

A Review of Teaching Grammar Translation Method (GTM) for Malaysian Gifted Learners when Reading Arabic Text

Mohd Sham Kamis^{a*}, Norhayuza Mohamad^b, Aini Akmar Mohd Kasim^c, Muhammad Nazir Alias^d, Zaini Nasohah^e, Noor Lizza Mohamed Said^f, Anwar Fakhri Omar^g, ^aPusat Genius@Pintar Negara, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia Bangi, Malaysia, ^{b,c}Akademi Pengajian Bahasa, Universiti Teknologi MARA Shah Alam, Malaysia, ^{d,e,f}Fakulti Pengajian Islam, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia Bangi, Malaysia, Email: ^{a*}mohdsham856@ukm.edu.my, ^bnorhayuzamohamad@gmail.com, ^cainik695@salam.uitm.edu.my, ^dnazir@ukm.edu.my, ^ezbn@ukm.edu.my, ^flizza@ukm.edu.my, ^ganwar.fpi@ukm.edu.my

Gifted learners present a unique challenge for elementary teachers by virtue of their salient characteristics. By definition they are advanced in intellectual and linguistic abilities. Experts in the fields of gifted education and reading identify gifted and talented readers as students who read and comprehend text beyond their chronological grade placement as measured on a standardized reading test or who have the potential for high reading performance. The authors of this article suggest Grammar Translation Method (GMT) for teaching Malaysian Gifted Learners in reading Arabic text. This article highlights theories of Multiple Intelligences (MI) and academic needs for all gifted learners. Gifted readers read easily and voraciously and with amazing speed and incredible comprehension can comprehend the text that they read. They also are passionate about what they read. For them, reading is not the mere process of translating symbols into meanings but an intense need to explore, investigate, fantasize and make connections with concepts and ideas. However, they need teachers to guide them and this necessitates that they understand the potential advantages for gifted learners when learning language. Apart from that, this article also mentions the different between gifted learners and other learners in understanding the target language. The article highlights the techniques

of Grammar Translation Method (GMT) and sourcing finding information in a text to encourage gifted learners when reading Arabic text.

Key words: *Theories, Multiple Intelligences (MI), techniques of (GMT), differences between gifted learners and other learners.*

Introduction

Grammar Translation Method (GMT) is a traditional academic style of teaching that focuses on the explanation of grammar as a teaching and learning technique (Wongchaochan, 2012). This method has two main objectives; to enable students to read and translate literature written in the source language and to further student general intellectual development. It originated from the practice of teaching Latin. In the early 1500s, students learned Latin for communication but after the language died out it was studied purely as an academic discipline. When teachers started teaching other foreign languages in the 19th century, they used the same translation-based approach as had been used for teaching Latin. Some scholars claim that this method has since been rejected and has no theoretical basis (Zhou & Niu, 2015).

Aqel (2014) states that the translation process in foreign language or second language acquisition is not only the process of conveying meaning from the source language (SL) to the target language (TL) and the benefit of translation must go further. Humans are born with a natural ability or innate capacity to learn language and every gifted person is different (Troike, 2006). Benjamin (2002) agreed with this view and pointed out that gifted learners need a variety of classroom practices that accommodate differences in learner learning styles, interests, prior knowledge, socialization needs and comfort zones. Therefore, there is a teacher responsibility to identify gifted and talented student language learning capability and needs.

Theories of Multiple Intelligences (Mi)

Gardner's (1993) theory of multiple intelligences (MI) has been an influential force in the field of gifted education. Educators have used Gardner's theory to differentiate instruction based on individual intelligences and abilities and those practices have enlarged and enriched an understanding of giftedness and gifted education. Gardner's theory of MI demanded a more complex and nuanced assessment of children's ability and potential for success than is provided by traditional IQ tests. Gardner explained that intelligence comes in many different ways for different people and in many ways, people learn and apply the knowledge (Gardner 1993). Such a view, Gardner argued, should take into account eight intelligences:

- a) Logical-mathematical Ability to understand and use logic and numerical symbols and

operations.

