

Teaching Arabic as a Second Language in  
International School in Dubai  
A case study exploring new perspectives in learning  
materials design and development

تدريس اللغة العربية كلغه ثانيه في المدارس الدولييه في دبي  
دراسه حاله لاستكشاف أفاق جديده في تصميم مواد التعليم وتطويرها

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## **Dedication**

To my wife Zeinab, I dedicate this dissertation for her patience. It is only when I embarked on my dissertation that I realized how genuine intellectuals who dedicated their works to beloved ones were.

## **Acknowledgment**

I would like to express my thanks and gratitude to my supervisor, Dr. Amanda Howard, for her constructive feedback and encouragement.

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I alone, however, shall be responsible for any shortcomings in this dissertation.

## **Abstract:**

Teaching Arabic as Second/Foreign Language (TASL/TAFL) is still, in many parts of the world, based on intuition and unprincipled methods. Many textbooks and materials designed for this purposes still use outdated pedagogy in Second Language teaching. Although there are some attempts to break with this negative tradition, this gap is still noticed. Since TASL/TAFL has become a global educational enterprise, there is need for sound academic research to be conducted in order to inform the profession. This study investigates ways in which teachers of Arabic as Second Language can be helped to design and develop their own teaching materials. It makes a brief review of theories and principles which are considered in designing syllabuses of other languages, mainly English, for non native learners, and shows how such theories and principles can be adapted in designing Arabic learning materials for non Arabs. The study focuses on international schools in Dubai with the assumption that conclusions reached may be adaptable in other similar context, offering insight on key issues of syllabus design, such as selection.

## **موجز البحث**

لا يزال تدريس اللغة العربية كلغة ثانية أو أجنبية قائماً في كثير من أنحاء العالم على الحدس والطرق التي لا تهتدي بأسس واضحة. فكثير من المقررات والمواد التعليمية المؤلفة لهذا الغرض ما زالت تستخدم أساليب لم تعد مستعملة في تدريس اللغة الثانية. وعلى الرغم من بروز محاولات تسعى إلى نبذ هذا التقليد السلبي، فإن الفجوة حتى الآن ماثلة أمام الأبصار. وحيث إن تدريس العربية لغير العرب قد تحول إلى جهدٍ تعليمي عالمي، فلا مناص من القيام بأبحاث أكاديمية سليمة تُرشد المهنة. لذا جاءت هذه الدراسة للبحث عن الطرق التي يمكن بها مساعدة مُدرسي اللغة العربية إلى الناطقين بغيرها في تأليف موادهم التعليمية وتطويرها. إنها تستعرض استعراضاً موجزاً النظريات والأسس التي يستعين بها واضعو مناهج لغات أخرى، لا سيما الإنجليزية، لغير أبنائها، وتُبين كيف يمكن الاستفادة من هذه الأسس والنظريات في تطوير مواد تعليمية للمتعلمين غير الناطقين بالعربية. ومع أن الدراسة تُركز على المدارس الدولية في دبي إلا أن المفترض أن النتائج التي تُستخلص منها قابلة للتطبيق في بيئات مماثلة.

## **Table of Contents**

<b>Content</b>	<b>Page</b>
<b>1. Chapter One: Introduction</b>	<b>6</b>
1.1 Rationale and motive	7
1.2 Structure and components	8
<b>2. Chapter Two: Literature Review</b>	<b>10</b>
2.1 Lack of interest in Arabic as a first language	11
2.2 Perspectives from inside the Arab world	15
2.3 Perspectives from TAFL professionals outside the Arab world	20
2.4 Technology and Arabic as L2	22
<b>3. Chapter Three: Methodology</b>	<b>25</b>
3.1 Ethical issues	28
<b>4. School X and issues related to materials designing and development</b>	<b>30</b>
4.1 Good reasons for developing in-house materials	30
4.2 Motivation and learning	32
4.3 Content and seeking frequency information from frequency lists and corpora	35
4.4 Selection and gradation of syllabus	37
4.5 Arabic script and phonetics	41
<b>5. Conclusion, limitations and recommendations</b>	<b>46</b>
5.1 Conclusion	47
5.2 Limitations and recommendations	49

**Teaching Arabic as second language in international schools in Dubai**  
**A case study exploring new perspectives in learning materials design and development**

<b>References</b>	50
<b>Appendix A</b>	56
<b>Appendix B</b>	58
<b>Appendix C</b>	59

## **Chapter One: Introduction**

## **1. Introduction**

### **1.1 Rationale and motive**

Recognition of the importance of Arabic language in international communication is growing. In 1973, United Nations, in its Decision Number 28, adopted Arabic as one of its official languages, based on the considerations that Arabic has preserved universal civilization and that it is the language of 19 of UN members (Younus, 1977). Equally, Arab countries, particularly Gulf region countries, are developing economically, and are attracting expatriates from all over the world. This economic change has brought with it some impact on the linguistic situation of the region (Al Matoonq, 2008). In addition to that student intakes in Arabic university programmes in the United States of America, and most likely elsewhere, too, are increasing (Al Batal & Belnap, 2006 and Belnap, 2008).

There are also tensions that oppose Muslim countries, including Arab ones, to the Western countries. Such tensions have shown the dearth of fluent speakers of Arabic to deal with pressing military and political issues (Belnap, *ibid*).

Consequently, the need for understanding Arabic culture and language is expanding. Yet the research and infrastructure available to help facilitate Arabic learning and teaching are not keeping pace with these growing needs (Younus and Badawi, 1983). The main reason for this paradox is failure of textbooks and programmes to implement findings of Applied Linguists on the principles and theories on which quality learning materials should be built.

Studies conducted with the purpose of rectifying this situation are emerging. The bibliography specialized in Arabic language include, among other things, refereed journals on applied linguists, handbooks containing papers authored by renowned Arab and non Arab specialists, and books specifically dealing with different Arabic issues. Among the aforementioned refereed journals, there are *Iqraa*, published by Umul Qura University in Saudi Arabia, *Manhal* and *Faisal*, both published in Saudi Arabia, and

**Teaching Arabic as second language in international schools in Dubai**  
**A case study exploring new perspectives in learning materials design and development**

Arabic for non native speakers, published by the International University of Africa in Khartoum, Sudan, in addition to several annals of different faculties of education and Arabic language.

This study, therefore, hopes to join this community of research. Thus, it may be important to underline that, as far as British University in Dubai (BUiD) is concerned, the work is a pioneering one, and aims at helping teachers design and develop their in-house teaching materials, instead of relying on outside materials. It seeks to answer one key research question. What impacts will some variables, mainly learner variables, have on designing and developing learning materials for students in international schools in Dubai? The primary target audience is Arabic teachers in international schools in Dubai. Nonetheless, teachers elsewhere may benefit from the findings. Also, administrators and other decision makers may find the study helpful for various curriculum decision purposes.

## **1.2 Structure and Components**

This is how the study is structured. After this Introduction, which constitutes Chapter One, the Literature Review, representing Chapter Two, will follow. The Review highlights the main topics and questions over which experts in teaching Arabic to non Arabs, inside and outside the Arab world debate. It also gives place to voices that allude that so long as problems of teaching Arabic as First Language are not solved, it would be difficult to effectively deal with teaching Arabic as Second or Foreign language. Next is Chapter three featuring the Methodology of the research, the core of the study, Part three. It starts with the Methodology section in which the method used to arrive at the findings is revealed, and ethical issues, such as preservation of the privacy of the school under investigation, are dealt with. The last part is conclusion and recommendations. The conclusion reiterates briefly the main points found by the research. And the recommendations are statements addressed to different players and stakeholders, including Ministry of Education officials, experts, parents, teachers, administrators and learners, involved in Arabic as Second Language education. Care is taken that the recommendations are realistic and supported by the findings of the survey and the principles featured in the Literature Review. Awareness of the limitations of the

**Teaching Arabic as second language in international schools in Dubai**  
**A case study exploring new perspectives in learning materials design and development**

investigation is reflected in the recommendations. A detailed signposting is provided in the Contents.

## **Chapter Two: Literature Review**

## **2. Literature Review**

The survey of the literature the author has got access to has revealed three trends. There are authors who, rightly, believe that the problems and handicaps faced by Teaching Arabic as Second/Foreign Language (TASL/TAFL) is further complicated by the poor status of Arabic as first language. These authors (Al Rajhi, 2006, for instance), therefore, allude that the priority is to focus on Arabic as a first language, and subsequently other secondary issues would disappear or be easier to tackle. The second trend represents the practice and thinking of teachers and intellectuals involved in TASL within the Arab world, mainly in five key institutions: The International Arabic Institute in Khartoum, an Arab League-financed institute aiming at training teachers of Arabic to non-Arabs, Arabic Language Institute in King Saud University (KSU) in Saudi Arabia, Arabic Language Institute in Umul Qura University (UQU) in Saudi Arabia and Arabic Language Institute in the American University in Cairo (AUC). Finally, there are views and opinions of professionals and intellectuals of TAFL outside the Arab world, mainly in USA and UK. This selective focus on TAFL as it is practiced in USA and UK is justified by both the limits and orientation of this study, which, as it is explicitly stated in the title, makes special references to international schools in Dubai in which English is the language of instruction.

