

Muslim Societies' Ambivalence to Arabic: Reasons, Manifestations and Consequences

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ABSTRACT

The relationship between Arabic and Islam was conceived when the commandments of Allah were revealed to Muslims in Arabic. In fact the Quran, entirely in God's voice, clearly stipulates that "We have sent it down as an Arabic Quran so that you [people] may understand" (12:2). Naturally, Arabic is a component of various daily religious practices such as the recital of the Holy Quran, the five daily prayers and exaltations of Allah. Therefore, Arabic has held a sacrosanct position in the hearts of Muslims for centuries and the Muslim civilization embraced it as a Lingua Franca. However, academic literature paints a picture tainted by great degrees of ambivalence to Arabic in modern Muslim societies. This emergent ambivalence is evident at individual and institutional levels and indicates that the relationship between Arabic and Islamic education is no longer a straight forward one. More importantly, this ambivalence can explain the stagnation that afflicts the Arabic teaching profession and leaves known problems unresolved. This article will highlight the drift away from Arabic in modern Muslim societies and how this has invariably set Arabic language programs on a downwards spiral.

Keywords: Arabic language, Islamic Education, language, teaching and learning

Literacy has been an essential part of Islam since its inception (Lydon 2010). Indeed, the first verse that was revealed of the Holy Quran demanded that the Prophet Muhammad "read" (Lydon 2010). This dispositioned Muslims to seek knowledge even if it were located in China. The words of Caliph Umar ibn al-Khattab, who advised Muslims to learn Arabic so as to sharpen their wisdom, resonate strongly with this Islamic disposition and indicate that the invocations of Allah echoed through the young and growing Muslim nation. In fact, the efforts of Muslims to transform these entreaties to *read* and to learn *Arabic* into a way of life fashioned a significant body of written works that covered scientific, literary and practical topics (Lydon 2010).

In this regard, Lydon (2010) identifies that Muslim leaders, were quite distinguished from the leaders of other faith groups because they were devoted to equipping Muslims with Arabic, especially the recently converted. This ought to be seen as the earliest grassroots literacy campaign, which solidified Arabic's position as a Lingua Franca of the Muslim civilization for hundreds of years (Lydon 2010). Consequently, Lydon (2010) notes that while Islam developed a distinct pedagogical framework, its mission to promote Arabic literacy led to an inherent flexibility that resulted in the development of various teaching methods. For example, the renowned scholar Ibn Khaldun notes that in Muslim Spain, West Africa and Morocco students acquired Arabic literacy through the mastering of whole words whereas in Cairo and other parts of the Middle East this was done by learning individual letters of the alphabet (Lydon 2010).

This is highly telling of the Muslims' active attempts to optimize acquisition and their commitment to entrenching knowledge of Arabic. Accordingly, the Muslim civilization was at the

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cutting-edge of many linguistic sciences such as, phonology, lexicography and grammar. Indeed, Arabic linguistics became an established science that attracted innovation and scholarship by the 800s CE (Meri 2006). Corpus collection, error analysis, random data collection and field research were common pursuits among the linguistic community of Al-Khalil Ibn Ahmad al-Farahidi, a lexicographer and philologist extraordinaire, best known for his codex *Kitab al-'Ayn* (Meri 2006).

Naturally, with such attentions to advancing Arabic prevalent in the society, the early Muslims developed a curriculum for Arabic. Hall and Stewart (2010) surveyed West African Islamic manuscripts from 1625 – 1925. It was concluded that the presence and absence of particular texts in various collections was strongly indicative of an empirical process of text selection that determined which texts were to be studied by students and which were more suited for scholars. Accordingly, these texts constituted an essential curriculum for Arabic, in which lexicography, syntax, phonology, rhetoric and prosody were set subjects with recommended readings associated with them.

