

A Thesis

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Strategies Used to Teach Arabic as a Foreign Language

by

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Submitted to the Graduate Faculty as partial fulfillment of the requirements for the

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An Abstract of  
The Use of Bilingual Strategies to Teach Arabic as a Foreign Language

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The popularity of Arabic language classes has increased in the recent years. Most research has focused on Arabic language teaching to post-secondary education; however, limited research investigated the strategies used to teach Arabic as a foreign language to school students. This thesis investigates the strategies used by Arabic language teachers to teach Arabic language at Al-Bayan School in Sylvania, Ohio. This study shows that teachers use technology based strategies; group based strategies; bilingual strategies; experience based; movement based strategies; motivation-based; discussion based strategies, in their teaching. This study aims at bridging the gap in teaching Arabic as a foreign language research through providing a much needed overview of approaches used by teachers of Arabic as a foreign language at the K-12 level.

I dedicate this work to my husband Bashar, my mom, and my KiKi.

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## Chapter One

### Introduction and Review of Literature

This study examines the strategies Arabic language teachers use to teach Arabic as a foreign language at Al-Bayan School, in Sylvania, Ohio. It also looks at the problems and challenges these teachers face and the approaches they use to cope with these issues. The following sections provide background information about the status of Arabic teaching in the US, the challenges related to teaching Arabic as a foreign language in the US, and the proposed solutions and strategies to solve these issues. This information is significant to this research because it pinpoints the different circumstances and characteristics of teaching Arabic as a foreign language in the US. The sections start with an overview of the overall landscape of teaching Arabic as a foreign language in the US. This section concludes with showcasing examples of Arabic language programs in the US, in addition to an overview of Al-Bayan School in Sylvania, Ohio. Next, an overview of the challenges related to Arabic language teaching in the US is presented. This section also includes a description of the teaching of Arabic grammar, which is important to include in this study because of the controversy surrounding the inclusion of Arabic grammar teaching in foreign language classes. It also includes a description of teaching Arabic vocabulary, a side of Arabic language teaching that has not been given much attention over the years, in spite of its central role to achieving Arabic language proficiency. Finally, the chapter ends with presenting the solutions and strategies used to solve the challenges facing teaching Arabic as a foreign language in the US. This background information will be later compared to Al-Bayan's Arabic language teachers' strategies and methodologies used in the classrooms.

## **The Landscape of Teaching Arabic as a Foreign Language in the U.S.**

Foreign language learning has gained much popularity in recent years. One language that has become an area of interest to learners is Arabic. This rise in popularity is a result of political, economic, and social changes. Nash and Semaan (2018) explain that the September 11 event and the consequent crises in Iraq, the Arab Spring in recent years, the increasing number of Arabic immigration to the United States, and the growing number of Arab heritage students in American universities, have contributed to this surge (p. 6). Similarly, Palmer (2008) describes this growing interest in Arabic language learning as a reaction to the September 11 attacks, which exposed the critical status of Arabic language in the United States (p. 82). As a result, numerous Arabic language programs were established around the US. Al-Batal (2007) points out that the number of Arabic language programs saw a 82% increase in 2002, in comparison to the number of programs in 1998 (p. 268). In an article that compares two surveys: one conducted between April 2003 and August 2004 by the National Middle East Language Resource Center (NMEELRC), and one conducted by Belnap in 1987, Belnap (2006) points out that undergraduate students make the highest population in the Arabic language programs around US universities. The percentages of students in both surveys indicate that the number of undergraduate students in Arabic language programs has increased over the years (Belnap, 2006, pp. 170-171). In a study that surveys 209 Arabic language university teachers in the United States, Abdalla & Al-Batal (2011) report that two thirds of Arabic language teachers were “recruited in the past ten years as part of the national effort to accommodate the dramatic increase since 2001 in the number of students studying Arabic” (p. 6).

Arabic language learners have increasingly shown interest in not only acquiring the Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) but also the spoken versions that enable them to communicate with native speakers. In a study that examined the students' attitude towards learning spoken Arabic, Palmer (2008) points out that the majority of students expressed their desire to learn spoken Arabic before travelling to an Arabic speaking country. He explains that these students have learned Arabic for two semesters before going to an Arab country. In their responses, they emphasized the importance of learning a dialect in order to engage in conversations with the locals, something they cannot do with learning only MSA. Younes (2015) describes the students' frustration when they find out that their years of learning Arabic was spent in studying MSA, a form that does not enable them to communicate with Arabic native speakers. He adds that the students who are mainly instructed in MSA lack the skills to conduct natural conversations with native "speakers in a meaningful communicative manner and are shut out of any opportunities of reinforcement, which is essential to the development of language proficiency" (p. 30). The students' eagerness to learn local dialects is a result to the diglossic nature of the Arabic language, a challenge that will be later discussed in this chapter.

### **Arabic language programs**

Study abroad programs have become a widely popular approach to learning a foreign language. With the increased popularity of Arabic language, Arabic speaking countries have become a destination for Arabic language learners. Different universities have started to offers study abroad programs in countries like Jordan, Egypt, or Morocco. Through spending a certain amount of time abroad, learners are able to engage with

native speakers of Arabic and acquire the spoken form of the language. Ryding (2013) emphasizes the importance of these programs to enable students “to develop reasonably authentic and automatic spoken language skills” (p. 68). She explains that the amount of hours students spend learning Arabic in the different Arabic language programs are not enough to acquire proficiency. This is due to the categorization of Arabic as a level V language, which means that 2400-2760 hours are required to achieve “professional levels of proficiency” (p. 68). The average Arabic language student studies a maximum of 360 hours in four years of teaching, all of which affirms the fundamental role study abroad programs play in mastering the language. Learners also have the chance to immerse in the local culture and acquire not only the language, but also its cultural contexts. In an interview with Nash (2010), Michael Cooperson points out to the importance of including culture in foreign language classes. He explains that teaching the language without its cultural connotations may not achieve a successful communication because language learners do not “learn a language by reconstructing everything from the beginning,” instead, it is acquired through “saying the one sentence that the situation calls for” (p. 133).

One example of these programs is the summer intensive Arabic language program organized by University of Virginia and Yarmouk University in Irbid, Jordan, referred to as “the Program”. The Program, established in 1984, provides three different levels of Arabic language classes besides an advanced course in Arabic for special purposes. For level 1, which lasts for eight weeks and is considered to equal a second year of Arabic at the University of Virginia, students need to have previously completed a year of Arabic at any US university. Level two students finish what is considered a third year of Arabic

at the University of Virginia, whereas level three students complete what is regarded as a fourth year of Arabic at the University of Virginia (Sawaie, 2006, p. 371). In this program, students are able to interact with the local community and get exposed to the Jordanian dialect and culture.