### **2.1 Lack of interest in Arabic as first language**

In the first trend, authors put the greater share of blame on the shoulders of the governments who, they believe, failed to enact sound linguistic policies in order to protect Arabic language in its land (see, for instance, contributors to ECSSR, 2008). Some consequences of this claimed failure are exclusion of Arabic as language of instruction as well as communication in official institutions. Writers who look into challenges facing Arabic language seem to agree that imposing on Arab students to study in a language other than their native language, which is Arabic represents a great disadvantage for them (Al Maatooq, 2008; Al Anati & Barhoumeh, 2007). Such authors insist that, contrary to the opinion held by some Arab intellectuals and decision makers that Arabic is a poetic language and therefore is not fit to convey science, and is not able

**Teaching Arabic as second language in international schools in Dubai**  
**A case study exploring new perspectives in learning materials design and development**

to keep pace with ever growing technology and modern discoveries, the problem lies with the Arabs themselves and not Arabic. They argue that if Arabs had put Arabic into use in different spheres of intellectual and communicative activities, they would have found it easier to adapt the language to new situations arising from development and discoveries. An example can be given to explain the points these authors want to make. Blogs, for instance, are recent tools, which were not known before. But due to their common use, an Arabic label is used to name them. The Arabic word for blog is “mudawwan”. They remind that Arabic was the medium that brought us Greek science and philosophy over centuries in the past. The problem, therefore, does not lie in Arabic per se but rather with Arabs and particularly the lack of political will by high-ranking decision makers.

Another sign of lack of political will, which is present in this type of literature, is the marginalization of Arabic academies in different Arab countries (Abu Zaid, 2008). It is useful to remind the reader that there are Arabic academies in ten Arab countries: Syria, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Morocco, Tunisia, Sudan, Libya, Palestine and Algeria. The oldest and most important of these ten are the first four ones: Arabic Academy in Damascus, formerly known as the Scientific Arabic Academy, established in 1919; Arabic Academy in Cairo, established in 1937; Arabic Academy in Bagdad, established in 1947 and Arabic Academy in Amman, established in 1977. And in 1971, a union of Arabic academies was established in Cairo (Abu Zaid, *ibid*). The academies must have functioned as l’Académie Française, French Academy (Al Anati & Barhoumeh, *ibid*). That it is to say that they should have been invested with wider powers entitling them to monitor the development of Arabic language and define the accepted mechanisms by which new words and structures are admitted into Arabic language (for instance coinage, translation or assigning new meanings to old terms). Moreover, the academies are seriously understaffed, are usually chaired by great scholars but advanced in age and they often suffer from tight budget pressures. Even the accommodations assigned to these institutions, which should have been considered as prestigious ones, is not adequate. They are usually lodged in small and poor infrastructure (Abu Zaid, *ibid*). One of the observed consequences of the ineffectiveness of Arabic academies is total reign of linguistic anarchy with each region, if not each country, adopting its own way of

**Teaching Arabic as second language in international schools in Dubai**  
**A case study exploring new perspectives in learning materials design and development**

generating terminologies and naming of civilization products. A simple example, the word “computer”, cited by El Hannach (2008, p.483), will be enough to illustrate the linguistic problem in the Arab world. Some writers use an arabized form of the English word (cumbyootar). Others use the word “haasoob”, which is the literal translation of computer. Others, mainly from the Francophone Arab Maghreb, use the word “nazhaama”, which is the literal translation of the French word “ordinnateur”. This situation prevails despite their being an office supposed to be in charge of dealing with similar issues, namely Office of Arabization Coordination, located in Rabat, which is one of Arab League organs (Jumu’ah, 2008).

A third issue connected to linguistic policies is advertisement and display of print in streets, roads and public places. Al Anati and Barhoumeh (2007) identify two forms of this practice. On one hand there are notices and messages posted on placards, signboards and billboards in public places to advertise for products and services or give information. They notice that not all materials communicated through this media are in Arabic. Some of them are Arabic transcriptions of non Arabic words. According to Al Anati and Barhoumeh (ibid) governments need to put in place clear laws in order to regulate advertising and print display, since it affects language acquisition, and therefore must be integrated into governments educational polices. On the other hand, there are inscriptions and labels on various consumable products including products of daily use, such as T-shirts and stationery products, which are one of items most closely connected to learners. In addition to the issue of choice of language questioned by the authors, there is another point related to display of print and which, they rightly think, need to be dealt with. Some materials are written in erroneous or poor Arabic, contributing to exposure of learners to incorrect input. The author of this study participated last year in monitoring students in an Arabic language project as part of the end of term examination. The assignment was to go and find errors and poor Arabic in Arabic-language prints, displayed in any space in a public place (vehicles, walls, billboards, road signs, as examples), document them in photographs and suggest better rephrases. Getting the relevant materials was not a great challenge to our students. The findings included misspellings, poor rendering of English phrases leading to ridiculous Arabic structures.

**Teaching Arabic as second language in international schools in Dubai**  
**A case study exploring new perspectives in learning materials design and development**

Beside the above mentioned policy issues, there are other linguistic issues, which cannot be disassociated from policy. Al-Rajhi (2006), for instance, questions the rationale of talking of TASL/TAFL while Arabic as first language has not got enough focus as other languages. If one compares the situation in the Arabic language with the situation in other languages, he goes on, one realizes how far Arabic is lagging behind. He, for instance, indicates that until now no serious studies have been undertaken based on sound academic basis to accurately describe how Arab children acquire Arabic as first language. In his views, most of the research done on Arabic is done according to “prefabricated samples developed in the West” (p. 382). He explains that one of the major defects in linguistic research in the Arab world is that, at best, it only describes the reality of issues and stops short of suggesting practical solutions. Al Rajhi (ibid) also points out, rightly, to a gap in linguistic research in Arabic. Until now Arabic has not got computerized databases and corpuses documenting its historic and current uses despite easiness of such project due to the progress of IT technology. The absence of such databases and corpuses is, in his view, the reason behind lateness in lexicographic research, and subsequently Arabic language lacks an adequate monolingual dictionary that guides learners to current usage of Arabic. He also points out that training colleges in Arab world have failed to change their old curricula despite the huge and rapid change in teaching needs.

Many authors (see for instance, Al Sa’afeen, 2008 and Taimah, 2008) agree with Al Rajhi (ibid) on the need of benefiting from applied linguistic findings in developing learning materials for Arabic. They agree that one of the main causes of the poor quality of Arabic curricula and syllabi is that they are designed and developed according to intuitions and personal moods instead of basing them on informed findings of experts in the field of Applied Linguistics. Such being the case of Arabic as first language, it is now possible to imagine how daunting it is to design learning materials for learners of Arabic as Foreign or Second Language. Al Rajhi (ibid) asserts that due to this situation, experts within the Arab world have very little to offer to promote TASL/TAFL.

**Teaching Arabic as second language in international schools in Dubai**  
**A case study exploring new perspectives in learning materials design and development**

Despite this gloomy picture, Al Rajhi (2006) ends with an optimistic note. He believes that there are recent developments that carry hope for the future of Arabic. Among these developments in his view is the emergence of new communication system represented in the sprout of pan-Arab satellite channels broadcasting in Modern Standard Arabic (MSA). Nonetheless, other authors of this perspective who agree that spread of Arabic channels is a positive thing for Arabic language education in particular and Arab education in general observe with concern the backsliding of many channels to using colloquial varieties in their programmes (see for instance Ateyeh, 2008). Competition of colloquial varieties with the MSA is one of the factors on which blame is put for the fall of Arabic standards in schools and the Arab societies at large. Ateyeh (ibid, p.43) reports findings of a survey conducted on Jordanian TV programmes over a period of six months by Head of the Jordanian Academy of Arabic Language, and according to which colloquial variety accounts for 81.8% of the total time of the TV broadcast. The findings are presented and cited with the purpose of demonstrating the extent to which colloquial varieties compete with MSA, even in a media, which was supposed to use formal language and discourse.

But Al Rajhi (ibid) observes that there is a growing tendency among younger generations across various Arab countries to use MSA. This growing use of MSA observed by Al Rajhi (ibid) is due to the new media discourse including frequent exposure to Mexican and Brazilian romantic films usually dubbed in MSA, hence the sarcastic custom of referring to someone who speaks MSA, particularly in friendly informal situations as Mexican speaker (Taimah, 2008).

## **2.2 Perspectives from inside the Arab world**

The second trend of this Section features, as it is stated earlier, studies on Teaching Arabic as Second Language (TASL) within the Arab world. TASL is relatively a nascent field. Compared with English, for instance, Arabic as foreign or second language has started attracting experts' attention very recently (Stevens, 2006). In our modern era, early attempts to teach Arabic as a second language in the Arab world can be traced to

**Teaching Arabic as second language in international schools in Dubai**  
**A case study exploring new perspectives in learning materials design and development**

the establishment by the then British colonial authorities of the Middle East Centre for Arab Studies (MECAS) in 1944 in Jerusalem (McLoughlin, 2008). In 1947 the Centre was, upon security reasons, moved to Shamlan in Lebanon, where it operated until its closure in 1978 for political instability. It was established in order to provide British intelligence and military authorities with their linguistic needs in Arabic, and focused mainly on local dialects (Younus, 1977). Teaching in the Centre was not grounded on research or any systematic theory (McLoughlin, *ibid*). This trend persisted and was the general rule for some years. In fact To'mah (1978) highlights that there is a mistaken belief throughout the Arab world that teaching Arabic to non Arabs does not need specific qualifications, and that any graduate of Arabic language fits for the job. To'mah (*ibid*) claims that this practice is at the origin of the complaints about the difficulty of Arabic language, due to the fact of assigning teaching Arabic to incompetent teachers.

