Unpacking the Teaching and Learning Practices of Arabic at a Major U.S. University

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Abstract

Many researchers have investigated the complexity of Arabic, but have not provided adequate possibilities to overcome the challenges facing students in learning Arabic. In light of this, the primary purpose of this study is to investigate the challenges that influence the teaching and learning of Arabic as a foreign language by U.S. university students. This study serves as a tool for improving the teaching and learning of Arabic in U.S. academic institutions. The study critically assesses the teaching and learning of Arabic, by providing some recommendations that are peculiar to the study setting as well as to the general field of teaching Arabic as a foreign language in the United States. Findings suggest that extracurricular activities should be promoted in teaching and learning Arabic at U.S. universities. My attempt is to place Arabic within the fold of other foreign languages.

1. Introduction
1.1. Arabic Growth in U.S. Universities

Foreign language enrollments in the United States are experiencing a shift from the traditional European foreign languages towards the less commonly taught languages such as Arabic. Arabic is gaining ground in U.S. universities and new Arabic programs have been established. Teaching Arabic is gaining ground and has matured as a profession in US. Students' enrollment in Arabic classes has increased rapidly in recent years and shows no sign of decreasing in the near future (Al-Batal and Belnap 2006). Arabic classes in colleges and universities have seen and still experiencing a burgeoning enrollment (Allen 2004; Welles 2004; Ryding 2013). In a similar vein, Rabiee (2010) noticed that Arabic language enrollment shot up more than 125% between 2002 and 2006 while enrollment in all foreign languages increased by less than 13% during the same time. The Modern Language Association (MLA) reports that the number of American students enrolled in Arabic programs is expected to increase due to various reasons, among which is the direct U.S. military involvement in the Middle East. A number of universities have expanded or added full-fledged Arabic programs to their curriculum. Moreover, many universities have established new summer programs in the Arab world, aiming at providing U.S. students with the opportunity to study Arabic in authentic cultural setting. Expansion in the field of Arabic also touched the organizational aspects of the profession. The American Association of Teachers of Arabic (AATA) has experienced a

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significant increase in its membership both at the institutional and individual levels (Ryding 2006).

An interconnected world with increasing international links and interests, as well as key political concerns at the global level has raised the public profile of Arabic language and the Arab world in general (Ryding 2013). Even before the military involvement in Iraq, Dillon (2003) wrote in the New York Times, "As the pursuit of Al'Qa'eda and America's confrontation with Iraq intensifies, Arabic speaking educators and Islamic organizations, as well as universities and schools across the nation, are straining to respond to requests by students and the public for information and instruction about the language and culture of Islam" (p. 1). Universities have expanded new Arabic language programs to cope up with the increasing number of students and the higher demand for learning Arabic. Furthermore, many institutions and agencies "have sought to move away from the more traditional system in which the basic language courses were taught by faculty members to appoint instead new professionally trained Arabic teachers" (Allen, 2004, p. 275).

1.2. The Challenge of Arabic Instruction at the university level in US institutions

The United States Foreign Service Institute (FSI) classified languages into four levels or degrees of difficulty based on the amount of time spent by learners to attain a certain level of proficiency. According to the FSI ranking (Liskin-Gasparro1982, cited in Stevens 2006), Group 1 (relatively easy) languages includes French, Spanish, and Norwegian; Group 2 includes German, Greek, and Farsi; Group 3 includes Czech, Russian, Finish, and Turkish; and Group 4 (relatively difficult) languages includes Arabic, Chinese, and Japanese.

Learning Arabic is found to be quite challenging to native speakers of English due to phonological and morphological complexity. It presents certain types of phonological and syntactical difficulties to the English-speaking student due to the vast differences between the two languages. However, these difficulties can be overcome with adequate practice and by rights such difficulties should be weighed against any problems caused by the process of instruction and the material used in class (Kara 1976). Stevens (2006) even questioned the FSI ranking. He compared the various aspects of the languages ranked by FSI and found that Arabic not to be complicated, calling into question claims about Arabic's extraordinary difficulty. He claimed that Arabic was badly taught in the past and advances in second language teaching occurred in other languages before they did in Arabic. He pointed out that "[it] is fair to say that the field of teaching Arabic as a Foreign Language did not exist 30 years ago, certainly not in the well-developed sense that the foreign language teaching existed for other, more commonly taught languages" (p. 61).

Most native Arabic teachers in U.S. universities are not necessarily language specialists and the process of attracting trained teachers of Arabic to U.S. universities has become more infinitely more difficult and time consuming. Allen (2004) argued that

> The stringent regulations and costs associated with obtaining the appropriate visa to work in the United States and the checking procedures at various parts of entry mean that not only are some professionals unable to attend language teaching or other academic gatherings, but the entire process becomes so intrusive that few seek participation in the first place. We thus face the dilemma of a national need for a greater number of qualified teachers of Arabic than ever before and ever-diminishing supply of such people actually or potentially resident in the country. (p. 278).