- b) Linguistic Ability to understand and use spoken and written communication
- c) Kinesthetic Ability to coordinate physical movement.
- d) Spatial Ability to orient and manipulate three-dimensional space.
- e) Interpersonal Ability to understand and interact well with other people.
- f) Intrapersonal Ability to understand and use one's thoughts, feelings, preferences and interests.
- g) Naturalistic Ability to distinguish and categorize objects or phenomena in nature.

Gardner's theory of MI has had important implications for educators, and this is why educators, specifically teachers, should take into consideration the academic needs of all gifted learners which will benefit their future.

Academic Needs of All Gifted Learners

Perhaps the most common problems related to the process of teacher classification in the context of Gifted and Talented students is their classification as there is a lack of a specific concept for gifted or creative students (Fleith, 2000; Lee, 1999; Smutny, 2000). Is the gifted or creative student the most intelligent or the most creative? What are the behaviours that reflect the creative gifted student? What about students with private giftedness in a specific field, such as linguistics, or those who have high mental abilities but average to low academic achievements? The current article focuses on the teaching of Grammar Translation Method for Gifted Learners when learning language.

Gifted students generally possess a persistent intellectual curiosity along with superior abilities to reason, generalize and problem solve. They often display a wide range of interests and the perseverance to develop one or more of these interests to considerable depth. Gifted students may produce superior written work and/or possess a large vocabulary yet, they still need guidance from their teacher (Bailey, 2007). According to Bailey (2007) an awareness of other common issues and concerns is critical when working with gifted students including their acute self-awareness and need to be understood. Gifted students differ from their peers in their need for mental stimulation and the impact of perfectionism on their academic and personal lives.

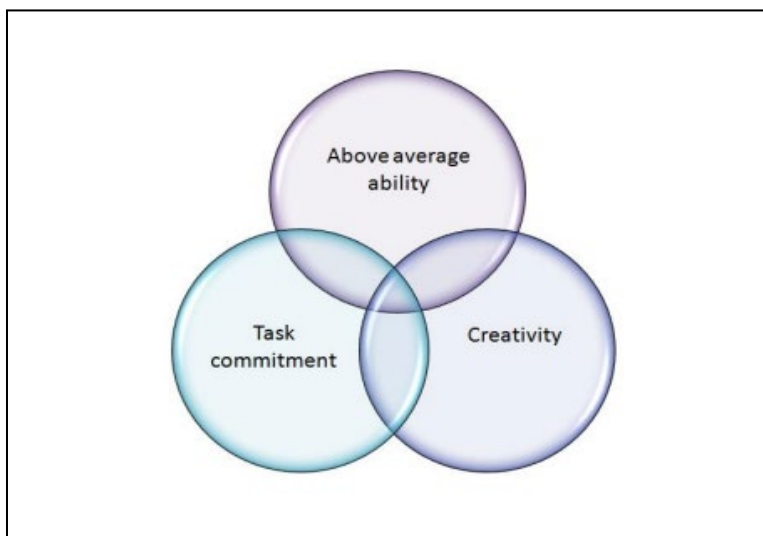
Gifted individuals often have a strong sense of humour as well as a unique sensitivity to the needs of others. This can lead to an "existential depression" where such students are confronted with the harsh realities of life coupled with an intense desire to better the world. This existential depression may result in a perception that they lack the capacity to change the current reality to achieve their perceived ideal. Gifted students also possess a strong perseverance that can be accessed as a positive coping strategy, given appropriate guidance and support. Underachievement is an issue of growing concern facing counsellors working with gifted

students and much work is currently in progress within the field of gifted education to better understand the complexity of this issue.

Advantages of Gifted Learners in Learning Language

Grammar Translation Method (GTM) is a pedagogical method that facilitates learning of language skills, making a foreign language more comprehensible and easier to understand. Schäffner (2002) lists the following benefits of translation: “(a) improve verbal agility, (b) expand the students vocabulary in L2, (c) develop their style, (d) improve their understanding of how languages work, (e) consolidate L2 structures for active use and (f) monitor and improve the comprehension of L2. Joseph Renzulli introduced the concept of gifted learners as those learners who demonstrate; task commitment, above average ability and the use of creativity. This conceptualisation intended to facilitate understanding of the intellectual potential of gifted people and is displayed in Figure 1 below:

Figure 1. Three-ring conception of giftedness



Renzulli’s three-ring conception of giftedness (Figure 1) results from research conducted with creative/productive people who “have achieved recognition because of their unique accomplishments and creative contributions” (Renzulli, 1978). For these people to become successful, they had to possess a relatively well-defined set of interlocking traits or clusters: above average (though not necessarily superior) ability, task commitment (motivation) and creativity. Renzulli points out that no single element of the 2 represented above entails giftedness in itself and rather, it is the combination of these three traits that make up the ingredients for gifted and talented capability.