There have been, however, serious attempts to depart from this practice since the Arab League created, in 1974 in Sudan, Khartoum International Institute with the purpose of training teachers of Arabic to non Arabs (Younus, *ibid*). One of the objectives of Khartoum International Institute is to conduct theoretical, practical and field research in Arabic language based on modern methods of language research with the aim of eliciting accurate data that inform the pedagogy of Arabic language (Younus, *ibid*). Institutes of the same orientation and others specifically dedicated to teaching Arabic to non Arabs followed. What is common between them all is their genuine will to base their teaching on methodical research, principled practice and systematic theory. This change led to an increase in academic literature in the field of Teaching Arabic as a Second Language.

There are TASL writers who focus on general topics such as evaluating of existing programmes (Younus, *ibid*; Madkour, 1985; Al Ghali and Abdallah, 1991; Taimah, 1998; Al Fawzan, 2007a), while others focus on specific topics such as reading (Ibrahim, 1987), functional dictation (Muhammad, 1991) and phonological (Al Fawzan, 2007b). Some questions raised about TASL are also present in the field of Arabic as first language. Among such issues are sound linguistic policies and planning, and viable teacher training

**Teaching Arabic as second language in international schools in Dubai**  
**A case study exploring new perspectives in learning materials design and development**

programmes. Nonetheless, the interest in this section is more in the topics that are particular to teaching Arabic to non Arabs.

It seems that there is a wide agreement among TASL experts on laying the greater share of blame for the slow progress of teaching Arabic in general, and TASL in particular on the pedagogy and teaching approach (To'mah, 1978; Medkour, 1985 and Madkour and Haridi, 2006; and Al Fawzan, 2007a). Madkour and Haridi (ibid) believe that Grammar Translation Approach, which was prevailing in Teaching Arabic in mid-70s, alienated learners from grammar and made them feel frustrated about the whole process of learning Arabic. Al Ghali and Abdallah (1991) oppose the idea of teaching grammar to learners below advanced level, as an independent subject with its own textbook. They propose that instead of presenting it in decontextualized sentence examples, grammar should be taught in meaningful texts that are suitable for the learners' level and can develop their vocabulary and structure knowledge. This proposition is in line with the notional-functional and communicative approaches in language teaching (see, for instance, Nunan, 2004). Madkour and Haridi (ibid) suggest a similar alternative with a slight difference. They propose that authentic texts should be introduced to learners along with its structures instead of introducing structures and other rules through the text. Madkour and Haridi (ibid) think that without this, teachers and materials writers may be compelled to twist and distort texts in a way or another for the sake of grammatical rules. There are contributors in the field of learning materials design who concur with this view, and hold that text, instead of grammar and structures, should be the starting teaching point (Nunan, D. 2004; Tomlinson, 2010).

Another major problems identified in TASL is the amalgamation between teaching Arabic to Arabs and teaching Arabic to non Arabs. To'ma (1978) affirms that acquisition of Arabic by non Arab nationals of Arab countries, such as Kurds and Turkmens in Iraq, and Berbers in the Arab Maghreb, has received little focus. He explains that Arabic has been taught to all students as a national language without consideration of their respective native languages. In the same line of argument, Al Fawzan (2007a) observes that Arab countries respond to requests of Arabic learning materials from non Arab Muslims by

**Teaching Arabic as second language in international schools in Dubai**  
**A case study exploring new perspectives in learning materials design and development**

sending them textbooks designed for Arab learners. According to Al Fawzan (2007a) there are linguistic aspects that are part of the implicit knowledge of the native speaker, and therefore are not featured in such textbooks. The non native speaker, on the contrary is alien to Arabic language and its culture. Therefore, such omitted aspects are crucial for the non native learner. Al Fawzan (ibid) indicates that while the Arab child comes to school with implicit knowledge of the phonological system and some vocabulary he or she has already acquired from home, the non native speaker starts from zero and has to learn everything. Madkour and Haridi (2006), who raised this point earlier, confirm that even textbooks designed for non Arab learners outside the Arab world should not be used to teach non Arab learners inside the Arab world because the contexts are different.

Also among the key issues featured in the literature is the cultural content of the Arabic language. The authors emphasize that no foreign or second language can be learned independently from the culture and civilization of its speakers (Madkour, 1985; Younus, 1986 and Al Fawzan, ibid). Other experts writing about Second Language Acquisition (SLA) in general concur with the cultural aspect of language learning. They hold that a child acquires native culture simultaneously with language (Davis, 1995). Madkour (ibid) believes that without interest in the culture of the target language the learner will find it difficult to acquire the language. He exemplifies his opinion with the orientalist who knew a lot about Arabic but failed to acquire the language due to their negative attitude towards Arab and Muslim culture. Madkour (ibid) is echoed by Al Ghali and Abdallah (1991) who maintain that it is through learning the culture of the target language that the learner succeeds to socialize with native speakers. Al Fawzan (ibid) also agrees that linguistic skills alone are not enough for the learner to communicate in Arabic as a second language. He believes that the cultural content of Arabic language shall be the Islamic culture because Islam is the religion of the vast majority of Arabs. Therefore, it is essential in his view that the learner of Arabic as second language be familiar with basic aspects of Islam in order to communicate well with his or her target Arab interlocutors.

**Teaching Arabic as second language in international schools in Dubai**  
**A case study exploring new perspectives in learning materials design and development**

While Al Fawzan's (2007a) proposition may not raise problems with non Arab Muslim learners of Arabic as a second language, it may be sensitive for non Muslim ones. In Part Two some aspects of this sensitivity will be highlighted.

Finally as a conclusion to this section here is another important issue that captures the interest of TASL experts – the adequate language variety in teaching. It is important to remind that the native linguistic behaviour in the Arab world is the use a formal variety of Arabic commonly referred to as the Modern Standard Arabic, for writing and formal situations, such as in press and political speeches, and *aamiyaa* (or colloquial variety) at home, streets and informal situations. This dual use is known in the literature as diglossia (England, 2006).

It is apparent that there is a strong opposition from many intellectuals and researchers in TASL to using colloquial varieties in teaching Arabic to non Arabs (Younus, 1977; Madkour, 1985; Madkour and Haridi 2006; and Al Ghali and Abdallah, 1991). Younus (ibid) asserts that the exaggerated role given to colloquial varieties by foreign experts has been subject to criticism on the ground that none of these ones is official language in any Arab country, and that MSA is the medium in use in official communication. In fact any suggestion of using colloquial variety in formal situations, particularly education, is regarded with great suspicion, because the idea of using colloquial dialects in literacy was linked to colonial authorities, and it was seen as an attempt of trying to keep Arabs away from MSA, which is the language of Quran and one of the most important unifying factors for Arabs (Madkour and Haridi, 2006). In addition to this reason, Madkour (ibid) argues that MSA must be the medium for teaching Arabic to non Arabs because it is the common variety all educated people across the Arab world use. Otherwise, he adds, the learner will be confused and perplexed due to fact that each country has got its own colloquial variety. Al Ghali and Abdallah (ibid) emphasize that colloquial varieties are not only different across the Arab countries but also within single countries. They explain that Arabic dialect in Upper Egypt is different from the Arabic dialect in the Coastal Egypt. Therefore, adopting a colloquial variety as a medium of education for non Arabs is not a practical choice in the view of these writers. These arguments are seemingly

**Teaching Arabic as second language in international schools in Dubai**  
**A case study exploring new perspectives in learning materials design and development**

relevant, but as it shall be clear in the next section, TAFL experts have different view about use of colloquial varieties in teaching non Arabs.

Nonetheless, the diglossic situation in Arabic language and the serious challenges it poses to non native learners need to be recognized. Some writers have suggested practical solutions. Madkour and Haridi (2006) and Younus (1977) among other writers report high frequency of great percentage of words in Arabic textbooks for primary schools in Egypt in colloquial variety. They conclude from this that the area that constitute an overlap between MSA and colloquial varieties must be given priority in any planning and designing Arabic textbooks and learning materials for Arab as well as non Arab learners. Younes (2006) echoes this proposition. There are intellectuals who maintain that the similarities between MSA and colloquial varieties outstrip their differences, and therefore the importance of this overlap area is not to be underestimated (Younes, 2006). According to these intellectuals it is this factor that makes an Arab illiterate understand some verses from the Quran or a politician's speech delivered in MSA.

### **2.3 Perspective from TAFL professionals outside the Arab world**

The final part of this Chapter is devoted to the perspective of TAFL experts, professionals directly or indirectly involved in teaching Arabic as a Foreign Language outside the Arab world. The investigation of the main debates among scholars of this area will start where the preceding part ended, that is to say the issue of which variety to choose as teaching medium. There is seemingly a wide agreement among intellectuals of this perspective that sticking to one variety of the Arabic language, namely MSA, the written form of Arabic language is ignoring the linguistic reality of the Arab world (Wahba, 2006). No native speaker of Arabic, they remind, uses the fully-inflected form of Arabic except in some formal specific situations. Otherwise, the most common linguistic behaviour among Arabs, even in some formal situations, is to switch between half-inflected form of MSA and colloquial varieties. This is why some experts believe that the fully-inflected form of MSA is a language without native speakers (Winke and

**Teaching Arabic as second language in international schools in Dubai**  
**A case study exploring new perspectives in learning materials design and development**

Aquil, 2006). Agreeing with this opinion, Wahba (2006, p140) prefers the phrase “diglossic user of Arabic”, instead of native speaker of Arabic, as an attempt to redefine the native speaker of Arabic.