1.3. Research and Studies about Teaching and Learning Arabic

Arabic has been the focus of many research studies. Many studies have been conducted in phonology, syntax, morphology, and sociolinguistics. The linguistic research works which were conducted in the area of phonology were mostly contrastive and comparative studies between Arabic and English. The objective of these studies was to discover the similarities and differences between these two languages. Several articles exist that established a contrast between various forms of Arabic and English. Setian (1974), for example, presented a comparison on the morphological and syntactic levels of some of the differences between colloquial Egyptian Arabic and English. He argued that the comparison of Colloquial Egyptian Arabic and English in terms of morphology and syntax is extremely revealing. Setian (1974: 253) also explained that "Arabic and English are almost antipodal to each other: the former being a highly synthetic (agglutinative) language, whereas the latter is highly analytic (isolating)".

Malick (1956:65) compared and contrasted a number of clusters in both Arabic and English. She argued that the main problem in learning a new language is not learning vocabulary items, but the mastery of the sound system in order to hear the distinctive features and to approximate their production. Unlike these studies which were aimed at teaching English, Asfoor's (1982) study is mainly geared to the teaching of Arabic.

Asfoor (1982) investigated the Arabic sounds that American speakers of English find most difficult to learn and whether the dialectal differences of English speakers are significant for the acquisition of the pronunciation of these sounds. In this study he took as subjects thirty five American students of Arabic at the Defense Language Institute Foreign Language Center (DLIFLC) in Monterey in California. The study examined a selected number of phonological items in Arabic to determine the nature and degree of difficulty which speakers of English at DLIFLC encountered in learning Arabic pronunciation. Asfoor resorted to rating and ranking the relative frequency of errors made by students in pronouncing Arabic phonemes on a three point scale: 1= not difficult, 2= moderately difficult, and 3= difficult, in the initial, medial, and final position of all Arabic phonemes. Asfoor also used pretest and posttest scans on taped oral tests of students' ability to pronounce Arabic sounds, on a scale of 1= poor to 2= acceptable to 3=good.

Asfoor (1982) found out that American speakers of English find most difficult pronouncing those Arabic letters which do not exist in English or in American dialects of English. He also confirmed that the American dialect spoken by students seemed to have no effect on their ability to pronounce the difficult Arabic phonemes. The general conclusion of this study is that

American students learning Arabic faced most difficulties with Arabic phonemes which have no correlates in English (El-Nekishbendy 1990).

1.4. Arabic Diglossia and its Effect on the Teaching of Arabic

The term *diglossia* (i.e. multiple Arabic varieties) was introduced by Ferguson (1959). He argued that there are two varieties in the Arabic linguistic situation. He named the superposed variety as the high (H) variety and the regional dialect as the low (L) variety. A number of linguists have challenged Ferguson's High/Low dichotomy. For example, Blanc (1960) and Badawi (1973) identified different intermediate levels between fusħa and the colloquial. Badawi identified five different levels (a) Fusħa al-turath (fusħa of the Arab/Islamic heritage); (b) Fusħa al-ʕasr (contemporary Fusħa); (c) ʕammiyya al-muthaqqafin (vernacular of the educated); (d) ʕammiyyat al-mutanawwiriin (vernacular of the enlightened, literate); and (e) ʕammiyyat al-ummiyyin (vernacular of the illiterate).

Ryding (2006) explained that diglossia refers to the fact that Arabs read and write one form of language (the so called "high") and use the spoken vernacular (the so called "low") to communicate among each other. However, for everyday spoken communication with each other, Arabs speak language variants that are substantially different. Slight differences between Standard Arabic are found in vocabulary and syntax in different Arab countries. The Arabic used in everyday conversation is quite different from the written form in its sounds, grammar, and vocabulary. With greater emphasis on communication in teaching Arabic, we are faced with the question whether Standard Arabic (H) or one of the colloquial varieties (L) should be used in the Arabic program. Several alternatives have been proposed (see Alosh (1992), Al-Batal (1992), and Younes (2006), and Alhawary (2013)).

The specific research questions that motivate this study are as follows:

1. What are the foreign language history, literacy and practices of the participants?

2. What are the challenges that the participants face in learning Arabic and how to tackle these challenges?

2. Methodology

2.1. Participants

In order to meet the selection criteria and achieve a sufficient range of variation and important issues in this study, I recruited six participants: three male students (Adam, John, and Raj) and three female students (Sara, Dana, and Kate) studying Arabic at a major U.S. Midwestern University. Participating students are referred to by pseudonyms. The students' ages ranged from 18 to 19 years. The average number of years that they had studied foreign languages in secondary school before studying at the university ranged from to 2 to 3 years. Dana had studied the longest, whereas the other students had studied Arabic the shortest length of time (2 years). They all studied foreign languages in high schools and all of them were at the intermediate level of Arabic with different majors. Appendix A table summarizes students' foreign languages literacy and practices and field of specialization.