“Gifted” is an elusive label. Even in schools, various measures are used to determine giftedness. While the gifted population is quite heterogeneous and cannot be reduced to a definitive list (Reis & Renzulli, 2010; Sternberg & Zhang, 1995), those identified as gifted by schools tend to be intellectually or academically gifted. In general, it is a label for people significantly advanced in cognitive development exhibited in high levels of ability in various areas such as academic, artistic and interpersonal skills (Reis & Renzulli, 2010).

Giftedness, talent and high capability are terms used to describe learners who perform and produce at levels above their age-normed peers in a variety of aptitude and competency areas (Kusuma-Powell & Powell, 2000; Rogers, 2007). These terms are sometimes used interchangeably even though they have also been described as distinctly different. Some of these distinctions are based on research by psychologists and academics while others are based on practices used by school counselors, coordinators of gifted programs, or classroom teachers. A few examples include giftedness as based solely on IQ test scores or achievement tests, the highly capable as those who are smart academically (but do not score as high on IQ/achievement tests as the gifted), and the talented as those who possess advanced skill and ability in the creative arts. According to Kusuma-Powell and Powell (2000), all of the terms used are relativistic, that is, an individual young learner may be highly intelligent in one content area but not in others or may be considered gifted in one school/district, but only highly capable in another one that may be more challenging academically.

Giftedness is measured by the possession and use of untrained and spontaneously expressed natural abilities 90% above of peers, whereas talent is the superior mastery of abilities, skills and/or knowledge 90% above that of peers. Renzulli (1978, 1986) defined giftedness more broadly as an interaction between above-average general and/or specific abilities, high levels of task commitment (motivation) and high levels of creativity. Sternberg (1985) proposed a definition based on three contexts: the individual’s internal world, external world and her/his experience with tasks or situations. This is also a broader, more global view of giftedness that incorporates cultural influences and other contextual factors.

The Differences between Gifted Learners and Other Learners in Understanding the Target Language

In traditional language teaching methodology, students translate a reading passage from the target language into their native language. The reading passage then provides the focus for several classes and vocabulary and grammatical structures in the passage are studied in subsequent lessons. The passage may be extracted from a literature text in the target language or a teacher may write a passage carefully designed to include particular grammar rules and vocabulary.

The translation may be written or spoken or both. Students should not translate idioms and the like literally but rather in a way that shows that they understand the meaning (Freeman, 2000). Cook (1992) suggests that how people learn languages might be a factor: “The variation in right hemisphere involvement may be due to the lack of a single route to L2 knowledge: second languages may be learnt by many means rather than the single means found in L1 acquisition and, consequently, may have a greater apparent hemispheric spread” such as shown in Figure 2 below.