Recognition of this situation should, in the view of some authors, have pedagogical implications. Wahba (2006) warns that selecting one variety of Arabic for non native learners will not allow them to communicate effectively. Younes (2006) reports on a successful experience of integrating MSA and colloquial varieties in the same course by using Fusha in reading materials exclusively and using colloquial varieties in spoken activities. He believes that this approach is more realistic than focusing on one variety or teaching them separately. But Younes (ibid) affirms that student needs are central in the decision of which variety to choose. He thinks if the learners’ purpose is for instance to understand the language of Quran, it is better to designed for them a purely reading syllabus based on MSA without any spoken components. If their goal is to communicate the variety selected for their instruction must be different. Wahba (ibid, p141) agrees on the essentiality of considering student needs in planning any Arabic course for non Arabs. One of the common problems with Arabic programmes, in his view, is that courses are “variety-driven rather than learner’s needs-driven”.

However, there are some programmes in the US that focus on the MSA variety. An example of these ones is the summer immersion Arabic program jointly held in Yarmouk, Jordan, by University of Virginia and Yarmouk University (Sawaie, 2006). It focuses on MSA for two reasons: (1) MSA is not a regional variety, and therefore its learners can communicate across Arab countries, and (2) MSA variety is offered virtually in all institutions teaching Arabic in US.

Anyway, the debate about the definition of an Arab native speaker is interesting on the basis that there are some other key issues hinging on it. The aims, goals and targets of learning tasks all depend on the conception of the builder of how target-like proficiency in Arabic is defined. Likewise is the issue of assessment. The designer of any assessment

**Teaching Arabic as second language in international schools in Dubai**  
**A case study exploring new perspectives in learning materials design and development**

tool needs to specify the criteria against which the learners are assessed, which is a daunting task (Stevens, 2006).

The assumed difficulty of Arabic language is another talking point in TAFL literature. It has been reported above that TASL experts reject the assumption (Madkour, 1977; To'mah, 1978; Madkour and Haridi, 2006 and Al Fawzan 2007a). But Arabic is classified by the Foreign Service Institute (FSI), the American institute in charge of providing training in foreign languages to American diplomats and other persons serving abroad, under Group IV, which includes languages relatively difficult for American learners (Stevens, 2006). The classification is done according to the length of training required to move the learner from beginning to a certain level of proficiency. Stevens (ibid) discusses the assumption that Arabic is a difficult language by contrasting some aspects of Arabic grammar and writing system with corresponding aspects and writing systems of languages rated by FSI as easier for American learners than Arabic. He demonstrates many cases where Arabic rules and structures are less complex than corresponding rules and structures in the compared languages. He concludes from this that the assumed difficulty of Arabic cannot be attributed to linguistic factors, but rather to pedagogical ones.

It is observed by other writers that the audio-lingual and grammar translation methods, which are outdated methods in other languages, are still in use in Arabic programmes in US and Europe. Among the arguments given in support of the use of traditional methods in TAFL despite emergence of newer methods is the diglossic situation in Arabic and complexity of Arabic grammar and morphology (Abdallah, 2006).

## **2.4 Technology and Arabic as L2**

The last point in this section is the use of technology. The role of information technology in supporting delivery of content is now taken for granted in almost every field of learning. Arabic language education is not an exception despite some handicaps. Computer-Aided Language Learning (CALL) entered Arabic, and its first version was

**Teaching Arabic as second language in international schools in Dubai**  
**A case study exploring new perspectives in learning materials design and development**

developed by western scholars assisted by Arab colleagues and students. From mid 1980s contributions have started coming from the Arab world (Ditters, 2006). In the beginning, there were some hitches in the programme due to the nature of Arabic language script moving from right to left, and the fact that American English was dominant on computer, but later localized versions of hardware and software sprouted, bringing about solutions for easier input (Ditters, *ibid*). Where such solutions are not available, alternatives may be provided such as popup Arabic keyboard, a virtual keyboard software that allows the user to key in Arabic letters by clicking buttons, in computers that are not equipped with Arabic-supported keyboard (Madhany, 2006). The advancement of information technology is accredited to creation and establishment of national and interstate agencies and organisations, which have as mission to research and arabize science and technology, such as ALESCO (Arab League Education, Sciences and Cultural Organisation) (Ditters, *ibid*).

Nonetheless, despite these major breakthroughs, the web is still underestimated and underused as a huge source for information, data and reference (Ditters, *ibid*).

There are some basic applications which can be used in designing learning. Microsoft Word is one example of these applications (Madhany, 2006). Among other features, Word has got a spellchecker, which is useful for learners in writing assignments. Internet, email and chat rooms are very popular in the Arab world. It is, therefore, possible to encourage learners of Arabic as Foreign Language to make friends in order to practice writing and speaking.

However, the advantages of information technology in learning must be counterbalanced with its disadvantages. Stevens (2006) warns that there are risks that technology as a means for distraction may outweigh its benefits as facilitator of learning and communication. Moreover, it is reported in the literature that one of the key factors that slow acquisition of basic writing skills by Arabic learners of Indo-European background is the huge distance between the writing system of their native languages and that of Arabic. Therefore educators should be careful about introducing beginners to typing, lest it may cost them valuable time for practicing handwriting.

**Teaching Arabic as second language in international schools in Dubai**  
**A case study exploring new perspectives in learning materials design and development**

This survey of previous literature has shown that there are, apparently, no studies specifically focusing on teaching Arabic as second language in international schools in Dubai. Therefore, this study wishes to bring its contribution, however modest it might be, towards filling that gap.

## **Chapter Three: Methodology**

### **3. Methodology**

The study investigates the impact of some variables, mainly individual ethnographic variables, on designing Arabic learning materials for non Arab students in a particular international school in Dubai. It uses a technique, which is similar to case study. No quantity data have been collected. Therefore, the study tilts more towards qualitative method of research, with an etic (outsider) perspective. It is an etic perspective because the author is not a participant in the practice under investigation (Davis, 1995).

However, classifying the study under the category of qualitative research requires some caution. Hence, the use of the expression “it tilts towards...” instead of stating straightforward that it falls under qualitative research. Some specialists in qualitative research have expressed skepticisms towards the tendency of automatically considering any methods research not using quantification or experimental paradigms as qualitative research (Lazaraton, 1995). Research methodology usually referred to as qualitative encapsulates different approaches, such as discourse analysis and ethnography.

Another argument against hasty classification of research is that confusion is often made between technique of research and method of research (Davis, *ibid*). Researchers may mislabel their works as qualitative research just because they have used one or more techniques generally used in qualitative research. In other words, presence of one or more techniques used in qualitative methods of research does not qualify the research to be considered as a qualitative one. Moreover, case study is considered as a technique for collecting data rather than a method of research on its own (Lazaraton, *ibid*).

Nonetheless, for practical reasons, and despite the above reservations, the choice in this Chapter is to identify this study with qualitative research. Debate over classification of research is book-length or at least journal-length, which is far beyond the limits of this survey.

Qualitative methods of research have attracted criticisms from experts on various aspects. They are, as some of the experts hold, subjective (Flynn & Foley, 2009), they lack rigour

**Teaching Arabic as second language in international schools in Dubai**  
**A case study exploring new perspectives in learning materials design and development**

and, consequently, are unable to produce replicable hard facts that can be generalizable to contexts other than the ones under investigation (Davis, 1995; Lazaraton, 1995). More seriously they have been accused of being purely descriptive, generating very little knowledge that contributes to our understanding of topics (Davis, *ibid*).

But in the recent years there have been voices in favour of restoring trust to qualitative research and consider it as equally useful as quantitative research (Lazaraton, *ibid*). In addition to that, positive aspects of qualitative research are recognized. Among these ones is that, due to the familiarity of the researcher with observed subjects, it provides detailed description, and often it links findings to relevant social contexts. And this is one of the reasons why sociolinguists favour it, because of the central role they give to context (Lazaraton, *ibid*). There is another recognized positive point for qualitative research, or at least one of its approaches, namely, longitudinal one. That is the importance it gives to time. A longitudinal approach of research restricts itself to small subjects, but observing them at different points of time.

For this study in particular the method used displays certain limitations. The questions of materials design and development are discussed in the light of the profile of the students of school subject of the case study, and which is named in the study as School X, for the purpose of preserving their privacy. Due to time and other constraints, almost no other variables have been considered apart from variables concerning the learners. Other variables, which may not be less important, could have been included in order to shed more lights on different factors that are involved in teachers designing and developing their own teaching materials. For instance, it was interesting to know how ready School X Administration would be to reward Arabic teacher materially and/or morally for the time they spend on developing materials for the benefit of School X reputation. In addition to depending on high expertise and long experience, materials design and development is a challenging task, especially these days when use of information technology is required in order to produce quality materials, which can compete with other distracting material in capturing teenagers' interest and attention (Tomlinson, 2010). If an administration of a school is not ready to recognize such efforts with

**Teaching Arabic as second language in international schools in Dubai**  
**A case study exploring new perspectives in learning materials design and development**

adequate incentives, either materially in forms of allowances, salary bonuses or time release, or morally in form of certificates of recognition, it would be hard to imagine how faculty members would be motivated to carry this task through. Therefore, knowledge of this variable would have been a useful feedback.