2.2. Data Source and Data Collection

To ensure the validity of the findings of the study, I used questionnaires, interviews, and observation as data collection methods to collect data. The information in appendix B table summarizes analytical procedure by research questions and data sources.

2.3. Participant observation

Observations of the teacher and the students took place in the classroom and lab. I attended classes where the participants of this research were enrolled. The class meetings took place from Monday to Friday. As I was interested in eliciting more information from the students, I became more immersed in the research by meting the participants every Friday from 3 p.m. to 5 p.m. The sessions took place over a 10 week period. It was a group activity that required from the students to come up with questions to the group about what they did not comprehend in class. It was a good opportunity to follow the participants' progress and see how they interacted. I chose to observe this activity every Friday because the participants felt more comfortable to discuss the challenges they faced in learning Arabic at the group meeting. During this group meeting, I volunteered to assist them on Arabic related work. I had the opportunity to take in depth look how they managed to write, speak, read and listen, and what strategies they used. The advantage of the regular and Friday meetings enabled me to record what I observed in field notes.

2.4. Interviews

I interviewed students and the teacher individually. Additionally, I had the opportunity to interview the students' former teachers. I practiced the following sequences when I conducted the interviews. I first interviewed the students to get some sense about their basic background and literacy practices in Arabic. The speakers were first asked simple questions that required them to talk about their family background. I asked them questions that represented areas of special interest or familiarity to them. Generally speaking, the students were asked to provide information about the reasons and motives for learning Arabic. They were also asked about their learning history in the past and how fluent they were. In addition, they were asked to tell their strengths and weaknesses in learning Arabic. The sample chief questions that I asked students revolved around the challenges that they faced in speaking, reading, listening and writing, and what characterized a good learner in these skills. From the sample interview queries, I was looking for the methods the students received in Arabic learning, classroom activities, and how they cope with the difficulties they faced. Sample interview questions are provided in appendix C.

I also interviewed the students' current teacher. The interview was conducted after I finished with the students. The aim of the interview is to find out how many orientations and workshops the teacher has been through. The teacher was asked to provide information about his experience in teaching Arabic. He was also asked about topics related to the teaching methodology he was using in class and the challenges that his students faced and how he helped them to overcome those challenges. Questions

about the teacher's perception of the book assigned were also asked. Sample teacher interview questions are provided in appendix D.

2.5. Data analysis

The analysis of the data obtained from questionnaires, observation, interviews and field note followed the method recommended by methodologists such as Bogdan and Bicklen (2003). I coded the data and searched throughout the data for regularities and patterns as well as for the topics they covered. I wrote down words and phrases to represent these topics and develop them in a list of coding categories. After generating preliminary coding categories, I tried to assign them to the data in order to discover their usefulness. These codes encompassed topics for which I had most substantiation to explore. After I developed the coding categories, I made a list and assigned each one a number as this is helpful in facilitating memorization of the coding system. This exercise resulted in different categories such as reasons and goals for learning Arabic and the problems faced in learning it. The choice of these categories is due to their frequent use by the respondents. I also looked for patterns and relationship from categories.

3. Findings and discussion

The first question sought to discover the foreign languages students learned in the past and how they contributed or hindered the learning of Arabic. Students' responses to this question have shown that the study of commonly taught languages such as French, German, and Spanish have maintained a viable position in foreign language programs. History and availability of certified instructors have rendered these languages the most commonly taught languages. The participating students in this study had been exposed to at least one commonly taught language in high school. Adam learned Spanish and German. John, Raj, and Kate studied French. Sara and Dana took Spanish. However, this success in foreign languages did not extend to less commonly taught languages such as Arabic. Nothing prepared the students for a Semitic, structurally different language. In fact, the history of Arabic teaching in the USA is bound with the study of the Bible and the emergence of Semitic studies (Allen, 1992). Ryding (2006) pointed out that Arabic was taught early in the United States, having been added to the offerings of Harvard University's courses in Semitic languages (Hebrew, Chaldaic, and Syriac) between 1654 and 1672. In a similar vein, McCarus (1992: 207) noted that "This became the typical pattern, instituting first Hebrew and cognate languages and then Arabic soon after." McCarus explained that Arabic was being taught in the USA over a century before the signing of Declaration Independence. It was introduced to complement the study of Hebrew and the Old Testament.