Another well known Arabic language program in the United States is the Teaching Arabic as a Foreign Language program at Cornell University. In addition to its inclusion of different Arabic dialects along with the teaching of MSA which provides an opportunity for the students to learn both a formal and a colloquial form of the language, this program also offers study abroad experiences through their Intensive Arabic Language and Arabic Language Internship programs, both offered in Amman, Jordan. Younes (2006), a Cornell University senior lecturer of Arabic language and Linguistics, explains that the program aims to advance and develop the students' language abilities and competence in all skills as it advocates the teaching of Contemporary Fus'ha (CF) and Educated Levantine Arabic (ELA) together as they are perceived to be "a one complete and invisible system of communication" as they share more similarities than differences (p.162). He emphasizes the importance of identifying the students' needs their goals for joining the program. A survey was conducted at the start of the 2003-2004 fall semester which included a sample of 113 students in the elementary and intermediate classes in the program to identify these goals as the students were allowed to choose more than one reason from a list of reasons that included learning the language to communicate with friends and family, learning the language to read the Quran and other religious books in addition to reading both contemporary and classical Arabic literary texts, learning the language to read and understand Arabic media, learning the language

for professional reasons, and to reach an overall level of competence and linguistic proficiency in all language skills. The majority of students selected achieving a high level of communicative proficiency as their main goal of studying the language (Younes, 2006, pp. 157-158). To meet the students' needs, Younes (2006) explains that the lessons focus on developing all four skills as CF is used to teach reading and writing, and ELA is used for speaking and listening which is also used for discussion as the program intends to prepare the students to use both CF and ELA at the same time through the use of interactive instructional materials in different forms which cover relevant "pan-Arab topics" (p.163). Dialects used in the program vary according to the teacher's background which expose the students to various dialects and accents. Responding to criticism that objects the use of both Fusha and colloquial Arabic together as that may cause confusion, Younes (2006) adds that both CF and ELA are used early in the program as the first is used with reading and writing, whereas the latter is used for speaking and listening which enables the students to develop a sense of the correct use of both forms (p.164).

### **Al-Bayan School in Sylvania, Ohio**

Teaching Arabic as a foreign language in the United States has been mainly targeted towards college students; however, the Arab American population has shown increased interest in teaching Arabic to the younger generation. This has resulted in the establishment of numerous schools around the United States that mainly focus on teaching Arabic language, culture, and religious teachings. This study takes a closer look at Al-Bayan School in Sylvania, Ohio, and examines the bilingual strategies used to teach Arabic as a foreign language. Al-Bayan is a weekend school for children and adults, established in 1993, as part of Masjid Saad Foundation. The classes are taught on

Saturdays and include Arabic language and Islamic and Quranic studies (Masjid Saad Foundation, n.d. para. 1). The school also has summer programs for younger students and a two-week intensive Arabic language program for girls (Masjid Saad Foundation, n.d. para. 4). The data is collected through interviews with the teachers, and class observations of four different classes. The interview questions provided information about the students' population, the language skills taught, the teaching methodologies and strategies used, and the challenges faced in teaching Arabic as a foreign language.

### **The Challenges of Teaching Arabic as a Foreign Language in the US**

Arabic language teaching in the U.S. has faced many challenges that hindered its progress over the years. One of these challenges is the very limited number of qualified Arabic language teachers who have academic backgrounds in foreign language teaching, Arabic in particular. The popularity of Arabic language has resulted in the establishment of multiple Arabic programs at different institutions that lack the required experience and knowledge needed to help students develop the language to a high level of proficiency (Al-Batal & Belnap, 2006, p. 390).

Another major challenge of Arabic language teaching is its diglossic nature, which refers to Arabs using different forms of Arabic: MSA for writing and reading accompanied with spoken forms of the language used for daily communication known as dialects. The Arabic diglossia requires teachers of Arabic to decide on the different varieties of Arabic to be included in the classroom in order to help students develop their communicative skills (Taha, 1995, p. 179). The diglossic situation of Arabic is important because of the relation between communicative competence, accuracy, and appropriateness as “grammar should be understood as discourse grammar, where formal

features are seen in terms of their contribution to the extended message and the intended meaning construction” (Taha, 1995, p. 179). The severe detachment within the Arabic language itself between the Classical Arabic, known as “Al-fuṣḥā”, and the Colloquial Arabic, known as “Ammiya,” has resulted in two distinctive approaches to teaching materials; one that teaches “Al-fuṣḥā”, and one that teaches “Ammiya”, without any consideration to what is in-between (Badawi, 1985, p. 16). In addition, most Arabic language books do not differentiate between the different levels of MSA and assume that there is only one variation used in all situations that require the use of MSA, such as the media, literature, and religious contexts. This misrepresentation of MSA in Arabic language teaching materials and the shortage of research that investigate these varieties are affecting the development of Arabic language teaching (Taha, 1995, p. 180).

Interestingly, Younes (2015) claims that the introduction of the ‘Modern Standard Arabic’ term to English speaking learners in the 1960 has negatively affected the field of Arabic language teaching for years. He explains that this term has “helped spread the myth that MSA is a standard language like standard American English... [whereas the case is that] the variety of Arabic designated by this name is in fact Modern Written Arabic” (p.16).

Moreover, the Arabic language forms or dialects vary from one region to another as speakers may share a mutually intelligible or unintelligible language according to the region they come from. Native speakers of Arabic use the language “within a continuum of linguistic competence” (Ryding, 2006, p. 14) which takes different forms influenced by “the formality of a situation, the location of a situation, and the people involved in it” (Ryding, 2006, p. 14), all of which adds to the complexity of learning Arabic language.



According to Badawi (1985), the problematic nature of teaching Arabic language is due to the discrepancies surrounding the different forms of Arabic language ranging from the classical to the colloquial (p. 17). The shift between the Classical Arabic and the Colloquial Arabic results in five different varieties with clear linguistic features, characteristics, and social functions (Badawi, 1985, p. 17). The level of education plays a major role in these varieties which are present throughout all Arab-speaking communities (Badawi, 1985, p. 17). Badawi (1985) explains that the different varieties are classified according to their proximity or distance from the “Fus’ha”, the highest (H), and the “Ammiya”, the lowest (L): level 1 is the highest and stands for the Classical Arabic, or “Fus’hat al-turath”; level 2 is the Modern Standard Arabic, known as “Fus’hat al-asr”; level 3 is the Educated Spoken Arabic, known as “Ammiyat al-muthaqafin”; level 4 is the Semi-literate spoken Arabic, known as “Ammiyat al-mutanawwirin”; level 5 is the Illiterate spoken Arabic, known as “Ammiyat al-ummiyyin” (p. 17). The linguistic characteristics present in level 1 gradually decrease moving to level 5 and vice-versa. These levels overlap and create a “graded continuum of features either as we go from level 1 to level 5 or vice versa” (Badawi, 1985, p. 17). Likewise, Younes (2006) explains that educated native speakers of Arabic language use two varieties which range from classical Arabic described as “pure fuṣḥā” for reading and writing purposes and the colloquial forms described as “pure” dialect for speaking and daily life purposes (p. 159). The language throughout the continuum reveals levels of overlapping linguistic features between both the “Al-fuṣḥā” and the dialect as these features increase towards the middle, which means that they cannot be separated or studied in isolation as they

complement one another to achieve a successful level of communication (Younes, 2006, p. 159).