Another obvious limitation of the method used in this study is that the learners profile used as a background against which research questions have been discussed is other-construed profile. It is entirely based on information provided by an individual in charge of Arabic curriculum. Student self-perspective is not included. Time constraints did not allow to design questionnaires meant to elicit self-image. As it will be clear in Chapter Four, there is strong relationship between motivation and learning. Student self-reports on what is important, interesting and raises curiosity would have informed that section better.

Moreover, the data contained in the appendices represent one-sided perspective. Therefore, some kind of cross-checking and triangulation was needed. It was advisable that the author had made field visits to School X with the purpose of getting opportunity to interact with various players in materials design. Talking to teachers in teacher rooms and seeing them in action could have provided useful insights. The same can be said about observing teacher-student and student-student interaction.

### **3.1 Ethical issues**

On a final note, adequate care has been taken with the aim of preserving the privacy of the school referred to in the research. As stated early, the label School X was used throughout the study to replace its real name, wherever reference was made to the school. Due care has also been taken in the appendices so that not to include any information that may lead to the identification of the concerned schools.

It is hoped that subsequent research undertaken with the purpose of enlightening different stakeholders and decision makers will avoid the enumerated shortcomings and try to carry the research question further.

**Chapter Four: School X and issues related to materials  
designing and development**

## **4. School X and issues related to materials designing and development**

This Part will be devoted to exploring some issues, which School X has to take into consideration in designing and developing their own teaching materials, based on the profiles of their students (see Appendix A). Several important issues are involved in the process, but due to the scope of this study, the investigation will be limited to three issues only: motivation, contents and seeking frequency information from corpora, Arabic script and phonetics.

### **4.1. Good reasons for developing in-house materials**

But first, the starting point will be to demonstrate why it is important for the School to develop their own teaching materials, instead of merely choosing from the available coursebooks in the market.

The first reason is the individuality of learners. Learners are different from each other in motivation, attitudes, emotions and cognitive capabilities (Tomlinson, 2010). Due to these individual differences there is a growing tendency among applied linguists, particularly the needs analysts, to break away with old tradition in which teaching materials were developed without specific learning group in mind (Long, 2005). They insist that any particular learning group must be regarded as independent one, and their course must be tailored to their specific needs (Long, *ibid*; Richards, 2001). The situation in School X lends support to this view. As it is clear from Appendix A, the school has two types of students: native Arabs who take an L1 Arabic programme. These students are, therefore, beyond the interest of this study. And non natives who take an L2 Arabic programme. These are the focus of this Part. The latter are from different races (Africans, Asians and Europeans). It is essential for the School, represented in its Arabic department, to cater for the needs of these learners.

The second reason is that teachers understand their students better in terms of determining their needs (Jolly & Bolitho, 2010), and therefore are more able to write materials that capture their attention and interests. Teachers also know the number of

**Teaching Arabic as second language in international schools in Dubai**  
**A case study exploring new perspectives in learning materials design and development**

periods available to them, their class size and anticipate loss of periods due to expected and emergency events. This is a clear advantage for a teacher designing and developing in-house materials over writers of global coursebooks, who are not aware of these variables.

The third reason is that materials writing and development is part of teacher personal and professional development (Richards, 2001). Student teachers usually study the theory of materials design and development in college. When they start their service they get the opportunity to put the theories they have learnt into practice. They start first using materials developed by others without questioning. Then when they have got some experience they may adapt such materials. And as they become more experienced they design their own materials (Jolly & Bolitho, 2010).

The fourth reason is that global textbooks are market-oriented. Money and time have been invested in them, and their publishers want them to gain as wide acceptance as possible. Sometimes compromises are made in global textbooks in order to escape censor (Bell & Gower, 2010). Therefore, pedagogical judgments may not necessarily be the priorities of commercial textbooks producers. And it is noted that the wider the targeted audience of a textbook is the less able it becomes to cater for individual needs. (Tomlinson, 2010)

It may be fair before closing this section to point out that there is a debate over the choice between using commercial textbook and developing in-house teaching materials. On the pro-side of the debate stand parties that have interests in textbook industries, namely, textbook writers and publishers. Their arguments is, among other things, that use of commercial textbooks saves time because it frees teachers from a huge burden and allows them to devote their valuable time to the most important part of their job – teaching (Bell & Gower, 2010). They also claim, as a reply to the accusation by the opponents that use of commercial textbooks deny teachers and learners control over the learning process and de-skills teachers, that current global coursebooks are flexible and can be used by teachers as resources rather than books they follow rigidly from the beginning to the end.

It is not the aim of this study to delve in the debate because it is beyond its scope. However, based on the situation of TAFL and TASL, as it is summarized in the Literature Review, it seems safe to believe that it would be better for teachers in School X not only to be familiar with teaching materials design and development but also to be competent in it.

## **4.2. Motivation and learning**

The first key point teachers in School X should consider when writing their materials is motivation. Experts emphasize the importance of motivation in learning a second language in general. It is considered by some of them as a key factor for success in SLA (Gass & Selinker, 2008). It is investigated in SLA studies along with other factors that make individual differences, such as aptitude, personality and attitude (Dewaele, 2009). Motivation is therefore individual. It means what motivates a particular student or a group of students does not necessarily motivate another student or group of students. As a concept, there seems not to be unanimity among researchers on the definition of motivation. Lest this study overstep its limits, there are no intentions to dive into the disagreement. Nonetheless, they seem to agree on motivation as an internal character with observable behaviour manifestation that has positive impact on learning and achievement (Gass,& Selinker, *ibid*; Dewaele, *ibid*).

There are many factors that can raise motivation. One of these factors is the status of one's language in global market. For instance, native speakers of languages of limited spread around the world are usually more motivated in learning a foreign language than native speakers of languages with wider global spread. Thus, speakers of languages like French and Chinese are found to be more motivated in learning a foreign language than speakers of English (Dewaele, *ibid*). Teachers in School X need to take this variable into consideration. Their students come from various linguistic and ethnic backgrounds. Therefore, they will not be equal in what makes them want learn Arabic as foreign language. The teachers need to think about what types of reinforcement suit their different students. Questionnaires may provide valuable information.

**Teaching Arabic as second language in international schools in Dubai**  
**A case study exploring new perspectives in learning materials design and development**

Another factor that raises motivation is conspicuousness of the purpose of the course to the learner. It is important for the teachers to know “how to fashion particular subjects so that they have relevance beyond themselves” (Widdowson, 1983, p7). In other words it is essential for the teachers to demonstrate to the learners in the teaching materials they develop that the course is an instrument and not a goal in itself. That means that the learners need to understand that there is a utilitarian use of the course they are doing. This is a real challenge to Arabic teachers in School X. They teach general purpose Arabic language programme. And, unlike students of Language for Specific Purposes (LSP) who know that there will be an ultimate use of the course they are doing, either in the academic or occupational areas, students of Languages for General Purposes (LGP) may not necessary know that they will have an opportunity to put what they learn in use in real life (Widdowson, *ibid*). One of possible way of alleviating this disadvantage is reliance on authentic texts. This will become clearer when talking about content selection. Meanwhile, it may be useful to suggest that Arabic satellite channels, particularly the pan Arabic Al Jazeera news channel, regularly feature guests from all over the world in debate and talk show programmes. Some of the guests are European and American specialists expressing themselves in clear Arabic with high precision. Such programmes can be exploited in pedagogical tasks. They may well boost the motivation of European and American learners. Furthermore, Al Jazeera, and probably other channels too, have correspondents in Asian countries who are local citizens, speaking Arabic fluently. Excerpts from dispatches of such correspondents may serve as good motivator for students of Asian origin. Of course, it is needless to remind that copyright issues must be taken into consideration.

Another factor to be considered in relation to raising motivation of learners in School X is the degree of previous and current exposure to Arabic outside classroom. Apart from cognates in languages like Farsi and Urdu, some students may get more opportunities than others for exposure to Arabic outside classroom, either through friends or evening Quran and/or Arabic classes. Another form of this exposure to Arabic is the religious programmes in TV and radio in native dialects. It is common practice of presenters of religious programmes in languages and dialects other than Arabic to quote verses and

**Teaching Arabic as second language in international schools in Dubai**  
**A case study exploring new perspectives in learning materials design and development**

hadiths (Prophet's sayings) in their original Arabic first, before translating and explaining them. This advantage outside classroom may engender success, which may yield motivation, as it is noticed that there is a circular relationship between motivation and success. Motivation leads to success, and success increases motivation (Gass & Selinker, 2008).

In the Literature Review it is pointed out to the low attitude of many Arabs towards their own language, especially use of Arabic in education. This attitude, no doubt, affects negatively the motivation of students who want to study Arabic. This is particularly so in international schools in the Arab world, of which School X belong. Non native Arab students in School X have friends and colleagues who are there because Arabic is not a priority to their parents. Friends and colleagues need to interact and communicate with each other. Need and desire to communicate with L2 interlocutors have been defined by some researchers as motivators to learning (Noels & Giles, 2009). However, in this case, School X non Arab students will find that they do not need to speak Arabic to communicate with their Arab colleagues. Students of international schools have a popular reputation of being good English speakers, and this is one of the reasons why they attract students from high social class. It is useful that Arabic teachers in School X think of designing tasks and activities with strong reinforcing in order to encourage more interaction between students in Arabic.