Unfortunately, the apple seems to have fallen very far from the tree. Literacy in some parts of the Arabic-speaking Muslim world is as low as 40% (Hammoud 2006). In fact, the most literate Arabic-speaking nations toy with an 80% literacy rate (Hammoud 2006). However, more importantly, it would seem that non-Arabic speaking Muslim societies are far less inclined to learn Arabic today than in the past. For although, some would argue that the preservation of Islam is dependent on the continued promotion of Arabic (Ahmad 2001), the reality is that Arabic has lost its position as a Muslim lingua Franca with the rise of the Ottoman Empire. The position of Arabic among Muslims has been further weakened by various factors, such as the rise of English as the new lingua Franca; the huge translation movements of religious Arabic texts; the rise of nationalism and globalism. As such the question about the place of Arabic in Islamic Education in the non-Arab Islamic world is a pressing one. This article reviews findings on the growing ambivalence to Arabic among non-Arabic speaking Muslims and illuminates the consequences this has on the Arabic teaching profession.

Potential Reasons for the Emerging Ambivalence Among Muslims

In contrast to the earlier Muslims' vision of Arabic as an absolutely central component of education and scholarship, many of today's non-Arabic speaking Muslims have consigned the purpose of Arabic to advanced religious scholarship, see it as extraneous to their contexts and often fail to conceptualise a role for it in their Islamic educational practices. In fact, the invocation to "read" seems to have been transformed in the minds of some Muslims to an invocation to "recite" only. This drift towards confining Arabic to its purely liturgical purposes, such as the recitation of the Quran (Sirajudeen & Adebisi 2012), has relegated the learning of Arabic being equated with rudimentary literacy (Foster & Purves 1996) and has done so at the expense of developing a genuine ability to read with comprehension (Ahmad 2001; M. Mall & Nieman 2002).

A good example of this is noted by Abubakar (2012), who explains that there is a misconception among Nigerian Muslim women about the need for learning Arabic. Nigerian women seem to be under the impression that only Islamic scholars, perceived to be the custodians of religious scripture, need to learn Arabic. This is of course exacerbated by a cultural dominion of men over women in the Nigerian context that has also led to the underrepresentation of women in the field of Arabic education (Abubakar 2012). However, this notion is argued against by Ayuba (2013) who states that Arabic is necessary for Islamic message comprehension and is therefore a necessity for women who are expected to raise the generations of the future.

Of course a misconception such as this would only be further complicated by the known difficulties of acquiring a new language; such as mastering the script and vocabulary acquisition. Research suggests that a five-year-old native speaker of English knows about 4,000-5,000 word families (Nation & Waring 1997) which means that a learner of English would need to master at

least 4,000 word families to attain the proficiency of a five-year-old child. This is neither unique to Arabic nor has it deterred hundreds of thousands of early Muslims from learning the language. More importantly, these difficulties do not stop people, and particularly Muslims, from learning English for example.

This insinuates that the value awarded to language and its perceived impact on one's life provides the impetus for learning it and persisting in that endeavor. While the earlier converts to Islam had a multitude of pragmatic needs for Arabic, it is clear that this is not true of today's Muslims. In fact, rather alarmingly, many Muslims seem to believe that Arabic is dispensable for a number of reasons. Firstly, they have no use for it in their daily lives (Ismail 1993). Secondly, most Islamic works have been translated (Ahmad 2001). Thirdly, because the commandments of Allah do not demand proficiency in the Arabic language. In fact, it would seem that many Muslims have relegated Arabic to be a *fard* (a religious obligation) on religious scholars only and are satisfied with practicing their religion via a language medium they do not understand.

Manifestations of Ambivalence in Muslim Societies

A lot of academic work has been undertaken in the Muslim world and has considered the individual aspects of learner motivation as well as the societal attitudes to Arabic. A selection of findings from three regions have been selected for discussion. Firstly, the work of Meshkat and Saeb (2014) that recently compared the attitudes of Iranian students to the learning of Arabic and English. Secondly, the findings of Ayuba (2012) on the institutionalisation of ambivalence towards Arabic in Nigeria. Finally, the findings of Ismail (1993) on Educational policy in Malaysia which indicate that these issues have been evident for almost a quarter of a decade.

Meshkat and Saeb (2014) and Findings from Iran

Meshkat and Saeb (2014) compared Iranian students' motivation to learn English as a Foreign Language (EFL) and Arabic as a Foreign Language (AFL). Meshkat and Saeb's study included a sizeable sample of participants. There were 540 female highschool students whose ages ranged from 14 – 18 years of age. Participants were divided into two groups; those studying English and those studying Arabic and questionnaires were distributed to each group. The questionnaire and consequent statistical analysis of responses produced interesting results, some of which are of great relevance to the matter of ambivalence.

