Professionalizing Community-based Arabic Language Education: Prospects and Challenges

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This presentation

The context:
Arabic as a community/heritage language in the international and Australian contexts

The questions:
Existential questions that need to be addressed prior to any efforts to promote Arabic as a community/heritage language

The way forward:
Efforts needed to professionalize the teaching of Arabic as a community language within the Australian context
Recent waves of migration and immigration of Arabic-speaking and Muslim people to Europe, North America, and Australia have significantly increased the demand for Arabic for a variety of purposes including religious, cultural, professional, travel and family-related.

Despite this increasing demand and governmental efforts in some countries, teaching Arabic as a community and heritage language remains an area that is greatly lacking in vision, structure, research, and support.
Need for Arabic within the Australian context: Demographics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percentage of Total Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Australian Muslims</td>
<td>604,240</td>
<td>3.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arabic spoken by a person at home</td>
<td>321,728</td>
<td>1.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australians born in an Arab country</td>
<td>265,224</td>
<td>1.0%</td>
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</tbody>
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Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics: 2016 Census figures
Existential Questions

1. What do we mean when we say “Arabic”?

2. What are we teaching Arabic for? communication vs. performance

3. How relevant is the local context to the learning and teaching of Arabic?

4. What roles should families play in promoting Arabic community language learning?

5. What pedagogies are needed to promote and sustain more effective learning and teaching of Arabic?
1. What do we mean when we say “Arabic”?

- **Standard Arabic** (FuSHaa)
- **Dialects**
2. What are we teaching for? Communication vs. Performance

Connection between Arabic and Islam has resulted in Arabic language curricula that places more focus on the language of performance (religious and literary).

Strong focus on the language of performance in Arab world curricula translates into heavy emphasis on advanced grammatical knowledge disconnected from real life functions.

Focus on the language of performance is often driven by strong interest among some parents and educators in teaching religion through Arabic.
3. How relevant is the local context to learning and teaching Arabic in community education?

Local context is essential in order to relate Arabic to the real world in which the learners live, not to an “imagined reality”

Need for textbooks and materials that reflect both the home/heritage context and the local context and present Arab and Australian characters.

Need for Australian-born teachers to participate in Arabic community centers
4. What roles should families play in promoting community language learning?

- Role of family is crucial in providing additional, constant meaningful input to children.

- Need for a positive attitude towards the richness of diversity in Arabic and Arab culture to help incentivize learning, which will not be successful without a local community.

- First generation parents need to accept that their children’s experience in learning Arabic will be different from theirs.

- Need to be partnering with local authorities to jointly seek ways to provide support for community education.
5. What pedagogies are needed to promote and sustain effective Arabic community language education?

Arabic community language education needs to depart from the traditional pedagogies that are still prevalent in many schools in Arabic-speaking countries, and instead:

- Look to current pedagogies of modern languages, which focus on learners, learning outcomes, collaborative learning, integrated skills
- Focus, first and foremost, on communication not performance standards
- Embrace all varieties of Arabic in the classroom as ingredients of 21st century Arabic language proficiency
The way ahead: Professionalizing Community-based Arabic Language Education in Australia

The way ahead requires a great deal of partnership and collaboration between the government and communities.

Development of Arabic curricula with Australian “flavors” that serve the needs of learners in community centers and public schools that offer Arabic: Mainstreaming Arabic

Professionalizing the teaching of Arabic: Teacher training and certification, mentoring teachers

Professionalizing the learning of Arabic: Proficiency testing and certification throughout community centers, schools, and universities
The Community Education Cycle

- Community language centers
- Schools
- Colleges and universities
- Larger community
Arabic community language education: Toward an Australian model

- Australia has made some important strides in Arabic community language education.
- Efforts are needed to develop a national strategy for community languages (including Arabic) that will not only enhance the presence of Arabic within the Australian context and contribute to the mission of “developing intergenerational linguistic and cultural understandings,” but can also serve as a model for community-based Arabic education worldwide.