systematic and structured environments are often necessary when it comes to acquiring a foreign language such as Urdu. Classrooms, private lessons, language courses, and other educational settings provide learners with a structured approach to language learning.

The potential benefits of introducing a language to individuals at an early age are widely discussed. Creating a foreign language environment during the preschool stage, while the individual's native language skills are still developing, may have advantages in terms of the child adopting the foreign language as their mother tongue.

Many young students in our country are limited to learning languages solely within the classroom setting due to social and economic constraints and do not have the opportunity to immerse themselves in the natural environment of a language. In these classrooms, foreign languages are taught using basic course materials, often lacking in technology and resources provided by the state. The opportunities available to them are limited. Students can be motivated through various initiatives, such as student exchange programs allowing them to learn languages authentically. Additionally, regular foreign language learning activities can incorporate teacher and student exchange programs to enhance language acquisition further. By implementing these measures, efforts can be made to broaden students' language learning experiences beyond the confines of the classroom.

The demand for the Urdu language within the student's environment is a crucial factor. The greater the need for the Urdu language in the environments where students are situated, the more likely individuals will be inclined towards it, especially if they receive appreciation and encouragement. During the teaching phase, striving for a natural approach to the Urdu language is essential. Instead of presenting it as a complex set of



rules distinct from their native language, if we can instill in students the significance and necessity of the language they are learning, we can positively impact their motivation and attitude towards it.

The habit of reading is undeniably a crucial element in acquiring language learning skills, including the Urdu language. Reading has various definitions, and Gokkaya (2012:548) describes it as the process of comprehending and making sense of the information and ideas presented in writing. Individuals need to develop the habit of reading from a young age, and parents and teachers play a significant role in fostering this habit. They are responsible for promoting reading and creating a supportive environment for language acquisition.

For teachers to encourage students to read books and direct them to books suitable for their level, they must first read the books and follow the publications. It is possible by having a regular reading habit and a positive attitude towards reading (Bozpolat 2010: 413).

Students' reading habits in their native language significantly impact their success in foreign language classes, including Urdu language learning. It is widely recognized that individuals with a strong command of their language are better equipped to grasp a foreign language with greater ease. Gökaya's statement, as mentioned by Er, highlights that words encountered during foreign language reading are stored in memory more quickly compared to comments in the native language. However, Er also emphasizes the importance of reading comprehension in reinforcing foreign words that may not be closely familiar in reading exercises (Er, 2005: 216).

In the context above, it is crucial for Urdu language teachers to carefully select texts that are appropriate for their student's proficiency level. They should prioritize easily comprehensible texts for students, supporting and facilitating the educational process from simple to complex. When students can understand the texts they read, the information they encounter is more likely to be retained in their memory for a more extended period than texts that are read but not comprehended.

Hence, it is crucial to cultivate a reading habit among Urdu language students. Teachers should strive to instill a love for reading in their students, and both group and individual reading activities should be encouraged and supported. However, it is essential to acknowledge that students possess diverse intelligence skills and personal characteristics, and these should be respected in the design and implementation of reading activities.

Learning Urdu requires a particular process, just like any other language. Reading habit is a requirement that accelerates and reinforces the learning process. The ability to understand and speak increases with extensive reading of literature. It also positively affects reading and writing skills. In this way, the development of the other three elements in language learning is ensured through reading.

Insufficient vocabulary and unfamiliarity with a text's socio-cultural context can hinder reading skills and make comprehension more challenging. When students know the content and context of a text, they are better equipped to understand what is written or

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said. Therefore, it is highly beneficial to incorporate publications that reflect the culture of the Urdu language in order to foster a reading habit.

Activities for developing reading skills, as suggested by Grenall and Swan, include; encouraging students to understand a text's overall message or main point rather than getting caught up in every word; teaching students to read selectively, targeting specific information they need rather than reading the entire text; before reading a passage, prompting students to think about what they already know about the subject, encouraging them to speculate and make inferences about the author's intentions and implicit meanings; teaching students to guess the meaning of unknown words and expressions by using contextual clues from the surrounding text; and helping students understand complex sentence structures and stylistic choices made by writers (Gokkaya 2012:550).

Based on the provided information, understanding every word in a text is unnecessary for overall comprehension. Instead, grasping the general meaning of the text allows the reading skill to function effectively. In the case of a foreign language, a limited vocabulary can impede the reading process and lead to student disengagement and boredom. In such situations, relying on prior knowledge about the text and focusing on understanding the overall message may be more beneficial rather than getting caught up in individual words.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, it is crucial to cultivate a reading habit among Urdu language students, both in their native language and in a foreign language. One of the key obstacles they encounter is the inability to provide immediate feedback to their conversation partners in Urdu. Insufficient reading practice is a significant contributing factor to this challenge. Relying solely on textbooks for Urdu education may result in lower efficiency than desired. Therefore, it is essential to increase reading activities and carefully select reading materials appropriate for the students' language proficiency level to address this issue.

When students do not have the opportunity to immerse themselves in an Urdu-speaking environment, the foreign language course can be restructured to accommodate this limitation. In this regard, carefully selecting literary texts can play a significant role in developing language skills. Advancements in various educational fields have brought about a search for new ideas to facilitate information retrieval, promote self-directed learning, and apply acquired knowledge in real-life Urdu language situations. Education programs worldwide need to be updated, embracing new student-centered approaches. Active student participation, acquisition of relevant skills, and keeping pace with the information age are all crucial aspects of effective Urdu language education as a foreign language. Reading, comprehension, remembering, and memory are essential aspects to consider in Urdu language education. Literary texts in Urdu play a crucial role in teaching and learning, particularly in terms of cultural and country-specific knowledge. The concept of "cultural, literary text" refers to the norms and values of a community, reflecting their shared identity. In foreign language teaching, the use of literary texts such as stories, poems, and short stories serves as a tool for cultural memory, benefiting both the linguistic learning process and providing insights into the socio-cultural and economic

background of the country. Students' memory and understanding of the language and culture can be enhanced by incorporating literary texts.

The methods employed in Urdu language teaching strive to provide adequate language instruction. However, the emergence of alternative approaches indicates no precise, flawless way.

Indeed, the success of language teaching methods relies on their adaptability and responsiveness to various factors. Students' Personal characteristics, such as their learning styles, preferences, and language proficiency levels, must be considered when selecting and implementing instructional methods. Additionally, the economic and social context in which language learning occurs can impact the availability of resources, technology, and learning opportunities. Therefore, methods should be tailored to meet the specific needs and circumstances of the students, taking into account their characteristics and the broader context in which they are learning.

Urdu language teaching approaches draw inspiration from the methods employed in teaching Western languages. However, it is crucial to recognize that each language has unique characteristics and structures. Therefore, developing specific teaching methods tailored to languages such as Urdu is essential. Each language possesses distinct syntactic, morphological, and phonetic features, necessitating the formulation of language-specific teaching approaches in countries where Urdu is taught. Given that language is an ever-evolving entity shaped by human development, it is impractical to rely on a single static method for teaching. Instead, the teaching methodology should remain adaptable and continuously evolving to respond to the evolving nature of the language effectively.

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