The students' own perception of the language difficulty and the teachers' belief that the students will succeed in mastering the language is an important factor that influences Arabic language teaching. Belnap (2006) calls this perceptions a self-fulfilling prophecy as he explains that that the 82% of students in the NMELRC survey expressed their belief that they are able to learn Arabic proficiently, and 76% reported that the Arabic teachers shared the same belief of their ability to master the language (pp. 175-176). This indicates the relation between the students' view of the level of difficulty learning the language and the teachers' perception of the students' capacities of achieving a level of competency. Belnap (2006) adds that "the more the teachers show they believe that students can learn Arabic, the less the students feel that Arabic is difficult, and vice versa" (p.175). He notes that the majority of students reported their desire to learn spoken Arabic; however, this desire is influenced by the teachers' own attitudes towards colloquial forms of Arabic and their inclusion in Arabic language lessons (pp. 176-177).

Another challenge facing Arabic language learning is a result of the hostile attitudes toward Arabs and Arabic culture in the United States. This attitude increased after September 11, and further materialized with the rise of hostility and bias against foreign language learning. Hill (2001) calls these attitudes "language panics" which he identifies as a "characteristic discourse of racist culture as it has developed in the United States" (p.245). Bale (2010) further explains the influence language panics have on foreign language education, as he points out the example of the Gibran Academy in New

York, which has faced extensive backlash from conservatives opposing the establishment of such institutions (pp. 125-126).

In spite of the important role the Program, the collaborative study abroad program between the University of Virginia and Yarmouk University in Jordan, has played in improving the status of Arabic language learning in the US, it has faced multiple challenges over the years. Sawaie (2006) explains that the first challenge was linguistic due to the diglossic nature of the Arabic language. Following the steps of most Arabic language programs in the US, The Program initially focused on MSA as well because of its inter-Arab status, as it is used all over the Arab World. However, life in the host country and the need for communication with the native population required knowledge of the local Arabic dialect as well. The students needed to learn a language variety that will enable them to fulfill their daily life activities and needs; therefore, the Program offered a course in Jordanian dialects that prepared the students for real life interactions (Sawaie, 2006, p. 372).

Organizational challenges include learners', cultural, and administrative challenges. Learners' challenges refer to the students' different levels of Arabic proficiency due to the diverse Arabic language programs they come from. In other words, students who finished the same number of years in an Arabic language program at different universities did not share the exact level of language competence and proficiency. These differences can be attributed to factors such as the instructors' teaching methods, the textbooks used, the students' quality and their dedication and commitment, the university's academic atmosphere and the importance given to the foreign languages, and the teaching approaches adopted by the department (Sawaie,

2006, p. 373). These challenges have pushed the Program to adopt an Arabic standardized test instead of considering the number of years spent studying Arabic at a university level. In 1994, the Arabic Proficiency Test (APT) conducted by the Center for Applied Linguistics (CAL) became a requirement for admission but only for three years since administering the test has created more challenges for the Program, in addition to a decrease in the number of applicants. These challenges included conducting the test to students around the country simultaneously, accommodating these students, maintaining the same test environment for all, finding test administrators, and grading the tests in time (Sawaie, 2006, p. 373).

Next, Sawaie (2006) points to the cultural challenges that can be perceived as a result of the newness of foreign language programs in Arabic countries. The cultural differences and the historical tensions between the West and the East have created mistrust between the local population and such programs (p.374). Sawaie (2006) also explains that the Program faced administrative challenges, mainly the difficulty locating qualified instructors able to identify the students' needs and employ different teaching methodologies to successfully teach the different language skills. The Program had problems with the local administrators, especially decision makers, who believe in the idea that any native speaker of Arabic is qualified to teach it regardless of their qualification. Another misconception that caused problems is that the idea that Arabic language and literature PhD holders, with no experience teaching foreign students, are suitable candidates to fulfill foreign language teaching positions (Sawaie, 2006, pp. 374 - 375).

Gender issues, which are a result of the difference perception of male-female relations between the West and the Arab countries, were also a challenge. These issues affect teacher-student relationships inside and outside of the classroom, as male teachers feel more comfortable dealing with male students, and avoid asking female students difficult questions or initiating conversations outside the classroom (Sawaie, 2006, p. 375).

### **Teaching of Arabic grammar**

Teaching grammar as a part of foreign language education has always been a controversial topic. According to Taha (1995), Arabic linguists should not argue about whether or not to include grammar in teaching; instead, the focus should be on the optimal means through which both grammar and communication are blended together to ensure high levels of accuracy and fluency (p. 176). In order to achieve this, Taha (1995) suggests a list of three questions that deal with different elements surrounding grammar teaching. The first question revolves around the grammatical rules that should be taught in the classroom and the order in which they should be presented according to their functions. The second question is about the grammatical mistakes committed at different levels and what steps should be taken to fix them. The final question is about the grammar variations native speakers of Arabic use and how these varieties influence Arabic language learners (Taha, 1995, p. 176). These questions can be figured out in relation to two problems: a global problem that is relevant to the nature of teaching foreign languages, and a more exact issue that revolves around the teaching of Arabic itself (Taha, 1995, p. 176). In regards to the first problem, Arabic language students are still judged on their grammatical accuracy, in spite of the different approaches used to

teach communicative skills, which creates a disagreement between the teachers' objectives and the methods they use (Taha, 1995, pp. 176-177). In other words, students are taught to focus on improving their communication; however, they are evaluated on their grammar.

Curriculum and teaching materials are also a part of this global problem as most Arabic language teaching books do not provide proper explanations of the different structures; instead, they are blended within the different readings, followed by numerous exercises that do not engage the students (Taha, 1995, p. 177). The difference between the inclusion of grammar in beginner level books and intermediate level books is also problematic; grammar in low level books is not accompanied with detailed explanation, whereas in higher levels books, grammar is presented with much explanation, resulting in a change too sudden that does not help students (Taha, 1995, p. 178). The order in which grammatical rules and structures are introduced in many books does not correspond with what rules are needed for communication (Taha, 1995, p. 178).