Firstly, when comparing the value of culture to language learning. Meshkat and Saeb found that in terms of the language learning process itself, 40% of the students believed that learning about English-speaking cultures was an important factor in acquiring English fluency, whereas only 13% of students felt that learning about Arabic culture would be an asset to their learning of the language. The researchers pondered on this result and explained it in the light of the appeal of both languages and cultures. The researchers explained that Western cultures were extremely popular among the younger generations of Iranians which led to a desire to learn about them. The researchers elaborated that Arabic cultures did not attract the same sentiments or interest.

Secondly, when considering the societal value awarded to English and Arabic, it was rather alarming to note that these Iranian students perceived English to be more important. When the students were asked about whether people in Iran thought it was important to learn English, 65% of students stated that they believed this was so, whereas only 35% of students believed that the Iranians viewed the learning of Arabic as important. In connection with this point, 80% of students indicated that they felt that English will assist them in securing work positions. However, only 47% of the students learning Arabic felt that it was useful from a work perspective. It was therefore concluded that high school Iranian students were instrumentally motivated to learn English because it is the prevailing language in the academic and professional fields in Iran.

Ayuba (2012) and Findings from Nigeria

Ayuba (2012) raised some particularly alarming points. Essentially, it was identified that both the government of Nigeria and the Nigerian society grant Arabic far less esteem and support than they do French and English. At the government level, Arabic is acknowledged only as a subordinate topic of religious education and does not receive financial or moral support in sharp contrast to French and English. For instance, Adeyemi (2016) highlights that the Inspectorate Division of the Nigerian Ministry of Education has assigned an Inspector for all subjects and languages apart from Arabic. This clearly indicates that the government has no sincere concern for the quality of Arabic teaching and programs and has little if any respect for the value of Arabic as a language of communication.

Further to this, Ayuba (2012) explains that many Nigerians scorn Arabic specialists because of the dominance and appreciation of Western values in the society. Ayuba (2012) elaborates that these sentiments reverberate through the society to such an extent that has made qualified teachers of Arabic feel a need to excuse their choice of becoming an Arabic educator by explaining that they studied it because their opportunities were limited.

Additionally, Ayuba (2012) identifies that many parents do not support their children in their learning of Arabic. However, what is more interesting is the reason given for this parental behaviour. It is identified that Muslim parents only view Arabic as beneficial for naming children, conducting wedding ceremonies and completing burial rituals. In connection with this point, Kazeem and Balogun (2013) affirm that Western values and educational models are more esteemed in the Nigerian society by explaining that parents are inclined to spend generous amounts of money on Western education but not Islamic education.

Naturally, such an atmosphere cannot be conducive to high levels of student motivation. In fact, this level of societal disdain for Arabic, leads to students absorbing the sentiments of their parents and society and placing far less value on Arabic. In this regard, Adeyemi (2016) points out that efforts of Nigerian students to acquire Arabic are rather fickle. Students become quickly disheartened with Arabic studies once they have to grapple with any language learning difficulties, which results in the choice to drop Arabic rather than try and overcome the challenges (Adeyemi 2016).

Ismail (1993) and Findings from Malaysia

According to Ismail (1993) the situation seems to be no different in Malaysia. In fact, he describes a situation in which the Malaysian Education policy is unclear and vague in its conceptualization of a purpose for Arabic. Ismail (1993) explains that while the policy situates Arabic under the general umbrella of Islamic education which aims to develop a moral and ethical society in Malaysia, it remains merely a constituent of religious education. Further to this point, Ismail (1993) emphasized that the Education policy is only concerned with Muslim students which means that its scope is limited to Malay students rather than the full spectrum of the Malaysian population.