In principle, residence in the target language country is an advantage for the learners (Dewaele, 2009). But this is not necessarily so in some Gulf countries. The supervisor of the author of this dissertation reported to him (personal communication) a personal experience when she was planning to visit another Gulf country with her husband. She was expecting to find learning Arabic easy for her, but when she arrived she saw different reality, which of course has an impact on her motivation for learning Arabic.

### **4.3. Content and seeking information from frequency lists and corpora**

One of the clear trends in designing and developing materials for language learners is linking content to use. It has been noticed that no use of language can be made without a purpose and subjective attitude (Tomlinson, 2010), therefore the traditional practice of basing learning materials on data drawn from idealized form of language use is seen as great disadvantage to language learner (Tomlinson, *ibid*). The alternative is tools that inform us on language use as documented in spoken and written texts (Reppen, 2010; Willis, 2010). These are known as corpora. A corpus is a large collection of authentic texts with the aim of finding the actual use of a language (Tomlinson, *ibid*).

In teaching English, the use of corpora in order to inform dictionaries and language references started in mid 1990s (Reppen, 2010). Corpora provide lexicographers with valuable pieces of information, including use and collocation patterns. The concordance line plays a great role in this direction. It is a long vertical line, which shows a target word or group of words along with words that are more probable to co-occur with it on both sides, that is to say before and after the target words/group of words, arranged according to order of frequency. This provides lexicographers with indication on which meaning of a headword they need to introduce first.

Frequency lists are lists that show the words that occur most frequently in particular text. However, they differ from corpora in that they do not give words in context. They are simply lists of words not embedded in their contexts.

In the pedagogic application, corpora help teachers and learning materials developers identify the language their students are most probably to encounter in real life, so that they give it priority in syllabus selection (Van Mol, 2008). But it is essential to bear in mind that frequency patterns of words and expressions vary according to discourse (Willis, 2010). A word that is highly frequent in general discourse may not be so in medical discourse for instance. This requires from teachers to be aware of the type of the

**Teaching Arabic as second language in international schools in Dubai**  
**A case study exploring new perspectives in learning materials design and development**

discourse their students need. Corpora are exploited in classroom teaching and materials development not only to illustrate written discourses but also to introduce unplanned spontaneous discourse. There is a tendency to use authentic dialogues to supplant scripted concocted ones in teaching speaking skills (Willis, 2010; Carter, et al, 2010). This is an advantage to language learning because it supports the principle of purposefulness, which is discussed above in the brief enumerations of key factors, which can help boost the motivation of Arabic learners.

Development in corpus linguistic is not confined to English. Other languages, including Arabic, are benefitting from corpus linguistics (Van Mol, 2008). Earlier, it is reported in the Literature Review the critical picture Al Rajhi (2006) drew for the Arabic language education, even for native Arab students. Between that time and now, some progress has been made. For instance, seventy-five Arabic newspapers have been made freely accessible at this website [www.arabic2000.com](http://www.arabic2000.com) (Ditters, 2006). Dilworth B. Parkinson, a professor of Arabic at Brigham Young University has compiled a corpus accessible at <http://arabiccorpus.byu.edu> (Van Mol, *ibid*). Mark Van Mol, an Arabic professor in the Institute of Modern Languages in the University of Leuven in Belgium, has compiled an Arabic corpus of 4,000,000 words, dating between 1980 and 2008, drawn from newspapers from all over the Arab world (Van Mol, 2008). Tim Buckwalter and Dilworth Parkinson authored a frequency dictionary of Arabic, featuring the most frequent 5000 words in MSA and some words from various regional dialects, based on a database composed of 30 million words from all over the Arab world (Buckwalter & Parkinson, 2011).

Despite this considerable progress, some problems still persist. Three principal problems are reported by Van Mol (2008). The first one is that the computer code for Arabic has not yet been uniformized, which make transfer of file between Mac and PC impossible. The second one is that the software programs used for searching the databases are deeply imperfect so far as Arabic words are concerned, due to non existence of tagging (full vocalization and indication of grammar class). If a word is searched the results will be a great number of hits of the homographs of that word, regardless of their parts of speech

and grammatical categories. Van Mol (2008) illustrates this point with the limitations of Parkinson's database despite its important size. This fact has been confirmed by the author of this study, who tried to investigate the Arabic word for male, "thakar" (classified under the part of speech of noun). There were many hits of that word, highlighting the meaning of "to say" or "state", which is a verb. This is partly due to the fact that Arabic has a consonantal script, a point that will be explained better in the coming section. The third problem reported by Van Mol (ibid) is the difficulty of ensuring the representativeness of the corpus. In other words, the extent to which compiled and stored authentic texts represent the target discourse is highly important. The next step, therefore, is to discuss insight teachers in School X can get from frequency information in designing their own teaching materials.

#### **4.4. Selection and grading of syllabus**

Experts emphasize that syllabus selection should be informed by real use (Tomlinson, 2010; Reppen & Simpson, 2002). This real use can be indicated by corpora compiled from the target discourse. It can also be assessed by analyzing the target situation (Long, 2005). Frequency lists and dictionaries can be consulted to define which type of vocabulary, structures and grammar points must be given priority. For that purpose, it is important to take into consideration a number of pedagogical principles.

Among the above-referred principles is to assign proper place to vocabulary. Early learning materials have drawn criticism for marginalization of vocabulary teaching. The practice is attributed to many reasons including their structure-oriented nature in addition to the mistaken belief held by some teachers that learners can reach proficiency with reduced vocabulary provided they mastered grammar and language structures (Milton, 2009). It has been observed that there is a tendency of paying very little attention to vocabulary teaching in TAFL by providing very little vocabulary building activities, and focusing more on grammar as a mean of developing proficiency (Al Batal, 2006).

Another essential principle is the importance of being aware of the disadvantage of basing vocabulary learning activities on decontextualized words, such as words games (see Appendix C for an illustration of a sample of such activities designed by School X

**Teaching Arabic as second language in international schools in Dubai**  
**A case study exploring new perspectives in learning materials design and development**

Arabic teachers). If similar activities are used, there is a need to provide adequate context for the benefit of learners. One possible way of doing it is to explore the corpora for real use sentences.

The third principle is that while there are no reported studies for Arabic on lexical requirement for different learning levels, some anecdotal reports estimate the size of vocabulary a learner needs to reach proficiency at 3000 – 3500 of frequently used words (Al Batal, 2006). Madkour and Haridi (2006), citing Taimah, put the estimates for a non native child between 2000 and 2500 words, provided they learn two accompanying skills, forming words into sentences and using dictionaries.

This may give teachers in School X a hint on the grading of language syllabus including vocabulary. It is possible for the teachers to be even nearer to precision in their breakdown of the lexical syllabi on different grades, by considering the propositions made by Taimah (1998, p123), who assigned lexis limits to different level bands. For instance, grade 1 between 200 and 250 words; grade 2 between 300 and 400 words; and grade 3 between 500 and 600 words. He maintains that the lexis must be graded in a way that new words do not exceed 10 words per lesson and gradually increasing to 30 words per lesson by grade 3. While Taimah (ibid) was talking about designing Arabic curriculum for native Arab students, his proposition may be interesting in TAFL/TASL, because it could be used as a starting point for an empirical research to determine how the limits apply to L2 learners.

The Arabic Department of the School has four different levels for every year group (see Appendix A), therefore this vocabulary can be graded to suit different levels in the year groups. By gradation language experts mean the arrangement of the learning items. In other words, which topic should be presented first and what next (Richards, 2001). Some criteria for gradation of language syllabus are suggested in the literature. They include among other things: chronology order, arranging syllabus according to their nature from simple to complex and needs criteria (Richards, ibid).

**Teaching Arabic as second language in international schools in Dubai**  
**A case study exploring new perspectives in learning materials design and development**

Among the learning outcomes set by the Administration of School X for Arabic subject are that students will be able to read restaurant menus and fill out arrival/departure forms in airport. Task-based Language Teaching (TBLT) suits these outcomes. Pedagogic tasks can be modelled on role-play of targeted communicative situation in real life (Nunan, 2004). Some students can play the role of waiters or waitresses while others play the role of customers. However, the task developer needs to be aware of the issue of dialect varieties discussed in the Literature Review. In normal real life situation, native Arabs would make their orders in their regional dialects. It is also possible to build activities around seeking and giving directions in the airport, such as asking for directions to the prayer room for ladies or men (for Muslim students), to duty-free shop and departure gates.

Moreover, as the learners advance in their Arabic course, they will find themselves in great need of a dictionary to cope with new words. But in addition to the lack of principled base for most of the modern Arabic dictionaries as identified by Al Rajhi (2006) in the Literature Review, L2 students may find it difficult to use some dictionaries, which do not classify words alphabetically but according to their morphological roots (Saleem, 1995). Using such dictionaries requires somewhat advanced knowledge of morphology (Omar, 1998). To illustrate this, it is helpful to take one word as an example. The word <tirah> (vengeance), in a dictionary that adopt alphabetical arrangement is classified under the letter <t>, but dictionary which adopt morphological original as basis for classification put it under <w>, because the original of the word is <watara>.

However, there is a wide practice now among Arab lexicographers to arrange dictionaries according to alphabetical order, for the sake of simplification. But the language of the definition is another sticking point (Omar, *ibid*). While Oxford and other dictionaries (Oxford,2010) adopt a bank of words from which they choose their language of defining words, there does not seem that Arabic dictionaries choose their language of definition according to principled basis.