Figure 2. Part of the brain in understanding the language

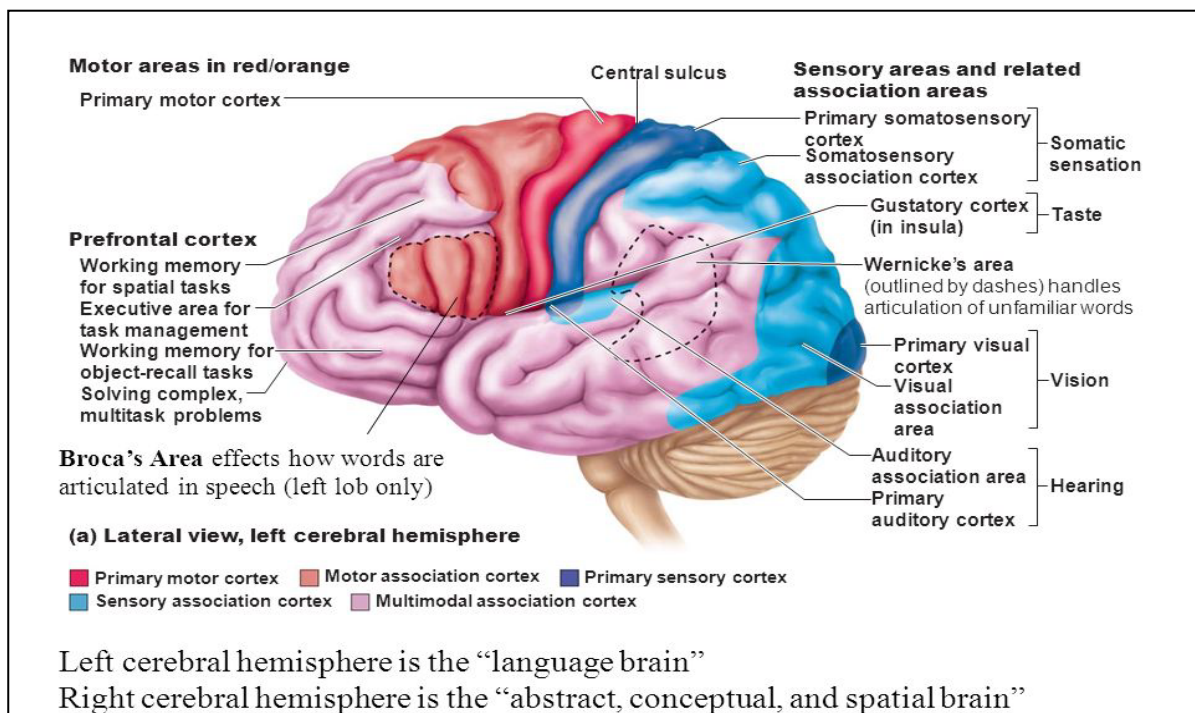
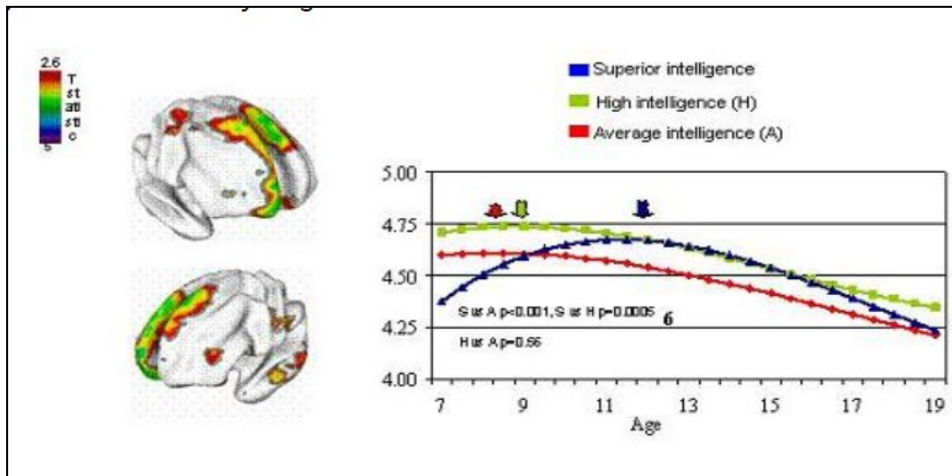


Figure 2 reflects that learners understand the difficult words or complex sentences when they read by using the part of the brain which is known as the prefrontal cortex. This part is functional when a person arranges their task management and solves multi-task problems when the type task is difficult to solve. A 2006 article from the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) cites one such, interesting study. The study results showed (via MRI) that the brain development of children with high IQ's (defined in the study as 121-145) is significantly different to that of their above average (109-120) and average (83-108) peers, see Figure 3 below:

Figure 3. The categories of brain development of children with their IQs



A 2006 article from the National Institutes of Mental Health (subsidiary of National Institutes of Health) notes one such interesting study. The study results showed (via MRI) that the brain development of children with high IQ's (defined in the study as 121-145) is significantly different from that of their above average (109-120) and average (83-108) peers. The cortex layer in the brains of children with superior IQ's started out much thinner at age 7 (compared to the cortex thickness of the average and above average kids) and reached peak thickness much later (age 12 in gifted kids compared to about age 8 or 9 for average and above average children). After reaching peak thickness, the maturation process (i.e. thinning & pruning) of the cortex takes place at a more rapid pace in children with the highest IQ's. In terms of the implications for parents and teachers of these children, the study findings suggest that it might also indicate an extended window of opportunity for "development of high-level cognitive circuits. Given that the pre-frontal cortex controls organization, this might help explain why some higher achieving middle-years scholars can do algebra but can't find the homework they know they did the night before, indicating an extended window of opportunity for development of high-level cognitive circuits.