### **Teaching of Arabic vocabulary**

Vocabulary in Arabic language teaching does not receive the amount of importance it should, as instructors and textbooks focus on grammar instead. Al-Batal (2006) points out that Arabic vocabulary is one of the most difficult aspects of the language and should be included, to a much bigger extent, in teaching. Teachers should use different activities and materials that ensure an interactive communicative approach to building vocabulary which is important to improving other language skills as well (Al-Batal, 2006, p. 332). Acquiring vocabulary through reading, or incidental learning, only works for more advanced students who, at least, reached an intermediate level in their

reading skills (Al-Batal, 2006, p. 332). The complicated nature of Arabic orthography adds to the challenge of learning vocabulary mainly through reading, as teachers should focus on building vocabulary, along with other language skills, through incorporating different activities and exercises (Al-Batal, 2006, pp. 332-333). Teachers should use activities such as games and simulation that build a context around the different vocabulary which helps students remember and retain the newly introduced words. Using isolated wordlists as a method to teach vocabulary is not successful as students will easily forget them, unless the teacher is able to create contexts for these words and incorporate them with the previously learned words and grammar, and with the lesson as a whole (Al-Batal, 2006, p. 334). While using these wordlists can be useful for beginner students, intermediate students require exercises that enable them to build sentences and short paragraphs through using the grammar structures they learned and both new and old vocabulary. For advanced students, Al-Batal (2006) suggests incorporating activities that ask them to use the new words in full paragraphs, such as talking about a country they previously visited or plan to visit, or a favorite author or movie. Incidental learning happens at highly advanced levels where students are proficient, and paired wordlist exercises are no longer needed as they are able to use the dictionary and understand contexts on their own, and new vocabulary is discussed after the reading and understanding texts, not introduced ahead, which may hinder their incidental learning (pp. 334-335).

### **Solutions/Strategies Related to Teaching Arabic as a FL in the U.S.**

To help Arabic language learners deal with the diglossic nature of Arabic, Al-Batal (2018) suggests that Arabic language should not be perceived as constituting of two

separate entities that include the prestigious higher MSA and the lower inferior spoken variations; instead, it should be looked at as one “multidimensional entity that is made up of various components that include Standard Arabic (Al-fuṣḥā), the principal dialect of any Arabic speaker (or learner), and the other Arabic dialect to which all Arabic speakers are increasingly exposed” (p. 7). This view believes that Arabic language programs should incorporate MSA and colloquial Arabic in teaching from the start, instead of postponing it to more advanced levels. In other words, Arabic should be taught as one whole language constituting of many equally valid variations that all contribute to its comprehensiveness. Unlike the previously adopted language separation approach, proponents of this method argue that native Arabic speakers acquire all these variations simultaneously without one affecting the other; an approach that should be followed in Arabic language classes in order to prepare learners for real world interactions with native speakers and enable them to “develop awareness of the synergies that exist among these various components” (Al-Batal, 2018, p.8). Moreover, Ryding (2013) stresses the importance of including colloquial Arabic in Arabic language classes in order to prepare students for their study abroad experiences. This step is crucial in ensuring that students will fully benefit from these opportunities because they will need these skills to communicate with the locals in the countries they visit. As many locals lack the ability to fully communicate in MSA, Arabic language learners should be prepared to engage in colloquial conversations that provide authentic Arabic language communication.

The American Association of Teachers of Arabic (AATA) proposed professional standards for teachers of Arabic (PSTA), in 2001. These standards aim to provide a set of criteria that dictate what is expected of Arabic language instructors and ensures the



qualifications of Arabic teachers, at both school and university levels, as it will determine the required skills, knowledge, and education they should possess (Alosh, Elkhafaifi, & Hammoud, 2006, p. 409). Such criteria are significantly important because of the big increase in student enrollment at different Arabic language programs around the United States. Alosh, Elkhafaifi, & Hammoud (2006) claim that the implementation of PSTA will improve the quality of Arabic teachers and programs to the same level of other, more established, foreign language programs, which will increase the students' language abilities and competence. They add that the PSTA will also affect schools teaching Arabic as it will enhance the level of students which will, in turn, affect Arabic language programs at university levels (p. 411). Similarly, Ryding (2013) points out to the importance of preparing Arabic language teachers with the right pedagogies that will enable them to fulfill their roles. She suggests that teachers should follow a list of ten basic principles to achieve successful Arabic language teaching. One important principal is increasing the teachers' expectations of their students and depart from the traditional view that Arabic language is too difficult to master, especially in its spoken forms. She emphasizes that teachers' expectations affect their teaching, which also affects their students' performances and confidence levels. Ryding (2013) also explains that teachers should keep their teaching interesting and not solely rely on the textbook as the only source for teaching materials. This can be achieved through designing extra activities that engage the learners and provide them with "extensive deliberate practice" (p. 16) and regular written homework which "should be read, graded, and handed back with brief comments as soon as possible" (p. 17). Using Arabic as the main language of instruction and building the lessons around what the students already know are two suggested

principles, which play an important role in Arabic language teaching. Ryding (2013) stresses that teachers should aim at using Arabic 75% of the class time and use the students' native language merely when students' understanding is affected by Arabic use only. For example, teachers can use English to explain a specific grammatical rule that requires a more detailed clarification. She also adds that teachers should use the students' own common knowledge as a starting point to creating lessons, especially with beginner students. For example, a lesson can be designed around country names, or American topics such as American history, music, or culture that students find familiar.

Abdalla & Al-Batal (2010) explain that in spite of the development in Arabic language teaching in recent years due to the federal funding that allowed for teachers' "training, assessment, and development of materials" (p. 11), their results revealed the need for more teacher training opportunities that focus on foreign language pedagogies and teaching methodologies; increasing the collaboration between Arabic language programs in the U.S. and Arabic language programs in the Arab countries in "curriculum design, teaching methodology, development of instructional materials, testing and assessment, and program evaluation" (p. 26); developing Arabic language curriculum that considers teaching colloquial Arabic a major part of its foundation; increasing the focus on Arabic pronunciation and listening comprehension which were reported as two areas that need more attention in Arabic language teaching.