  When students come to Arabic classes, they encountered dilemmas and were surprised with the degree of difficulty they experienced with the Arabic language in comparison to their prior foreign language learning. They were surprised to find that they had to master a new structure which was completely different from the system of English and the languages they were exposed to in high school. Therefore, anxiety tends to be high among

students of Arabic in the first year. Beliefs and attitudes have a strong effect on learning a language. Arabic has a reputation among U.S. students for being difficult to learn (Elkhafaifi 2005). The research data provide a strong supporting evidence and confirmation to the relationship between anxiety and the belief that Arabic is the most difficult language, especially when the students were asked about their perception of Arabic as a foreign language. It should be noted that research conducted in more commonly taught languages should be extended to less commonly taught languages as well. Since many U.S. students have the privilege to learn more commonly taught languages in high schools, this should also extend to Arabic. High schools should be double funded and encouraged to include Arabic in their curricula. It would be easier for students to learn Arabic in high school. A high school graduate with a background of Arabic structure would have the more potential to excel in learning Arabic at the university than a student who starts learning Arabic at the university. The number of high schools offering Arabic should be increased if we intend to prepare skilled students in Arabic who will be qualified to teach Arabic in the future. I also recommend that instructors of Arabic would develop an annual conventional with teachers of more commonly taught languages to exchange thoughts and ideas about the difficulties that the students are facing. The success in foreign languages teaching and learning should extend to Arabic through the participation in orientations and workshops. Arabic will never thrive if teachers of Arabic do not collaborate with other teachers of the commonly taught languages, who have more experience in teaching and have maintained a viable position in foreign language programs. There is no doubt that from this dynamic relationship, interaction and cooperation, there will be benefits to the whole language learning field.

4. Challenges and recommendations

The findings showed that Arabic is complex and posed a serious challenge to the participants. There are many differences between Arabic and English which would predict that second language learners of Arabic would experience difficulty in learning Arabic. Grammatically, it pales in comparison with some of the world's languages (Belnap 2006). Students were to master new system, which differed from English and the languages they learned in high school. The participants faced difficulties in Arabic morphology. They had problems with case, definiteness, word order, and the number system, among others. Given the peculiarities of the languages students learned in high school and English, the students seemed to benefit from their L1 and L2 closeness and similarities. They were able to draw on English at many levels. However, they did not profit much from their educational background when learning Arabic because Arabic is a non-cognate language (Hamdaoui 2006). The findings of the present study are similar to other studies regarding the difficulty caused by constructions which are different in Arabic and English.

There is also abundant of evidence of English influence in learning Arabic. The specific errors found reinforce the evidence of native language interference. Students' proficiency of Arabic was poor. They had problems in expressing themselves. It is also quite likely that the writing system of Arabic

played a major role in the estimation of the amount of time needed to acquire it. The Arabic alphabet presents major challenges for U.S. students in the first stages of Arabic learning. Letters take different forms according to their positions in words. Also, short vowels are not part of the word as they are in English and many words in Arabic have different meanings according to the difference in their vowels though they have the same consonants. Since texts are not always vocalized, this may lead to students' confusion.

The participants expressed more concerns about their vocabulary limitations. Even Dana, who is a student of Arabic descent, expressed concern about the vocabulary limitation. Finding the equivalent word in Arabic was her biggest obstacle. Students' struggle in finding the appropriate vocabulary reflects the marginality of vocabulary teaching in the Arabic curricula. This marginal attention to vocabulary was noted in the observed class. The vocabulary was explained in a non-context. The vocabulary building in the observed class consisted of learning a certain number of words for a certain number of days. They were presented in isolation and not in meaningful contexts so that students can use them. The vocabulary lesson was conducted in the manner that required students to memorize the meaning. Contextualization of vocabulary is very important in helping learners retain the new words. Effective communication in language relies on the possession of adequate and contextualized vocabulary. Further suggested recommendations about vocabulary teaching are explored and elaborated below.

4.1. *Recommendations for Teaching Vocabulary*

Despite its importance to the learning of Arabic at large, vocabulary remains less emphasized in most Arabic classes. The teaching of vocabulary building in the observed class consisted of learning a certain number of words for a certain number of days. As state above, students interviewed complained how difficult it was to retain and use the vocabulary in meaningful sentences. They pointed that the vocabularies were presented to them in isolation and not in meaningful contexts so that they could use them. Students' voices should be beneficial for Arabic teachers to re-consider the way they teach Arabic vocabulary. The Arabic teaching profession needs to address the dire need for studies addressing various aspects of the vocabulary learning process (Al-Batal 2006).

The Arabic teachers should present activities such as role play, games, and discussions to facilitate the use of learned vocabulary. For example, if a teacher wants the students to use certain learned vocabulary, he or she should introduce a conversation where that vocabulary is used in meaningful sentences and where all students participate in class. The teacher also should use pictures in teaching and reviewing certain vocabularies. Students should be taught words in their contextual contexts and be encouraged to use them. Using vocabulary in their contextual context is the best way to make the language more functional and learning more lasting. Through my experience in teaching Arabic, I noticed that whenever vocabulary is taught in context, the students learned it better and retained it much larger than they studied it as isolated words. It takes time for students of Arabic to retain vocabulary easily because of the nature of the Arabic

language and the absence of cognate words such that exists, for instance, between English and French, which makes very hard for the speaker of English to retain. However, though vocabulary lessons are important in the learning process, the teacher should not prioritize them over other linguistic aspects.