Ismail (1993) explains that the role that Arabic can and does play at these Islamic schools is completely contingent on the way each school handles their educational situation and the degree to which they incorporate Arabic into the teaching of Islamic subjects. Having said that, Ismail (1993) explains that the majority of Islamic subjects are actually taught in Malay, thus relegating the role of Arabic to being a hurdle on the path to success in examinations. However, more concerning is the fact this extremely unglamorous role is not a stable one. It is elaborated that at the secondary level, students have the option of writing their exams in Arabic or in Malay which has minimized the students' need for learning Arabic even further.

This quick review of findings indicates that Arabic is struggling to convince Muslim societies of its relevance and value in and for Islamic Education. The ambivalence to Arabic seems to be imbedded at various levels of the society and has a drastic effect on the nature and quality

of Arabic programs. This review clearly indicates that Muslim ambivalence to Arabic at the societal level invariably affects students' decisions to pursue Arabic study. More importantly, emergent disdain for Arabic has relegated its teaching to an unglamorous profession which will result in fewer students taking up Arabic teaching qualifications.

Consequences of Ambivalence

Ambivalence to Arabic has manifested itself at various universities around the world. Arabic is considered a Moderately Taught Language in Australia because it is available at only five universities in three states (Baldauf Jr & White 2010) and this is of course driven by demand for the subject. In the USA, Arabic is still considered a Less Commonly Taught Language (NCOLCTL, 2016; Ryding, 1989), in spite of the increased demand for it since the events of September 11 (Allen 2004). However, aside from Arabic's struggle for a place in languages or linguistics departments, many universities which house Islamic departments do not include Arabic departments or subjects. Ahmad (2001) identifies that the predominant means of delivering tertiary Islamic educational programs are local languages and/or English.

Naturally, the validity of Islamic scholarship that excludes Arabic study and neglects Arabic language research repositories is questionable (Ahmad 2001). However, more importantly this neglect has a number of serious consequences. In fact, Ahmad (2001) explains that this neglect further detracts from Arabic's value to Islamic education and the role it should be playing in building the world view of Muslim graduates (Ahmad 2001) because language and culture are inseparable reflections of one another (Jiang 2000). Since actions speak louder than words, the continued absence of Arabic in Islamic departments and educational institutions will only serve to perpetuate the misconception that it is irrelevant. Further to this, Muslim graduates of educational systems that do not provide a solid grounding in the Arabic language will lack the capability to meet the needs of Muslim intelligentsias and communities (Ahmad 2001). It is therefore paramount that we start redressing ambivalence towards Arabic in non-Arabic speaking Muslim societies. Ahmad (2001) argues that before we can find the means of promoting excellence in Arabic we need to eradicate from the minds of Muslims the notion that Arabic is dispensable.

However, this article identifies that this ambivalence is the root cause behind the stagnation that plagues various aspects of the Arabic teaching profession and drives the ensuing lack of determination to solve many of the known problems. There are tangible and observable consequences of this stagnation that are reverberating through Muslim societies and educational institutions around the world. Firstly, there are conflicting views on what constitutes Arabic literacy and a lack of incentive to develop directorial bodies to provide direction and a semblance of consensus. Secondly, qualified teachers and effective teaching methods are in short supply and there seems to be no immediate solutions in sight. Thirdly, textbooks and syllabi designed for non-native-speaking learners of Arabic are almost non-existent especially at the school levels.

Conflicting Views on Arabic Literacy

There is a lack of consensus among Muslims on what Arabic learning constitutes both at the individual and institutional levels. One of the glaring outcomes of this situation is that the goals and objectives of Arabic programs are often confused and conflated with those of Qur'an literacy programs. Examples of this confusion and lack of unanimity on what Arabic learning is, or should be, are plentiful.

Cruikshank (2008) reviewed Arabic-English bilingualism in the Australian context and found that Arabic-speaking Muslim parents wanted their children to maintain Arabic but that they had very different views on what that entailed and how this could be achieved. For some parents, Arabic literacy was the goal and it was to be developed by acquiring an ability to read

and write the letters of the alphabet (Cruickshank 2008). However, for other parents this literacy was equated with an ability to recite chapters of the Qur'an (Cruickshank 2008) which is traditionally acquired through practice and memorization or *hifz*.