**Teaching Arabic as second language in international schools in Dubai**  
**A case study exploring new perspectives in learning materials design and development**

Equally, it is important that learning materials contain items that are meant to help learners acquire culture of the target language, in this case Arabic. It has been reported in the Literature Review the wide agreement between linguists of the importance of the cultural aspect in language learning. Native children acquire their cultures as they acquire their languages. L2 learners, on the contrary, do not have this advantage. This means they need to be exposed to relevant cultural input. It is believed that television and video are useful means for help learners acquire target culture (Vanderplank, 2009). This can inform Arabic teachers in School X that it is a good idea to use authentic items from the media portraying various aspects of Arab life, for instance how Arab homes are designed, what the daily Arab foods are and what special foods they prefer on special days such as Eid days. It is also important for the learners to know what things are considered taboo by Arabs in order to be able to successfully interact with target interlocutors.

Al Fawzan (2007a), as it was stated in the Literature Review, proposes Islamic topics as the cultural contents for Arabic. But caution is needed. In an interview this author conducted with a teacher in one international school in Sharjah (see Appendix B), she enumerated among the handicaps of learning Arabic her students face, their parents' fear that they might convert to Islam. She states that their parents discourage them from studying seriously, and advise them to try only to get the marks required by the Ministry to avoid repeating. This means that the learners need to understand that there is nothing in the Arabic programmes that may raise their fears.

The concluding note of this section will be a remark pertaining to a type of School X students. Some of them who are from Asian background are native speakers of Farsi and Urdu, and similar languages, which share considerable amounts of cognates with Arabic. It is helpful to exploit this advantage for the benefit of these students. Nonetheless, it may also be a factor that contributes to individual differentiation, because there are students who have not got that advantage due to the difference of their native languages. Prudence is also advisable since there are, too, a number of false friends between these languages and Arabic.

## **4.5. Arabic script and phonetics**

Arabic has a consonantal script (Asaker, 1980, 1986 and; Cook, 2004). Vowels are not considered as letters in Arabic writing system (Dawood, 2001). They are used as diacritical marks, placed above or under the consonants, whose functions are to facilitate reading aloud consonants (Cook, *ibid*). The Arabic alphabet consists of 28 letters, all consonants. Eventually, materials meant for learners at beginning levels usually are presented with full vocalization. But, as learners progress the vowels are omitted progressively, because they are predictable from context. Examples A below can help illustrate this idea:

Example A: the word <ktb> كتب. Here are the possible readings of this word:

A1: kataba: wrote or written

A2: kutiba: is or was written

A3: kutub: books

This is just an illustration. It was possible to choose a word with more possible readings. Due to this situation, advanced Arabic readers read in nonlinear way using top down skills (Brustad, 2006). In other words, in order to read accurately, they do not use only information from the print stimuli, but also extra-textual clues, including the surrounding text and even knowledge of the world. Another distinctive feature of Arabic script is the direction of its movement. Arabic is written from right to left, which is opposite the direction of scripts of Indo-European languages. Moreover, Arabic letters change in shape as their position change (Shahata, 2002). Many letters have initial, medial and final shapes. Consequently, it is not uncommon to see a lot of traditional textbooks that adopt the methodology of isolating letters for beginners starting with presenting Arabic letters in different shapes combined with all diacritical vowel symbols, producing often a fairly cumbersome layout.

While students who are native speakers of Farsi and Urdu may cope with Arabic writing systems, students from Indo-European background may find this situation challenging. Some experts believe that Arabic vocabulary acquisition is complicated by orthography

**Teaching Arabic as second language in international schools in Dubai**  
**A case study exploring new perspectives in learning materials design and development**

(Al Batal, 2006). But not all of them share this view. Belnap (2006), a TAFL expert, asserts that although American learners complain about the Arabic script they can easily learn it.

There is an attempt to change the Arabic writing system (Asaker, 1980, 1986). The proposition aims at disambiguating the Arabic writing. It isolates two directions of Arabic writing: a vertical one, which refers to the letters and all diacritical symbols placed on and beneath them; and a linear one, which refers to the horizontal arrangement of letters in words. The core of the idea is to reconsider vowels as letters, just like consonants. Instead of using vowels as diacritical marks, the proposition suggests to write them in front of the letters, on the symbol known to the typists as kashida, a long horizontal line just on the script level. The proposition also calls for the omission of two diacritical marks: the long vowels, based on the fact that they are predictable because of the semi vowel letters with which they combine, and sukoon (a small zero-like symbol placed above a consonant to signal that it is not followed by a vowel), which is a negative concept.

The proposition does not seem to have got support so far. Nonetheless, it highlights a pressing pedagogical need.

In the light of the above, two insights emerge:

First, the Arabic writing system may be challenging to some learners but it is learnable (Belnap, *ibid*). It is therefore advisable to present it to beginner students in a way that does not cause frustration to them. There is a funny popular video clip song in which the singer enumerates the names of Arabic alphabetical letters while the letters pop up accompanied with concrete items captioned with their labels, which illustrate the target letters inscribed in an outstanding colour. Such materials may be useful for the purpose of basic receptive knowledge of Arabic letters That is to say elementary skill of recognizing printed letters.

Second, the nature of the Arabic writing system should not discourage teachers from teaching the Arabic script, and consequently make them think of teaching Arabic with

**Teaching Arabic as second language in international schools in Dubai**  
**A case study exploring new perspectives in learning materials design and development**

Roman script. It has been observed that such practice may be disadvantageous to learners (Taimiah, 2008). In addition to the fact that it prevents literacy acquisition in Arabic, it may also negatively affect the phonetic production of learners. Roman script is adopted to represent phonemes of the languages using it. Not all phonemes are shared between Arabic and these languages. By using Roman script, other letters will be used to represent the Arabic phonemes that do not exist in the Roman languages, which of course have different phonetic realization.

The last aspect of this issue is phonetics. Here again the varying profile of School X students will have pedagogical implications. To begin with the smallest units, the sounds, it will be noted that the native languages of the learners differ in similarities and differences. The area of similarities is greater than the area of dissimilarities (Madkour, 1985). However, the area of dissimilarities, as little as it is, requires great efforts, particular for basic level students. Early stage of learning pronunciation is considerably critical. Errors of pronunciation acquired during this period are said to be very difficult to unlearn (Abdul Aziz & Sulaiman, 1981). Nonetheless, caution is required so that overemphasis on pronunciation may not take all the instructional time. Pronunciation acquisition is an accumulative skill, and attaining native-like pronunciation takes time (El Emeen, 1997).

Teaching phonetic skills, including sounds, involves two aspects: acoustic perception, which is the ability of the learners to recognize the sounds they hear; and production, which is a perfect pronunciation of the sounds, as measured by a native person realization (Abdul Aziz & Sulaiman, *ibid*; El Emeen, *ibid* and Younus & Badawi, 1983). For acoustic perception, minimal pairs have been proved to be an effective methods of teaching learners recognition of single sounds (Younus & Badawi, *ibid*). But it is very important to choose target sounds from different position, i.e. initial, medial and final sounds (Abdul Aziz and Sulaiman, *ibid*).

The Arabic materials designed by teachers of Schools X for their students need to target specific problems arising from the nature of the native languages of the learners. At

**Teaching Arabic as second language in international schools in Dubai**  
**A case study exploring new perspectives in learning materials design and development**

instructional level, focus must be on the students who struggle with particular aspects of Arabic phonetics. Native speakers of English for instance are anticipated to have problems with long consonants. Consonant length is not a contrastive feature in English. While in Arabic the word Abbas, for instance, is realized as ab-baas, a native speaker of English may hear and pronounce it as just abaas. In Arabic long or doubled consonants are signally graphically with a special diacritical symbol placed on it, known as shedda (Younus & Badawi, 1983).

It is stated above that the overlapping areas between Arabic and English phonemes are greater than the peculiar areas belonging to each language. This seems to be an advantage for the benefit of teaching Arabic sounds to a native speaker of English. There is, however, a misleading aspect in this statement. Difficulties of pronunciation and perception of target sounds does not always arise from the non existence of those sounds in the native language. The problems may rather arise from different distribution of the sounds in the two languages (El Emeen, 1997). This means that learners may have problems with some sounds not because they do not exist in their native languages, but because its distribution patterns in their native languages are different from its distribution patterns in the target language. The phonetic system of each language places constraints on co-occurrence of sounds and sounds occurring in particular positions in the words (distributions of sounds). These constraints are known as phonotactic rules (Roach, 2009; Fromkin et al, 2007; and McMahon, 2002).

To take just one example, English phonotactic rules do not allow the sound /h/ to occur at the end of a word. The pedagogic implication of this fact is that it is anticipated that learners who are native speakers of English will have problems in perceiving and producing the rounded <t> (ṭ), which is usually turned at final or temporary pauses into /h/ (El Emeen, ibid and Madkour & Haridi, 2006). Therefore, the word, tamrah (a date) may be heard and produced as tamraa.

Finally it is essential for phonetic syllabi to include tasks and activities designed to help the learners acquire stress patterns and intonation of Arabic words and sentences. The

**Teaching Arabic as second language in international schools in Dubai**  
**A case study exploring new perspectives in learning materials design and development**

importance of these features can be communicated to learners by exposing them to sentences that change their meaning due to intonation direction (El Emeen, *ibid*).