4.2. Recommendations for Dealing with Diglossia

Although the question of binary distinction between Standard Arabic and Spoken Arabic varieties has been posed ever since the teaching of Arabic began in the United States, it is far from having reached a consensus even in the Arab World. The issue of diglossia is not merely a linguistic one, but a political and national one as well. It mirrors the conflict in some Arab countries between Standard Arabic advocates who associate Standard Arabic with pan-Arab nationalism and the colloquial Arabic supporters who see the colloquial Arabic as marker of national identity (Zouhir, 2008).

It has been demonstrated that diglossia poses a great challenge to U.S. students learning Arabic. The differences between the everyday colloquial language and the standard written language are vast and problematic. Even though it is true that the systems of Standard Arabic and the Arabic dialects are closely related and show a considerable amount of overlapping in vocabulary, they are nonetheless two different systems. Many students are sometimes surprised to discover that they must master two languages, which would take them longer to learn than is the case for many other languages. Students felt frustrated and disappointed when they faced and experienced the realities of the diglossic situation in Arab countries and any endeavor to speak Standard Arabic with Arabs usually ends with unsatisfactory outcomes and expectations. It is worth quoting the challenges that some participants face when they travel to Arab countries. Adam's following email extract proved the point:

> [...] When I first arrived and tried to speak Modern Standard Arabic with people, many people did not understand or only understood after a few repetitions. The Cairene dialect is significantly different from Modern Standard Arabic and only more educated know Modern Standard Arabic well. Although Cairene Arabic has a lot of differences from Modern Standard Arabic, it has a lot in common, obviously. Half the battle is just remembering to pronounce "qaf" like a "hamza," "jim like a "g", etc. The conjugation patterns are different from Modern Standard Arabic, but the differences follow an obvious pattern, so it is not too hard. It takes practice.

Kate also had the opportunity to visit Egypt as part of study abroad program. She experienced difficulties in communicating with local people using Standard Arabic. Kate reported that the Standard Arabic she learned was helpful to her in writing, reading, and listening only. She described her first experience when she had a chance to use Arabic in an authentic situation:

Since I had never taken Egyptian Arabic it was hard communicating with people in Egypt. It was difficult speaking with taxi drivers and waiters especially. Many times I would try and speak Standard Arabic and the taxi drivers would not understand. At restaurants I picked up on a few Egyptian Arabic words. Most waiters spoke a little English. So using the little Egyptian Arabic I knew and some English I was able to order. At the university where I studied I used Standard Arabic and most everyone understood. However, when speaking with college students from other universities in Cairo I had a hard time speaking with them in Standard Arabic. Although they knew it they were unable to talk with me using Standard Arabic. The most challenging thing I faced in Egypt was improving my Standard Arabic skills and trying to speak with local Egyptians. I did not take an Egyptian Arabic course because I was not sure if I should continue to focus on Standard Arabic until I become fluent. Overall, I think learning to speak Arabic is the hardest part because even though I lived in Egypt for 4 months there weren't many opportunities outside of the classroom to speak Modern Standard Arabic. As for learning Egyptian Arabic I was not sure if it was worth taking instead of taking a Standard Arabic course because any time I go to another country Egyptian Arabic will not be used. The Standard Arabic I learned here was helpful when reading, writing, and listening to the news. It was definitely important but it would have been nice to have a crash course in Egyptian Arabic before I went.

Teachers of Arabic as a foreign language are continuously faced with the question of which variety to teach. The majority of teachers in U.S. universities are from different Arab countries and they brought with them preferences of their own regional dialect and biases towards the other Arabic dialects. It is common to hear that a certain variety of Arabic dialect is closer to Standard Arabic than the other and every teacher should normally prefer to teach his or her dialect thinking that it is the closest variety to Standard Arabic.

Though it is true that diglossia poses a great challenge to the learners of Arabic, some linguists refused to accept any interpretation of the Arabic language situation as problematic because Arabic is not the only language with this diglossic nature (Steven, 2006). Along this line, I reject the assumption that the Arabic language situation is unique, unparalleled, and different from other language communities. Arabic diglossia should not be looked as a problem. It is useful and realistic for learners to master speaking a colloquial Arabic. Language reality in the Arab World shows that oral communication using a colloquial variety is important because it is an integral part of the linguistic repertoire of speakers of Arabic and used naturally in a large set of social situations. Many more students than before are taking Arabic classes to communicate with Arabs while abroad. If the goal of the Arabic programs is to prepare students for real proficiency, then the country the students plan to visit dictates the Arabic dialect to be taught in the classroom. If we accept such a conclusion, the question of whether to

start teaching Standard Arabic first and the colloquial or vice versa is not that important. Both approaches are effective if students' interests are taken into consideration.