Moreover, Sawaie (2006) also provides a list of solutions that have been implemented to help with the challenges the Program faced. He explains that students are given extensive information before departure regarding gender issues in the host country, in addition to an orientation session for all students held in New York City just before the

trip to Jordan, in which they receive necessary information about what to expect in their trip abroad experience. The Program provides orientation for the Arabic teachers to teach them about American culture and behaviors, which will help in teaching and dealing with the coming students (Sawaie, 2006, pp. 375-376).

The use of songs as an approach to teach Arabic is a method that has gained popularity especially with the increased interest in acquiring colloquial forms of Arabic. Nash and Semaan (2018) propose the use of Arabic songs as an approach to familiarize students with the diglossic nature of Arabic and the different colloquial forms used by native speakers. They also note that songs can provide students with an engaging experience that reveals different cultural elements of the Arabic speaking countries “which allow students to stay connected with current events and the Arab communities inside the U.S and abroad” (p. 8). They emphasize that this method is a convenient option for students interested in exposing themselves to real examples of authentic native Arabic examples that reflect the age’s pop culture and current events.

In one of the few studies that investigated Arabic language teaching to school students, Schwartz & Asli (2014) reported in their research conducted in a bilingual kindergarten with Arab and Jewish children in Israel that teachers used translanguaging, which used both inter-sentence code-switching, and intra-code-switching, in addition to the use of gestures, cognates, translation, and double-book reading strategies, in their instruction to create an interactive bilingual environment in the classroom that encourages the participation of the students in both languages (pp. 27 -30).

Schwartz & Asli (2014) explore the bilingual strategies used to teach Arabic and Hebrew at a kindergarten level class in Israel. Arabic is considered an official language in

Israel, along with Hebrew, which makes this study closer to the research conducted in English/Spanish bilingual education in the United States. The current study examines Arabic language teaching as a foreign language, not as a second language. The area of teaching Arabic as a foreign language to school students is rarely investigated. In my research, I intend to shed light on the different practices used by Arabic language teachers in their instruction. My study will closely examine the strategies used by these teachers as they navigate through their teaching process, the challenges, and the solutions they implement, at Al-Bayan School in Sylvania, Ohio.

## Chapter Two

### Study and Methodology

The purpose of this study is to look at the bilingual strategies used to teach Arabic as a foreign language at Al-Bayan School, in Sylvania, Ohio. Chapter one provided an overview of Arabic language teaching in the United States, and the different methodologies and approaches used to teach a foreign language. In this chapter, I provide a description of the study and present the steps followed to collect the data.

#### Research Question

What are the strategies used by Arabic language teachers to teach Arabic as a foreign language at Al-Bayan School?

#### Study Context

The study took place at Al-Bayan School in Sylvania, Ohio. Al-Bayan is a weekend school that is part of the Masjid Saad Foundation, established in 1993. The school provides classes in Arabic language, Islamic studies, and the Quran, the holy book for Islam. The school uses the Toledo Islamic Academy building, which is also part of the Masjid Saad Foundation, for its operations. The student population at Al-Bayan School mainly consists of Arabic heritage learners. The term “heritage learners” refers to learners who are proficient in a language, culturally related to it, or both (Van Deusen-Scholl, 2003). These students are either born in the US or abroad, learn or are exposed to the language in their childhood; however, due to growing up in a country where the dominant language differs from their heritage language, their heritage language proficiency is not as strong as their dominant language skills. Most of these students did not receive formal education in their heritage language which results in varying

proficiency levels, as some learners may be fluent whereas other are not. Husseinali (2012) points out that in the case of Arabic heritage learners, one should consider a linguistic definition which refers to learners who were brought up in an Arabic household, and another that refers to learners who are culturally related to the language which includes Muslim learners who learn Arabic “to connect to religious texts, especially those who come from homes where the native language of their parents uses Arabic script such as Persian and Urdu” (p. 100).

Some of Al-Bayan School students went to school in their home countries before coming to the US. In general, the students who were born overseas and had some formal education in their native countries are in the most advanced classes, as they are fluent in all language skills. They attend Al-Bayan School to continue their Arabic language education. Most of Al-Bayan School students were born in the US and have attended only American schools. Their levels vary between students who can speak Arabic to those who study it as a foreign language. Detailed information about the students’ backgrounds could not be obtained in order to maintain their privacy.

Classes are taught on Saturdays from 10:30-2:30, including lunch and recess. Each teacher is responsible for teaching Arabic language, Islamic studies, and the Quran, to one class.

### **Participants**

In total, four classes were observed. Class 1, taught by Teacher 1, is a girls-only class, and includes three different levels divided into three groups. The students are 12-14 years old. Group A included students who speak Arabic but don’t read or write it. Group B included one student who can read and write Arabic but cannot speak it. Group C

students are fluent in all language skills including reading, listening, writing, and speaking. Teacher 1 does not have a university degree in education; however, she has twelve years of experience teaching Arabic as a foreign language at Al-Bayan School.

Class 2, taught by Teacher 2, is also a girls-only class, and includes Arabic language heritage learners aged 12-17 years old. Teacher 2 classified the students' levels as ranging from intermediate to advanced on the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Language (ACTFL) scale. The ACTFL scale is a foreign language proficiency guideline that categorizes language skills into categories: novice, intermediate, and advanced. Each category is subdivided into low, mid, and high. This scale "describe[s] the continuum of proficiency from that of the highly articulate, well-educated language user to a level of little or no functional ability" (The American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages, 2012, p. 3). Advanced students can hold conversations with both native and nonnative speakers on different topics using correct grammar and structure and general vocabulary, engage in formal and informal writing, and read and understand main and supporting ideas on a variety of topics. On the other hand, intermediate students can engage in conversation about topics relevant to their lives, mostly using the present tense; use simple sentence and basic vocabulary in their writing answering simple questions; understand everyday face to face communication; comprehend meaning expressed in simple passages and depend on the contexts to understand ideas.

Teacher 2 has a bachelor's in psychology, a master's in curriculum and instruction, and is a member of ACTFL and the American Association of Teachers of Arabic (AATA). She has twenty five years of teaching experience.

The principal explained that single-sex classrooms were requested by the students as they expressed their preference to study in a girls-only environment. This is a result to the students' religious background which does not encourage co-sex education for advanced grades.

Class 3, Taught by Teacher 3, is a co-ed class for students between 9-14 years old. Students are beginner Arabic foreign language speakers. Teacher 3 has a bachelor's degree in physics and has experience teaching math and science. She has worked as an Arabic Language teacher at Al-Bayan School since 2009.

### **Data Collection and Instrument**

The participants were recruited through direct contact with the Al-Bayan School. The researcher visited the school and met with the school's principal. The researcher provided an overview of the study and its goals, upon which subsequent visitations to the classes were organized. The classes to be observed were chosen by the principal, who ensured that they were representative of different language levels taught at the school. During the observations, four classes were observed; however, interviews were conducted with only three teachers as the fourth teacher left her job at the school by the time the interviews were conducted. The data collected in the fourth teacher's class is not included in the study because the interview was not conducted with the teacher.