Techniques of Grammar Translation Method (GMT) & Finding Information in a Text

According to Murcia (1979) the characteristics of GTM include instruction using the L1, use of standalone and potentially unrelated words, explanation of rules, structural focus in vocabulary teaching and decontextualized teaching of form, (Indonesian EFL Journal, 2015, p. 175). Regarding the techniques of GTM, Freeman (2000) describe the following:

a) Comprehension of group in the Classroom regarding the text

Freeman (2000) described that after teaching students through reading a passage, students respond to questions from the passage and the first group of questions relates to information

found within the reading passage. The second group of questions asks students to respond based on their understanding of the passage. They have to answer questions to which the answers are not contained in the passage. The third group of questions ask students to write answers based on their own experience.

b) Using Cognates to Develop Comprehension

Biplab (2018) conducted research regarding several GMT techniques in Bangladesh EFL Classrooms and two are of particular note in the context of classroom reading: using cognates to develop comprehension and using antonyms and synonyms to develop comprehension. Surprisingly, there are a large number of both Arabic and English cognates that learners can quickly recognize and understand while reading Arabic text (Modern Standard Arabic.com, 2019). Some of the words, sourced from modern Standard Arabic which might help learners understand the Arabic text they read, are presented in Table 1 below:

Table 1: Cognates of language in Arabic that are similar in English

English	Arabic
Alcohol	الكحول
Algebra	الجبر
Aluminium	الألومنيوم
America	أمريكا
Bacteria	بكتيريا
Bank	بنك
Biscuit	بسكويت
Buddha	بوذا
Bureaucracy	البيروقراطية
Caliph	الخلافة
Chemistry	كيمياء
Cinema	سينما
Cotton	قطن
Diplomacy	دبلوماسية
Dolphin	دولفين
Fatwa	فتوى
Giraffe	زرافة

Based on Table 1 the cognates refer to languages and words which have the same origin, or are related and in some way similar (Cambridge Dictionary, 2019). Previous studies reported that the cognate words are consequential to their processing. For example, cognate more often than non-cognate translation equivalents elicit associations that are also translations of each other (Taylor, 1976) and are translated more quickly and accurately from one language to the other (de Groot, 1992b, Sánchez-Casas, Davis, & Gracia-Albea, 1992). Particularly relevant to the

present study is the finding that cross-lingual immediate repetition priming effect was larger between cognate than non-cognate translation equivalents (e.g., Cristoffanini, Kirsner, & Milech, 1986). This effect was found even if visual masking of the prime minimized strategic or conscious episodic factors (de Groot and Nas, 1991) used semantic categorization rather than lexical decision tasks (Sanchez-Casas et al., 1992). The use of masked priming technique in cross lingual repetition priming is important because it helps to locate the effect at the lexical level. Alternately, several studies suggested that masked priming is very limited (Serenio, 1991) or insensitive to semantic priming (Forster & Tafts, 1994). Masked priming reduces the effect of possible episodic and/or strategic factors. The primary lexical origin of masked repetition priming is also suggested by the absence of masked repetition effects when the targets are non-words even if morphemes (or pseudo-morphemes) are repeated from the prime to the target (Forster, & Davis, 1984; Frost, Forster, & Deutsch, 1997; but see evidence for the existence of form priming in Forster, 1987).