This situation is elaborated on from a socio-cultural standpoint by Sarroub (2002, 2013) who investigated how young Yemeni-American girls make sense of their lives. Sarroub (2002, 2013) noted that these young girls had to deal with conflicting visions of literacy presented by their public school, after-hours Arabic school and their homes environments. Reading at the public school meant that they needed to have the ability to read several types of content, understand the content and be able to question or critique it. However, at home and at their communal Arabic school, literacy was viewed in terms of attaining a mastery of the script, recitation and grammar rules which meant that instruction focused on these aspects and did not generally encourage questions.

Conflicting views and varying needs for literacy seem to be ingrained in the Islamic educational tradition of Indonesia. For example, Javanese traditional schools called *pesantrens*, determined the types of literacy offered according to the learners' position in the Javanese society (Jones 1983). Therefore, if the learner was a villager, they were offered an educational experience that equipped them with an ability to recite parts of the Qur'an but did not make them literate. However, if the learner belonged to the middle-class, then literacy was desirable but was equated with an ability to decipher text without necessarily understanding its message. In contrast, if the learner was an aspiring Islamic scholar, then literacy and knowledge of the Arabic language was the desired result of the learning experience but fluency in the language was seldom achieved.

This lack of unanimity can be further exemplified by the findings of Areef (1986) who examined the teaching of AFL in Saudi Arabia. His research sought the views of teachers, administrators and students. This study identified that students who enrol in these programs were actively seeking the acquisition of proficiency because they intended to use Arabic in future work and study opportunities. The data in his study was gathered through three questionnaires, one to each of the three aforementioned groups of stakeholders. Data was gathered from five different institutions in KSA and for a substantial population of participants. 110 full-time AFL students, 60 teachers and 10 administrators participated in the study. The results made it clear that the various stakeholders had conflicting views on a number of crucial parameters.

Firstly, stakeholders differed on whether grammar-based drill work or communicative work should be used in AFL programs. 60.7% of the teachers favoured the use of communicative content over the use of grammar-based drill work. However, in sharp contrast, 60% of the administrators thought that the use of drilling was more essential. Interestingly, 50% of the student population was in favour of the use of more communicative content and the rest of the population was divided between sustaining variable degrees of support for drilling and neutrality.

Secondly, stakeholders differed on what the course objectives should be and whether they needed to enable students to understand others. There was overwhelming support from students and teachers, with 80% and 76.8% respectively vocalising support for this point. However, only 40% of the administrators agreed that courses needed to enable students to understand others. Essentially, stakeholders disagreed on whether AFL activities should focus on the boosting of oral proficiency. Interestingly, while 67.1% of the students were in favour of this, 52.5% of the teachers and an overwhelming 90% of the administrators disagreed with it.

Naturally, with so many conflicting views of what Arabic learning constitutes or should entail, direction is sorely needed. However, direction would necessitate the presence of a body to coordinate efforts, resources and clarify the nature and objectives of syllabi (Campbell, Dyson, Karim, & Basima 1993). While, Al-Batal & Belnap (2006) suggest that institutional leadership could be achieved in America if the more established successful programs took on a leadership position, Campbell et al. (1993) recommended that a formalized coordinating body be formed in Australia. Unfortunately, there have been no global efforts to achieve coordination between

schools, universities and seminaries. This detrimental absence of coordination persists as there are no institutions that have assumed either a regional or international leadership role. Essentially, some attempts were made by Arabic teachers who formed teachers' associations in their localities. These associations are generally not religiously affiliated and include Arabic teachers from all faith groups and cultural backgrounds. Unfortunately, these associations have limited reach and are by no means regional or influential enough to facilitate real change. As such, many institutions and practitioners continue working in isolation, particularly in the field of Islamic education.

Teachers, Teaching Methods and Attrition

Arabic teachers are unfortunately products of a system characterised by its chaotic disorganised nature (Sirajudeen & Adebisi 2012) and inability to produce sufficient numbers of qualified teachers. Therefore, the Arabic teaching profession is generally unable to deliver high-quality, pioneering and creative teaching that develops students' proficiency adequately (Lubis 2013). This poor supply of qualified teachers is well documented in the literature. This is to a great extent a problem that has no short-term solutions and has led to a teaching situation in which the distaste for Arabic lessons has become a huge problem (Hassan 2014). However, the more alarming fact is that the societal ambivalence to Arabic that sometimes borders on disdain has perpetuated this problem because many potential teachers are driven away from the profession.