Example B clarifies this point further:

B. Muhammad wasal. It can be realized either as

B1 muhammad wasal (with a falling intonation, and therefore it becomes a statement), or  
as

B2 muhammad wasal (with a rising intonation, and therefore it becomes a question).

Learners also need to be exposed to other communicative functions of intonation and stress. Stress and intonation can both be used to convey respect or scorn (Taimah, 1998).

## **Chapter Five: Conclusion, recommendations and limitations**

## **5. Conclusion, recommendations and limitations**

### **5.1 Conclusion**

Arabic language education is growing more and more into a global industry. Expanding demands for acquiring the language from non Arabs inside and outside the Arab world still outstrip the available opportunities. Design and development of quality learning materials will be useful for reducing the gap. For that purpose, cooperation from various parties interested in teaching Arabic is necessary. While college-level programmes are capturing experts' attention, Arabic for non Arabs in secondary schools does not seem to have the same focus. Yet, benefits of such focus are obvious. Secondary school students are prospective college students. Arabic language skills would, then, be an asset for both learners who decide to further their Arabic knowledge at college level and their future teachers.

International schools in Dubai, which were the focus of this study, are institutions that gather students from different nationalities, cultures, ethnics and languages (see Appendix A). Designing and developing learning materials for such disparate population is not an easy task. And what makes that task more difficult is the status of Arabic in the Arab countries, particularly Gulf region countries, with the reality suggesting that Gulf countries probably are not the best place for learning Arabic.

Nonetheless, with the huge advancement in Applied Linguistic and technology, particularly Corpus Linguistics, there is now very little excuse for not trying to reverse the trend. Teachers in, School X and, by extension, other international schools need to know the needs of their learners and their linguistic and ethnic background in order to be able to design materials that best suit them. Questionnaires and short diagnostic tests at the beginning of each academic year, if not each semester, will provide valuable information. Learner variables are definitely important, but not the only important variables affecting designing quality learning materials. A broader picture is essential to identify all elements that facilitate to write materials that can capture the interest of teenage students.

**Teaching Arabic as second language in international schools in Dubai**  
**A case study exploring new perspectives in learning materials design and development**

But teachers in international schools in Dubai are not the only players and interested parties in Arabic learning materials design. The parties are widespread all over the world. It is incumbent, therefore, upon various players, mainly Arabic training institutes and research producers, to cooperate tightly. Currently, the extent of the cooperation has not yet reached a satisfactory level. Its absence is observed, even between TASL providers within the Arab world. Madkour and Haridi (2006) state that one of the reasons for the weakness of TASAL in Arab world is the absence of coordination between its institutions, resulting in constant reinvention of the wheel.

In fact the cooperation should not be confined to institutions operating in the Arab world. There are renowned published experts and institutes involved in teaching Arabic as Foreign Language in the West, particularly USA and UK. Their efforts should be valued and their contributions need to be recognized. With corpora and dictionaries they compiled and the books and articles they authored, their contributions should not be underestimated. Seeking cooperation and help from such parties will be a great advantage for the cause of TASL/TAFL pedagogy. The West has preceded the Arab and Muslim worlds in establishing modern schools for teaching Arabic as a non native language (Younus, 1977), therefore, this accumulative experience should be seen as a great wealth. Furthermore, as second and foreign languages, European languages are far ahead of Arabic in terms of research and teaching and learning infrastructures, and some of the pedagogies and methodologies developed to facilitate their acquisition by non native speakers, which are suitable for the Arab and Islamic contexts, can be borrowed to enhance Arabic teaching and learning.

Political decision makers, too, have their role to play in order to support Arabic language education. The centrality of informed language planning and of enacting sound language policies has been emphasized by experts in the literature. There are strong voices expressing surprise at weakening Arabic among and by its own people. The message is clear. If Arabs want others to be interested in their language they should themselves be interested in their own language.

## **5.2. Limitations and recommendations**

Some considerations that could have contributed to a deeper analysis of the research question could not be made, due to time constraints. There are several variables, other than learner ones that affects materials writing. Administration attitude, parent views, teacher training backgrounds are just examples.

In the light of the findings of the study in general and its limitations in particular, it seems fairly reasonable to make the following recommendations:

- Enact effective laws and rules for the purpose of protecting Arabic
- Motivate non Arabs to learn Arabic by Requiring Arabic skills for employability in certain positions
- Regulate advertisement and display of print in streets and public places, in languages other than Arabic
- Encourage further research at Masters and doctoral levels to inform efforts of supporting Arabic learning and teaching
- Ensure parents of non muslim students that they have nothing to fear in Arabic education programme
- Highlight the potential career outlook of Arabic learners so that to motivate students to learn the language
- Base syllabus selection on real use, as indicated by corpora and frequency list
- Base Arabic courses on the specific needs of the learners
- Hold regular workshops for Arabic teachers in order to update them on modern trends in language education
- Review Arabic teacher training programme so as to respond to the changing needs of Arabic learners

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**A case study exploring new perspectives in learning materials design and development**

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**Teaching Arabic as second language in international schools in Dubai**  
**A case study exploring new perspectives in learning materials design and development**

Appendix (A)

An interview by email with the responsible for Arabic curriculum in School X in Dubai (She coloured her answers in red. No editing has been done. Her email was dated on 9 February 2012).

**A Student Profile:**

Races: Asian, Euripians, Africans, Americans

Nationalities: Any student that carries any passport apart from the Arab countries ( all Arabs must take Arabic A by low)

Native languages: many different languages up to but all speak English

Previous Education Programmes in Arabic: Students come from different back ground with arabic, some have moveed from other schools in Dubai and some come from around the world with no Arabic back ground.

Social Status: ??? ( sorry do not understand this)

Attitude and Motivation towards Learning Arabic: ( when students come they have very negative attitude towards the language because of a previous experience we do our best to change this attitude with lots of fun activities that make them change)our students have a good attitude as they have the confidence that it will be taught in the same fun way as modern languagesNow

Basis of Grouping Students in the Same Level: ( When students join our school we give them a placement test and they are palced in the right level we have 4 different levels for every year group.

**B Arabic Teachers:**

Nationalities: Syrians, Egyptians, Tunisians, Lebanese, Jordanians, Phaletinains

Professional Backgrounds: University degree Mostly in Arabic with Arabic B experience

Familiarity with Teaching Arabic as Second Language: It is very essencial that all teachers have few years of expereince in this field

Communication Language with students: Mostly Arabic with English to explain rules or grammar.

**Teaching Arabic as second language in international schools in Dubai**  
**A case study exploring new perspectives in learning materials design and development**

Do Arabic teachers receive the same treatment as teachers of other subjects (salaries, allowances, promotion opportunities)? **Yes for salaries, opportunities, trainings but not housing and plane tickets in other word they are on local contract.**

Do opinions of Arabic teachers count in major decisions? ( **Yes very much so after the KHDA interest in arabic, this had very big impac on the arabic in all the schools)**

### **C Administration**

Rapports with Arabic Teachers:

Expectations and Targets for Arabic Programme: **(We aim for the students to be able to communicate with arabs in any appportunity in the country read menus bok a holiday or a hotel. finish their paper work at the airport. read signs and advertisments.....etc)**

### **D Textbook:**

Breakdown of the textbook (for example: Book1 for Grades 1 and 2...) Reported

Difficulty from teachers or students ( **we do not use any books as they do not exists we make our own curriculum and materials to suits the needs of the students. The ministry have books targetting the muslims students but we find it not interesting or useful for our kind of students are they are mostly non muslims.**

### **E Extracurricular Activities**

Do students have any oppportunities for exposure to Arabic outside classroom situation.

**Yes we take them on field trips and ask them to make interviews with Arab people in many occasions. listen to TV and radios. find information order food in a restaurant...etc**

**Teaching Arabic as second language in international schools in Dubai**  
**A case study exploring new perspectives in learning materials design and development**

Appendix (B)

Translation of an interview over phone with an Arabic teacher in an Asian school located in Sharjah on 30.12.2011

Q stands for question and A stands for answer

Q: How motivated are your students in learning Arabic?

A: their motivation is very poor.

Q: Does the textbook assigned by the Ministry suit your students' levels?

A: No. It does not suit.

Q: How homogeneous are the levels of the students of the same class?

A: Their levels are highly heterogeneous.

Q: What are the main problems faced by your students?

A: unsuitable textbooks, students leave and new ones come

Q: How many Arabic and Islamic periods do you have per week?

A: 5 periods per week

Q: What language do you use to communicate with your students?

A: Arabic and English, but I use English more. I explain lessons, particularly grammar, in English.

Q: What the highest level in Arabic knowledge yours students have reached after the end of the programme?

A: They get better in speaking than in writing and reading. They find writing and reading difficult. Some of them cannot unlearn the bad practice of writing from left to right.

Q: How many students do you have per a class?

A: between 30 and 32.

Q: Is there any specific problem that you see as handicap for students learning?

A: The main handicap is the discouragement the students receive from their parents. Their parents advise them against learning Arabic, because they fear that they may convert to Islam. They tell not to try to do harder than can allow them to get the marks they need to pass Arabic.

Appendix C

Vocabulary activity designed by teachers of School X (It is entitled "the missing words in Arabic)

Appendix C: a vocabulary activity designed by School X

It is entitled "The Missing Word"

## الكلمة الضائعة

Create your own word search using the school vocabulary