In each observation, the researcher sat at the back of the class and took detailed notes of the class events. Each observation took between 30-45 minutes. These observations took place in the first school visit.

In the second school visit, the researcher had personal interviews with each instructor. These interviews were conducted inside the school: one interview was



conducted in the teacher's office, and two interviews inside the class. The researcher wrote down the teachers' answers word for word as no audio or video recording was used. Each interview took between 30-45 minutes. During each interview, the following questions were asked:

- 1) What is the population of the class and what is their level of Arabic?
- 2) What dialect of Arabic language do you use/teach and why?
- 3) What Arabic language skills do you teach?
- 4) How do you teach these Arabic language skills?
- 5) What are the languages of instruction?
- 6) Why did you choose to use them?
- 7) How do you use these languages to teach Arabic?
- 8) How do you balance between using the students' L1 and the target language?
- 9) How do you believe that using (the language of instruction/the students' first language) influences the learning of Arabic? Why?
- 10) What textbooks/ materials do you use to teach these Arabic language skills?
- 11) What kinds of activities and assignments do you use to teach Arabic language skills?
- 12) What activities do students like and dislike?
- 13) What kinds of homework / assignments do you assign?
- 14) What activities/ assignments have worked best over the years?
- 15) What is the students' level of improvement in a semester/ over the years?
- 16) What roles does the Arab community/social events play in teaching, maintaining, and improving Arabic?

17) What are the challenges you face teaching Arabic as a FL?

18) What do you do to try to cope with these challenges?

These questions aim at covering the different issues related to teaching Arabic as a foreign language at Al-Bayan School. The purpose of these questions was to understand the circumstances surrounding Arabic language teaching, the methodologies, strategies and approaches used, the challenges faced, the role of the Arab community in Toledo in the teaching of Arabic as a foreign language.

### **Data Analysis**

The observations and the interviews were transcribed and coded into categories that describe the strategies used by the teachers to teach Arabic as a foreign language. These categories include: technology based strategies such as PowerPoint; group based strategies such as working on a poster; bilingual strategies such as code-switching; experience based strategies such as baking; movement based strategies such as finding objects in the classroom; immersion strategies such as using visuals and sounds; motivation-based strategies such as using extra credit; discussion based strategies such as asking questions to the class as a whole.

Chapter Three discusses the results and findings of study, the limitations of the study, as well as recommendations for future research.

## Chapter Three

### Results and Discussion

This study aimed at observing the strategies used by Arabic language teachers in teaching Arabic as a foreign language at Al-Bayan School, in Sylvania, Ohio. To achieve this, I observed four classes and conducted three one-on-one interviews with the instructors. In each observation, I sat at the back of the class for 30-45 minutes and took detailed notes of the class events. Each interview was conducted one-on-one and lasted for 30-45 minutes. The teachers were asked questions about the strategies they use to teach Arabic as a foreign language. This chapter will discuss the results, which were coded into seven categories representing the strategies used by the teachers to teach Arabic as a foreign language. Following the results, a discussion section is included, after which the limitations of the study and the recommendations for future research are presented.

#### Results

Upon close examination of the data, I grouped the strategies used by the teachers into seven categories. These categories include: technology based strategies such as PowerPoint; group based strategies such as working on a poster; bilingual strategies such as code-switching; experience based strategies such as baking; movement based strategies such as finding objects in the classroom; motivation-based strategies such as using extra credit; discussion based strategies such as asking questions to the class as a whole.

## **Technology based strategies**

During the interviews, all teachers expressed their implementation of technology in their lessons. They each pointed out that technology plays an important role in teaching as students find it more interesting when different technology is used. The classrooms are equipped with at least one computer with speakers, a Smart Board, a projector and a screen. All the teachers had PowerPoint presentations of the lessons and used the Smart Board to engage the students through activities that required them to walk up to the board and respond to different questions displayed.

Teacher 1 explained that she mainly uses PowerPoint presentations projected on the screen, which she uses to explain the lesson to the students. During the observation, the class was working on an exercise displayed on the screen and the students went, one by one, to write their answers on the Smart Board.

Teacher 2 explained that using technology has become necessary in today's classes because students are tech savvy and expect the incorporation of technology in teaching. During my observation of Class 2, I noticed that Teacher 2 used PowerPoint to explain the lesson. A bright presentation was projected on the screen and the teacher moved between slides, asking the students questions and adding the answers to the appropriate place on the slide. Another technology that Teacher 2 uses is Voki App, which is an educational application that allows users to create customizable avatars, record their voices, and share or email the final product. Teacher 2 explained that each student creates her avatar and records messages in Arabic. Then, these avatars are shared with the rest of the class, which starts conversations and discussions on different topics. Teacher 2 added that students find this app entertaining and enjoy using it to learn

Arabic. Another type of technology Teacher 2 uses is Edmodo, which is a social learning network that enables teachers to share different learning materials, including quizzes and worksheets, with their students. Teacher 2 explained that the students enjoy using Edmodo because of its interactive nature as they are able to work on different assignments without feeling bored.

Teacher 3 also pointed to using technology in her teaching. She explained that she uses simple PowerPoint presentations with easy-to-understand sentences and activities because her class includes only beginner students who are learning Arabic as a foreign language. She added that she requires students to record themselves engaging in speaking activities which they send to her phone to be later discussed in class. She explained that using recordings as way to assign speaking assignments has proven popular with her students as they have the chance to practice their speaking and record themselves at home, instead of working on written assignments; something they do not enjoy. Another technology that she uses is Quizlet, a study app that allows users to create different types of study materials such as flashcards and quizzes. She added that students like using Quizlet because it helps them study the language in a fun way.

### **Group based strategies**

All the teachers explained that they follow a student-centered approach to teaching. They design their lessons with a focus on group work, which includes class activities that require students to work as a group to achieve certain goals. In each observation, the teachers focused on creating group-environments in which the students are able the practice what they learn.

To accommodate the three different levels in her class, Teacher 1 designs one main lesson which is projected on the screen accompanied by multiple activities for each level. Level A, the students who speak Arabic but do not read or write it, were given worksheets that included reading and vocabulary questions which they had to solve together. Group C were the students fluent in all language skills. They were also required to work together on answering the reading passage questions which included vocabulary, comprehension, and grammar. Group B was only one student who can read and write Arabic but cannot speak it. This student worked mainly alone as she was asked questions by the teacher and had to work on the reading passage by herself.