4.3. Textbook Recommendations

Despite the surge in the number of students learning Arabic, textbooks designed to teach Arabic are deficient in several areas. The majority of universities use different books. There is a competition among Arabic textbooks, which leads to the absence of authors who strive to produce outstanding Arabic books. Some of these books do not have clear plans for equipping students with necessary linguistic tools to build up confidence to speak Arabic fluently. Even the books which claim to have such plans are often judged to be not well organized in material presentation. It is likely that the difficulties that students face in learning Arabic may result more from poor textbooks without efficient methods than from actual difficulties inherent in the Arabic language itself.

Some Arabic teachers might not be able to determine which book to use because the textbook they choose may have been predetermined for them. In fact, it is the teachers themselves who should shape the textbook and mold it to fit their teaching methods and style. They should select the vocabulary and structures that their students need when they try to write a textbook. Learning is most likely to take place when students perceive that the content and activities are relevant to their interests and goals. In view of this, students need to be consulted about the books that equip them with necessary vocabulary and that they can use in communication. From the teacher's voice and the learning outcomes, it is clear that there is a dire need for more research and better textbooks.

4.4. Recommendations for Students' Participation

The success of class participation depends to a great extent on the choice of topics and the involvement of all students in class participation. To help students accomplish this task, teachers as facilitators should create a classroom atmosphere that is conducive to the participation of all students in class. Cooperating with peers requires the students to work together on activities toward a common goal using games and simulations that encourage interactions among students. They should be encouraged to learn in groups and to learn from each others' mistakes. Furthermore, the relationship between instructors and students is important in the process of learning Arabic. Teachers should be aware that teaching students in a traditional fashion without involving them in the decision making process can dramatically cause a negative impact on students' overall performance in Arabic. Also, the power relation inherent between the teacher and the students in the classroom might impact learning.

The instructor should present the process of teaching Arabic in most pleasant classroom atmosphere. A feeling for social solidarity is required and the teaching style should reflect a non authoritative attitude. The total involvement of the students throughout the learning process is the principal factor underlying the success of any class. In that framework, learning becomes a dynamic process in which the students play an active role. The

instruction should focus on the learner-centered perspective with a wide variety of activities offered in class, which would encourage the students to actively participate. It is quite likely that this will successfully be achieved in small classes. Participation of all students, especially those who are shy or not motivated, can be even harder to expect in crowded classes. My observation regarding the impact of big Arabic classes suggested that this type of classes is not very conductive to promoting students' participations and student-students interactions.

4.5. The Need for Authenticity

Learning is generated through social interaction. With limited exposure to the authentic situations where the use of the target language takes place, learning tends to be slower and difficult. Therefore, the authenticity of the teaching materials is a subject of consideration. The outcomes of this current study support the claim that there were very rare occasions for the participants to have direct contact with Arabs. Though there are many international students from Arab countries working, visiting, and studying in the university where this research was conducted, the participants tended to speak with them in English because of the Arabic colloquial barriers. In order to respond to the non authenticity of Arabic classes, Arabic programs should take practical steps to include authentic teaching environment into their curriculum. This can be achieved through exchange with students of Arab universities and regular communication with them through meetings and teleconferencing. The Arabic language program should encourage students to apply for study abroad. This helps the students to access opportunities for Arabic literacy development outside the classroom realistically and in authentic situations. Since learning is not merely a linguistic endeavor, teachers should be encouraged to host exchange students from other Arab countries to their universities. Ironically, as interest among Arab students for study in the United States has arisen, students flow abroad have steadily decreased since the events of September 11. This is due to the greater difficulties for Arab students to obtain visas (Coffman 1996). Therefore, alternative strategies should be evolved in order to help Arab students to visit U.S. universities for study and research. Other useful suggestions include sending students to Arabic immersion and summer programs in U.S. universities.

4.6. The Need for Qualified Teachers

It is fair to say that advances in second language teaching occurred in more commonly taught languages before they did in less commonly taught languages such as Arabic. There was no tradition of pedagogy in Arabic and the teaching materials were not satisfactory. Also, the teaching of Arabic in large classes has posed a controversial issue in several Arab programs because they were not enough teachers. Despite the heightened interest in Arabic in U.S. universities, the need for trained teachers of Arabic outweighs the supply. The limited budget does not allow the university to fill up sufficient teaching vacancies that would make teaching of Arabic in small classes plausible. Therefore students are jammed in a class and teaching assistants or part-timers are hired to teach. Being a native or having native