Among the user-determined factors influencing the bilingual or multi-lingual lexicon are, for example, the user's competence in the non-native languages and the order of their acquisition (Kroll & Stewart, 1990). Another user-determined factor that has been relatively less explored is the influence of ecological factors such as the role of the non-native language in the user's linguistic environment and its subjective perception as a second (or first) language. A particularly interesting linguistic environment for investigating the importance of ecological factors and their interaction with pure linguistic factors is Arabic. The similarity among languages should influence linguistic bilingual performance. For example, a longitudinal research of literacy acquisition in Moroccan children investigated whether preschool experience with a spoken Moroccan Arabic dialect facilitates literacy acquisition differently to pre-school experience with Berber, a member of the Hamitic family of languages which has no semantic or syntactic similarity to Arabic (Wranger, Spratt & Ezzaki, 1989).

c) Using Vocabulary in Teaching and Learning Arabic

The concept of a word can be defined in various ways but three significant aspects teachers need to be aware of and focus on are form, meaning and use. According to Nation (2001), the form of a word involves its pronunciation (spoken form), spelling and written form. Words that are antonyms and synonyms are vocabulary input for language learners who need to employ Vocabulary Learning Strategies (VLS) as a method for language learning strategy in vocabulary acquisition. In Arabic, vocabulary is also known as "*mufradat*" and functions in constructing a complete sentence with a combination of a few words. Although vocabulary is viewed as a sub skill in language learning, it is crucial, especially in writing and speaking skills (Che Radiah 2009). Al-Shuwairakh (2001) states three important components that need attention in learning Arabic words or Arabic vocabulary and these features are:

- 1) The basic knowledge of words and reference words (*wazan*);
- 2) The concept and the morphological system;
- 3) The diacritical system or short vowels (*tasykil*)

Normally, Arabic vocabulary lessons occur subtly through text reading comprehension exercises. This scenario is consistent with Mat Taib's (2005) conclusion which suggested that teaching and learning of vocabulary should be planned properly without neglecting other language skills. However, Goh & Azman (2010); Saini & Mohamad (2011); Nadwah & Nadhilah (2014); Nik Mohd Rahimi et al., (2014) state that students, especially among non-native speakers can speak, write and read effectively only if they acquire an extensive vocabulary size and depth. Takač's (2008) vocabulary learning strategies are the latest vocabulary learning strategies this century. From his string of studies, an inventory questionnaire to measure the frequency of foreign language learning strategies was developed. In order to improve the mastery of Arabic vocabulary in students, Rosni (2013) suggests that teachers:

- 1) Choose the correct and appropriate level for the students;
- 2) Translate new words through descriptions in Arabic, giving the meaning of antonyms, or synonyms, using pictures or objects, referring to dictionaries and eventually translating into the native language;
- 3) Read the entire text and explain the meaning of new words in the text;
- 4) Strengthen the words by reviewing several times;
- 5) Apply the new word in teaching and learning by encouraging the students to communicate in Arabic.

The synonyms and antonyms form an integral part of the language in learning. Acquaintance with the vocabulary of the English language is a necessity for effective expression either in written or an oral form. Synonyms are similar meanings of a particular word or its semantic relation. A synonym is a word or a phrase that means the same as another word or a phrase in the same language. Antonyms are the negative connotation of a particular word. An antonym is a word or phrase that is opposite in meaning to a particular word or a phrase in the same language, see Figure 4 below.