In the observation, Teacher 2 had all the students sitting at a round table. The projected PowerPoint presentation included vocabulary from the previous class' lesson chosen by the students. They were required to choose the words they found difficult and attempt to find their meanings. The teacher had each word in a sentence on a slide. The students worked together to guess the meaning of these words before sharing it with the teacher. In the interview, Teacher 2 pointed out that she designs different assignments that require group work. One of these assignments was a poster design in which the students had to create posters that discuss new terms they learned in their lessons. Teacher 2 believes that group activities are important because they teach students how to work in a team and how to delegate work, all of which improves their Arabic speaking skills since all communication is in Arabic.

During the observation, Teacher 3 grouped the students into pairs to work on a worksheet about a grammar rule which was explained earlier. The students talked with each other to answer the questions before discussing the answers as a group.

### **Bilingual strategies**

Code-switching was the main bilingual strategy used in all classes. Teachers 1 and 2 said that they mostly use Arabic in teaching, while Teacher 3 explained that she has to use both English and Arabic because her students are all beginners and find it difficult to understand Arabic.

During the observation, Teacher 1 used Arabic only with Groups A and C, and code-switched between Arabic and English when talking to Group B. The students in Groups A and C used Arabic to communicate with each other and with the teacher, while Group B used only English. Teacher 1 said that she uses both MSA and a Palestinian dialect in her teaching.

Teacher 2 used mostly Arabic in her class; however, she used some English words when students had difficulties understanding certain concepts. The code-switching was initiated by the students to which the teacher would respond with a few English words before code-switching back to Arabic. The students used mix of Arabic and English to communicate among each other. Each time the students answered questions in English, the teacher would ask them to use Arabic only. Teacher 1 pointed out that she uses a mix of MSA and Syrian dialect in her teaching.

Teacher 3 explained that code-switching is essential in her teaching because students need to use their first language to understand the different concepts taught in the class. During the observation, Teacher 3 exhibited different forms of code-switching: inter-sentential, intra-sentential, and extra-sentential. During inter-sentential code-switching, she would say one sentence in Arabic followed by one sentence in English. The English sentence would either repeat the idea expressed in the Arabic sentence,

which means this code-switching was more of a translation to the Arabic sentence, or continue the idea started in Arabic. One example of translating the Arabic sentence is: “You do it in a group. ”دا عمل جماعي (this is group work). An example of code-switching between Arabic and English to express one idea is: “how do you put them together? لما لتوصلي اللام مع الالف” (when you connect ‘the lam’ with ‘the alif’). In Intra-sentential code-switching, the teacher used Arabic and English in the same sentence. One example is “which one is which عشان تحددني” (so you can decide). Teacher 3 frequently used extra-sentential code-switching in her teaching. For example, she would say a sentence in English and insert an Arabic term. One example is: “the lesson is اللام الشمسية” (the sun L letter).

### **Experience based strategies**

Teacher 2 is the only teacher that emphasized the use of experience based learning in her teaching. She pointed that students have the chance to work on multiple projects throughout the semester, in which they are able to engage in an outside-the-classroom activity and write about it in Arabic. She explained that these activities relate to the students’ interests which they express in the class. She added that using such activities allows the students to take advantage of their skills in other areas and connect it to Arabic language learning, which enriches their educational experiences and makes it interesting and enjoyable. One example of such activities is baking. The students along with the teacher used the school’s kitchen to bake croissants, after which they were required to write the recipe in Arabic and present it in class. Another example of experience based activity is working as a teacher’s assistant. Each student is asked to help one teacher around the school and work as her assistant. Next, they are required to report



about the experience and the work they did. They are asked to write about it in Arabic and present it to the class.

### **Movement based strategies**

Both Teacher 2 and 3 emphasized using movement-based strategies in their teaching. Teacher 2 said that she does not prefer using a traditional teaching approach where students feel confined to their chairs; instead, she gives students the freedom to move around the class, or around the school, through designing activities that require such movement. One activity she uses includes walking around the school, in which the whole class goes on a walk outside as they discuss in Arabic the benefits of walking and exercise. Next, the students write about this activity and share their writing with the class.

Teacher 3 also uses movement in her teaching. She explained that students find it boring to sit in their seats for the whole class-time, which is why she prefers to engage them with activities that make learning Arabic a more exciting experience. One activity she uses is asking the students to locate objects around the class. The students are asked to find objects that correspond to different colors and write the name of the object, in Arabic, before the students share their objects with the whole class.

### **Motivation-based strategies**

All teachers emphasized the importance of encouraging the students through both intrinsic and extrinsic motivational strategies. Intrinsic motivational strategies the teachers use include creating a teaching environment around the students' needs and interests, fostering the students' interests in Arabic learning, and having high expectations of their progress. External motivational expectations the teachers use include the use of praise and rewards. For example, as an extrinsic motivation strategy,

Teacher 1 said that she provides students with small notebooks which they have to use to track their achievements. With each goal they reach, students are asked to add points to themselves. At the end of the semesters, the students return these notebooks to the teacher to receive extra points. Teacher 1 explained that students compete with each other to receive the highest number of points, which adds a sense of healthy competition in the class. On the other hand, examples of intrinsic motivation that all teachers expressed using include creating a student-centered teaching environment in which the students are heard and appreciated. The teachers also said that they use verbal praise and encouragement to help students not to get discouraged when they are faced with a difficult topic.

### **Discussion based strategies**

All teachers use discussions in their teaching. Throughout the observations, I noticed that each teacher focuses on students' participations through asking open-ended questions that allow students to think and connect what they have learned in the classroom with their own personal knowledge. All teachers also expressed their emphasis on preparing the students to communicate in Arabic, a main reason why they choose student-centered methods of teaching and materials. For example, during my observation, Teacher 2 asked students to come up with sentences using the new word presented on the slide. With each sentence, the students would add details and build a whole story around that sentence. These interactions included jokes and questions about grammar and meaning, all of which was encouraged by the teacher. I noticed how Teacher 2 gave students the freedom to create these stories and add their own points of view. She did not stop their discussions or their story-telling; instead, she engaged with

them asking about details in those stories. For example, one new word was “أغمي” which means to pass out. The students invented a story about a girl named Sarah who passed out while gardening and was later taken to the hospital by her brother. The teacher kept asking questions about the story allowing the students to add more details with each question.