fluency in Arabic is sometimes the only quality sought in the Arabic language teacher. These teaching assistants and part-timers are not necessarily language specialists and they are already overburdened by diverse responsibilities other than teaching. They do not have opportunities to attend workshops and orientations where they can hone their teaching skills and the materials used for teaching Arabic were not selected in accordance to the program curriculum. They need basic pedagogical training in teaching Arabic. Such training will introduce teachers of Arabic to principles of language teaching, preparing syllabi, and classroom management. Ideally, teachers would have the opportunity to prepare lessons under the supervision of experienced teachers. To support this point, Al-Batal and Belnap (2006) suggested micro-teaching that provide less experienced Arabic language teachers the opportunity to observe experienced teachers in action and prepare lessons under their guidance and supervision. Therefore, only teachers with special training in teaching foreign languages and with a special understanding of Arabic should be hired to teach the language. Only well trained teachers who showed interest and validity in foreign language teaching should be considered in hiring. Well trained teachers who project their vitality in foreign language instruction seem to retain a greater number of learners than do the other teachers (Kara 1976). Many U.S. students seem to see Arabic as the most difficult language to learn. If there were controlled teaching conditions and qualified Arabic teachers, it is unlikely that this standing belief will remain.

The need for teachers who can integrate technology in the teaching learning process is very pressing. Teachers should benefit from recent technology by going beyond the most practical use of technology in the lab only. Without systematic use of technology in class, teachers cannot enhance the traditional methods of teaching Arabic that prevailed in several Arabic programs.

5. Conclusions

The findings of this study indicated that the Arabic learning outcomes are influenced by a large number of factors. Some of these factors fell within established pedagogical framework and some are due to the nature of Arabic and the learning environment. To respond to such problems, I have proposed some recommendations for teaching and learning Arabic. My attempt is to place Arabic within the fold of other foreign languages rather than to keep it outside that milieu, like some exotic plant. It is important to note that without further systematic research involving both theoretical and empirical studies, the field of Arabic teaching and learning will never develop to serve the needs of teachers and students appropriately and effectively.

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Appendices

APPENDIX A

Table 1
Students' Foreign Language Learning Literacy and Academic Background Information

Features	Students' pseudonyms					
	Dana	Sara	Kate	Adam	Raj	John
Age	19	18	19	18	18	18
Major	International Studies	Political Science	International Studies	Anthropology	International Studies	Political Science
Ethnicity	Arabic	Pakistani and Italian	Caucasian	Caucasian	Indian	Caucasian
Foreign languages spoken and level of fluency	Palestinian Arabic (good) Spanish (fair)	Spanish (fluent) Urdu (fair) Pashtu (low) French (fair)	French (fair)	Spanish (fluent) German (low) Hindi (fair)	Hindi (fluent) French (low)	Spanish (fluent) German (low)
Number of years learning Arabic	3	2	2	2	2	2
Perception of Arabic as a Semitic language	Difficult in speaking	Difficult	Difficult	Difficult	Difficult	Difficult

APPENDIX B

Table 2
Analytical Procedures by Research Questions and Data Sources

Research Questions	Data Resource		
	Interviews	Classroom Observations	Assessment
What are the foreign languages history, literacy and practices of these 6 students?	Conduct interviews with the students. Ask students how they had learned to read, listen, speak and write in the languages they spoke. Ask them what characterizes a good speaker, writer, listener, and reader of a language. Conduct 3 interviews with students, and 1 interview with the teacher	Observe students in class. Look for how students participated in class. How they completed homework and assignments	Examine students' answers to the interview questions

Research Questions	Data Resource		
	Interviews	Classroom Observations	Assessment
What are the challenges that students face in learning Arabic?	Conduct 3 interviews with students, and 1 interview with the teacher Ask students about their perception of the curriculum, the book and the teaching materials used in class/ how they get support from their teacher/ which learning skill they find more challenging/ strengths and weaknesses of their teacher/ whether the teacher uses Arabic or English in teaching/ whether the teacher demonstrates a thorough knowledge of the subject. Interview the teacher about his experience in teaching/ about the difficulties students mostly find in learning Arabic/ about the book assigned and the teaching	Conduct 10-17 class observations. Observe students as they participate in class/ as they do drill and classroom activities individually and in groups. Observe the classroom as a context for learning and testing Look for formal learning processes/ what is taught in class/ how it is taught/ which language used in instruction/ interaction patterns (students/students and teacher/ students interaction)/ opportunities for	Analyze students' responses to assigned test. Examine students' homework, quizzes and exams. Assess the book and teaching materials.

| | materials/ about the strengths and weakness of the students/ about the number of quizzes assigned during the semester/ About the grading system and students' grades. | students to use Arabic in class. | |