Figure 4. The synonyms and antonyms of Arabic words

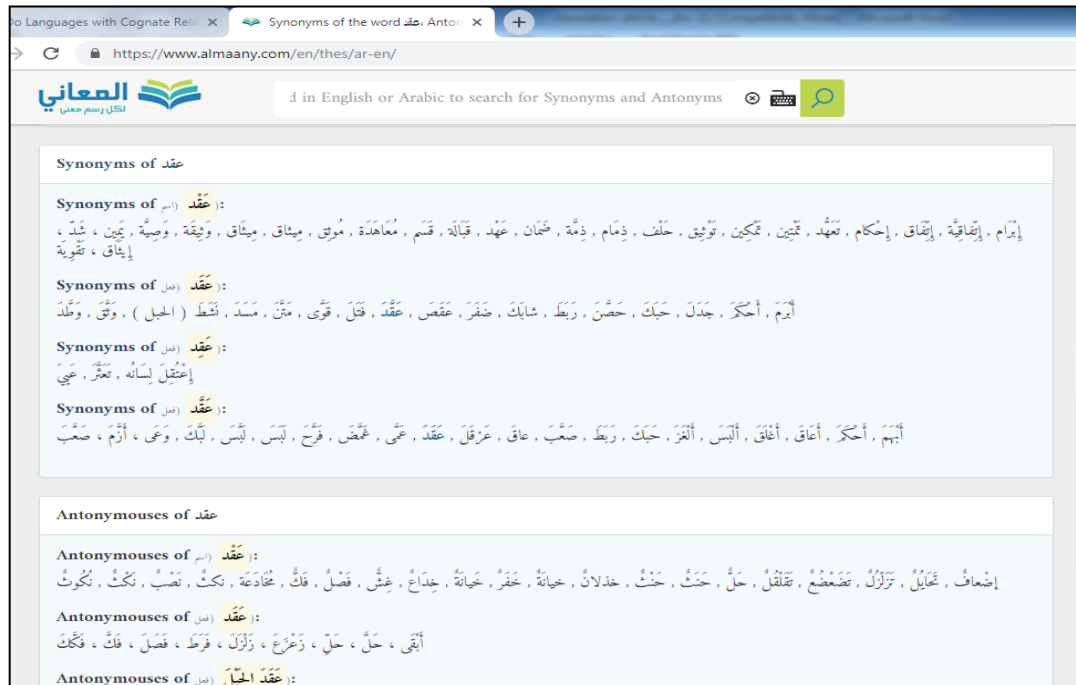


Figure 4 shows the synonyms and antonyms of Arabic words from almaany.com website. Actually, vocabulary is central to language teaching because without sufficient vocabulary students cannot understand others or express their own ideas. As Maigne (1993) notes in an overview on vocabulary learning and instruction, vocabulary used to be the "poor relation" of language teaching but now it seems to occupy the position of "guest of honour." This recent shift is significant because, as Wilkins (1972) states: *“There is not much value in being able to produce grammatical sentences if one has not got the vocabulary that is needed to convey what one wishes to say ... While without grammar very little can be conveyed, without vocabulary nothing can be conveyed.”* (pp. 110-111).

Conclusion

Gifted learners in general learn faster, deeper and with more complexity and have greater problem-solving skills, task-commitment and ability than their age-peers (NAGC, 2008a; Renzulli, 2005; Renzulli et al., 2002; Reis & Renzulli, 2009, 2010). Most definitions of giftedness include the students' need for instruction that differs from their same age peers (Florida State Rule 6A-6.03019, 2006; Sternberg, Ferrari, Clinkenbeard, & Grigorenko, 1996). An appropriately differentiated curriculum for gifted students requires modification of instruction (content, process, delivery, measures and expectations) aligned with the unique needs of individual gifted learners. There are a number of obstacles in implementing such



adjustments within the regular classroom setting for general education teachers and technology may hold the key to overcoming them. Teaching reading is a time-intensive task and in elementary classrooms across the country, teachers allocate large blocks of time to reading instruction.

Gifted learners are students who display a wide range of reading abilities, from non-readers to the highly competent. Reading strategies and activities must be orchestrated to match individual instructional needs (Wood, 2008) and student knowledge can be categorized using pre-test and post-test analysis to determine relative giftedness (Gross, Bronwyn & Pretorius, 2007). Ability grouping for reading instruction has been a long-standing practice in schools, with three ability groups (below average, average and above average) as the traditional grouping strategy. The use of ability grouping in schools is a controversial topic that continues to spark heated debate. In the field of gifted education, proponents of grouping (Kulik, 1992; Rogers, 2002; Tieso, 2003) argue that grouping of gifted learners allows for effective and efficient curriculum and instruction for students who learn at a faster rate and who need broadened and extended content.

Gifted learners are not like traditional students because they think differently, learn differently and behave differently. Research indicates that there are numerous characteristics among gifted students and these characteristics illustrate the importance of gifted students having the opportunity to be included in gifted programs even throughout high school. Delisle and Galbraith (2002) discuss some of these characteristics, including the idea that gifted students often show persistent intellectual curiosity, ask searching questions and show exceptional interest in the nature of humankind and the universe. Even at a young age, gifted children tend to exhibit interest in the universe and how the world works and they often appease their curiosity by asking questions. When they read and a phrase presents as difficult making the sentence or passage hard to understand they do not hesitate to seek clarification. Teacher responsibility to gifted students is in answering their questions and educating them with the Grammar Translation Method in consideration of their capabilities when reading Arabic text.

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