### **Discussion**

During the interviews, the teachers were asked about the challenges they face teaching Arabic as a foreign language. They all expressed that the lack of time available is the biggest problem they face. Since each teacher is responsible for teaching Islamic studies, the Quran, and Arabic language, very limited time is available for each subject. To cope with the time constraints, one notices that each teacher employs numerous strategies in order to take advantage of whatever is available to help students improve their language skills. The flexibility each teacher exhibited in her teaching demonstrates their levels of resourcefulness and ingenuity, which contribute to achieving the set goal of improving the students' Arabic language skills. Contrary to what is expected, all three teachers agreed that the Arabic community in Toledo, Ohio, does not contribute in improving the Arabic language. They all insisted that the community plays a role in promoting Arabic culture but not the language as most events take place in English. This is due to the varied Arabic language levels and dialects among community members which imposes the use of English as the language of communication. This is a missed opportunity that can add to the Arabic language learning experience as students will have the opportunity to practice what they learn with other community members which will

reduce the effect of the limited class time. Involving the community will also expose the students to different Arabic language variations, an important factor in acquiring fluency.

Interestingly, the diglossic nature of the Arabic language was not a problem that the teachers at Al-Bayan School face. This is worth mentioning because previous research in teaching Arabic as a foreign language considers this as one major challenge that faces learners and teachers alike. The debate whether to use only MSA in teaching or to also include a form of colloquial Arabic has been investigated for years. What I noticed at Al-Bayan School is that teachers transition smoothly between both MSA and colloquial Arabic as students learn both simultaneously. This is important because it serves as proof that both MSA and colloquial Arabic can be taught to Arabic language learners without preferring one over the other. What has been debated for years among Arabic as a foreign language researchers has not caused any controversy among Al-Bayan School teachers and students. Similar to the way children learn Arabic language in the Arabic world, where both MSA and colloquial Arabic are used in teaching, Al-Bayan School students switch between the two variations naturally. The students in Class 3 are the closest to the Arabic as a foreign language students in higher education institutions. They approach the language as foreign speakers, unlike Classes 1 and 2 who are heritage learners. Teacher 3 used a Sudanese Arabic dialect and English-Arabic code-switching to explain the lessons which were in MSA. The lesson went smoothly as the students, similar to their teachers, used all these variations to answer the questions and discuss the content.

Upon a close examination of the strategies that have emerged after analyzing the collected data, one notices that they are similar to the strategies used to teach foreign

languages in general. One common example is the use of bilingual strategies, code-switching in particular. Most research on foreign language teaching indicates that code-switching is used one way or another in the classroom. Similar to the examples provided in this study, code-switching occurs in communication between the teachers and the students, or among the students themselves. In each class, the students acquire the teacher's dialect along with the MSA Arabic. Unlike most other languages that are not of a diglossic nature, code-switching in Arabic classes does not occur just between English-Arabic, but also between Arabic variations. All three teachers used a mix of MSA and a colloquial Arabic in their teaching as they code-switched between MSA and a dialect to explain a certain idea or clarify a concept. This standard-language-dialect code-switching characterized all three classroom interactions. In spite of Teacher 1 and 2 limited English-Arabic code-switching, their MSA-Arabic dialect code-switching was a main part of their teaching. For example, MSA was used to read and a colloquial form was used to explain and communicate. Teachers also used colloquial Arabic for friendly interactions with students while MSA was used for more serious discussions. This confirms the fact that MSA is used for more formal situations and colloquial Arabic for the less formal.

Another widely-spread strategy among foreign language teachers is the use of technology, especially in today's world where students expect and may demand the use of modern technology in the classroom. All teachers emphasized that technology plays an important role in their teaching as they are able to take advantage of the different available resources to improve the quality of their lessons and engage the students.

### **Limitations of the Study**

Several limitations exist in the present study. One of these limitations is the small number of observations conducted. Due to the fact that classes at Al-Bayan School were taught only on Saturdays and the limited time available to teachers to finish the assigned teaching materials, only one observation of each class was conducted. The principal expressed her worry that the researcher's presence in the class may discomfort the students, who are not used to having guests in their classrooms. Another limitation is the lack of information on the students' social and linguistic backgrounds which may or may not have influenced their Arabic language learning. Such information was not collected in order to ensure the students' privacy. Maintaining the students' privacy is also the reason for not video-taping the observations, which would have provided a visually recorded observation of the classes' events.

### **Suggestions for Future Research**

Future research in the field of teaching Arabic as a foreign language can examine the different approaches used by teachers at different K-12 institutions around the US. These studies can also look at the differences and similarities between these approaches and the approaches used to teach Arabic as a foreign language at higher education institutions. This comparison can provide a better understanding of the status of Arabic language teaching in the US. Such research can lead to collaborations between K-12 teachers and higher education instructors. This collaboration may include exchanging experiences in order to come up with strategies that can help transition the students from their K-12 Arabic language classes to their undergraduate degrees in Arabic language.

This joint effort can transform Arabic language learning into one unified continuous experience that builds on previous knowledge.

## **Conclusion**

This study attempted to examine the strategies used by Arabic language teachers to teach Arabic as a foreign language at Al-Bayan School, in Sylvania, Ohio. Through class observations and one-on-one interviews with the teachers, I noticed that teachers use technology based strategies such as PowerPoint; group based strategies such as working on a poster; bilingual strategies such as code-switching; experience based strategies such as baking; movement based strategies such as finding objects in the classroom; motivation-based strategies such as using extra credit; discussion based strategies such as asking questions to the class as a whole, in their teaching. Each teacher used these strategies in her own way, focusing on one particular strategy over another depending on the students' needs. The significance of this research comes from the fact that very few studies focus on teaching Arabic as a foreign language at the school-level, as most research investigates teaching Arabic as a foreign language in higher education institutions. This study aims at bridging this gap in research through providing a much needed overview of approaches used by teachers of Arabic as a foreign language at the K-12 level.

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## Appendix A

### Interview Questions

1. What is the population of the class and what is their level of Arabic?
2. What dialect of Arabic language do you use/teach and why?
3. What Arabic language skills do you teach?
4. How do you teach these Arabic language skills?
5. What are the languages of instruction?
6. Why did you choose to use them?
7. How do you use these languages to teach Arabic?
8. How do you balance between using the students' L1 and the target language?
9. How do you believe that using (the language of instruction/the students' first language) influences the learning of Arabic? Why?
10. What textbooks/ materials do you use to teach these Arabic language skills?
11. What kinds of activities and assignments do you use to teach Arabic language skills?
12. What activities do students like and dislike?
13. What kinds of homework / assignments do you assign?
14. What activities/ assignments have worked best over the years?
15. What is the students' level of improvement in a semester/ over the years?
16. What roles does the Arab community/social events play in teaching, maintaining, and improving Arabic?
17. What are the challenges you face teaching Arabic as a FL?
18. What do you do to try to cope with these challenges?