	Data Resource		
Research Questions	Interviews	Classroom Observations	Assessment
What factors influence Arabic learning and teaching**?**	Conduct 3 interviews with the students and one interview with the teacher. Ask the students about classroom management/ teacher's organization/ tests design and level of difficulty. Ask students about their attitudes towards Arabs and the Arabic language/ their motivation in class/ whether they feel nervous during exams/ whether they take the exam in comfortable classroom context/ about the level of difficulty of tests and their design/ test length/ whether they prefer take home or in class exams. Interview the teacher about the tests design and construct/ ask about the length and validity of the tests/ about students' scores in tests taken in class and take home exams/ students participation and motivation in class/ students' absence/ punctuality/ their seriousness/ about the physical surroundings in class (light, noise, comfort, and so forth)	Conduct 10-17 observations Observe students participation in class. Observe the organization of the classroom and physical surrounding such as light and comfort in class/ class suitability for exam taking/ whether there is any distracting noise inside and outside the classroom/ students interaction patterns/ observe students taking exam. Observe teacher teaching and proctoring students during exams. Observe the teacher's behavior towards the students	Examine students' responses to the interview questions. Assess the assigned test.

Table 2 is a summative display of what data sources were used, and how to analyze the data to answer each research question. The complete details of the data sources and data collection procedures are described as follows:

APPENDIX C

SAMPLE STUDENTS' INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1) Why did you choose to learn Arabic?
2) What do you think about learning Arabic? How important it is to you?
3) Do your parents know you are taking Arabic? Do they support you to learn it?
4) How long have you been studying Arabic?
5) Tell me about your learning history of languages in the past. Which languages did you take?
6) How fluent are you in these languages?
7) What are your memories of success/failures in learning these languages?
8) Do you remember the first day you studied Arabic. Tell me about that experience.
9) What are your strengths and weaknesses in learning Arabic?
10) How many hours do you spend studying Arabic in the university and at home?
11) Which learning skill (i.e. reading, writing, speaking or listening) do you find more difficult?
12) How do you cope with your learning difficulties?
13) Have you even talked with your teacher or classmates about the difficulties you are facing in learning Arabic?
14) How often do you see your teacher in office hours?
15) Tell me about the teaching materials you are using in class.
16) Do you have a lot of assignments?
17) Tell me how you cope with these assignments. Do you work alone or with friends? Do you get support from parents or friends?
18) How do you read? What strategies do you use? (Do you read everything or just skim and summarize?)
19) Do you think you are a good reader of Arabic? What characterize a good reader?
20) How do you write? What strategies do you use in writing? (Do you write mean ideas first and develop them or you directly write?
21) Do you think you are a good writer of Arabic? What characterizes a good writer?
22) How do you listen? What strategies do you use in listening? (Do you take notes while listening?)
23) Do you think you are a good listener of Arabic? What characterizes a good listener?
24) Do you have the opportunity to use Arabic a lot? Tell me the opportunity when and where you use Arabic?
25) Do you think you are a good speaker of Arabic? What characterizes a good speaker?
26) Do you learn a lot in class? What do you learn?
27) Tell me about the common classroom activities? Do you participate a lot in class?

APPENDIX D

SAMPLE TEACHER'S INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. When and where did you first start teaching Arabic?
2. How long have you been teaching Arabic?
3. Can you tell me about the goals of teaching Arabic?
4. Have you ever attended any teaching orientation and participated in video critiques of teaching Arabic?
5. What is your preferred method of teaching Arabic? Do you think it is effective? Please state your reasons.
6. From your experience what teaching methods do most teachers use? Why do they use that method?
7. How many students do you have?
8. What have you noticed about your students' attitude and motivation in class?
9. What do you think about Alkitaab that is assigned for this class? Why did you recommend it?
10. In your experience, what are the biggest challenges that students of the Arabic program face in using this book?
11. How would you help your students face these challenges?
12. How do you follow your students' progress?
13. How many students stop by your office?
14. How many times per week do you assign homework to your students?
15. How many quizzes do you assign per semester?
16. Do you use other materials besides the book Alkitaab? If so, what are they?
17. Do you test students in the four learning skills (i.e. reading, writing, listening, and speaking)? Tell me how you rate the overall learning skills.
18. Other than homework, what do you encourage your students to read or do?
19. What have you noticed about your students' homework and assignment with respect to their Arabic literacy skills?
20. What are some of the constraints you face in teaching Arabic?
21. How do you deal with the Arabic diglossia in class?
22. If you are given the choice to use a dialect in class, which Arabic dialect will you choose? Why?
23. Do you use technology in teaching and what do you think about the use of technology in learning and teaching Arabic?
24. Which teaching activities do you use in reading, listening, speaking, and writing?
25. What do you view as strengths/weaknesses of U.S. students to study Arabic?
26. In your opinion, are you pleased with the present situation of the Arabic learning-teaching process? Please state your reasons.
27. Based on your experience and interaction with the students, what do you think can be done to improve Arabic learning for U.S. students?