For example, if we consider English-speaking Western contexts we find that many Arabic teachers are unqualified and are often inexperienced. Cruickshank (2008) explains that the proportion of unqualified teachers and teachers with unrecognized qualifications in Australia actually exceeds 50%. In America, it has been identified that the Arabic teaching profession is completely swamped by a demand for qualified professionals that it cannot meet (Al-Batal, 2007; Allen, 2004). In fact, in an American study undertaken by Temples (2010) in which four Arabic school teachers were interviewed, it was determined that teachers were striving to become locally qualified and that they had no prior experience teaching Arabic as a Foreign Language.

Further examples of this problem also exist in other non-Western contexts. For instance, Adeyemi (2016) asserts that there is a shortage of qualified teachers of Arabic in Nigeria at the primary, secondary and tertiary levels. Moreover, he explains that the few teachers who are qualified do not generally have a grounding in linguistics. These assertions are reinforced by Sirajudeen & Adebisi (2012) who explain that the major hindrance to effective Arabic pedagogy in Nigeria is the poor supply of professionals. In this regard, it is emphasised that while many English teaching experts exist in Nigeria, experts on the teaching of Arabic as Foreign language are non-existent (Sirajudeen & Adebisi 2012). Moreover, it is highlighted that many university teachers of Arabic have not been formally trained.

The lack of sufficient numbers of qualified teachers leads to problematic pedagogically poor methodological choices. One of the major issues associated with this phenomenon is the extensive use of the Grammar-Translation Method (GTM) in many Arabic classrooms in Muslim institutions. This method focuses on grammar, morphology and translation and is responsible for creating disengaging teacher-centered learning environments that are remembered unfavorably by many (Richards & Rodgers 2001). However, GTM seems to be the fallback position for many teachers, particularly unqualified ones because it demands very little of the teacher (Richards & Rodgers, 2001; Taber, 2006). In fact, the teachers do not even need to be proficient in the language because the focus is on grammar drills and translation (Taber 2006). This is highly convenient given the presence of teachers who are not proficient in the language (M. A. Mall, 2001) and lack the ability to cover complex topics using Arabic and resort to using their local language (Ismail 1993).

In connection with this, we find that Dawood (2009) and M. Mall and Nieman (2002), affirmed that teaching in South Africa is largely based on the GTM. In describing the associated practices, M. Mall and Nieman (2002) elaborate that teaching involves memorization of

vocabulary and grammar rules as well as translation to and from the local language into Arabic. Additionally, their research data identified that very short amounts of time were spent on Arabic listening or speaking activities. Sirajudeen & Adebisi's (2012) description of the Arabic teaching practices in Nigeria paints a medieval picture wherein students merely memorize texts and teachers focus on the theoretical elements of Arabic and neglect their communicative functions.

Similarly, it was identified that the educational system in Malaysia is one that mostly employs a teacher-centered approach and focuses on grammar and morphology (Ismail 1993). Moreover, it is emphasized that teacher-talk time is significant in classrooms with teachers often reading texts aloud and then explaining them to students (Ismail 1993). In fact, Ismail (1993) identified that many teachers at the university of Malaysia, did not prepare for lessons and relied on the content of their textbooks. In considering the learners' perspectives on teaching in Malaysia, Haron (2013) investigated their views on a speaking course offered by the International Islamic University of Malaysia. It was established that students found the methods to be ineffective because they promoted memorization and not speaking. Additionally, students seemed displeased with the fact that their conversational course involved the prescription and translation of texts by teachers and the expectation that students would memorize and recite these texts.

The use of the GTM and teacher-centered teaching without clear pedagogical goals has been anecdotally linked to attrition and Muslim students' decisions to terminate studies. Dawood (2009) blames the GTM for the declining numbers of students studying Arabic in South Africa. Likewise, Sirajudeen & Adebisi (2012) note that because Nigerian students suffer teaching that expects them to imitate or parrot texts without comprehension during the primary levels, they elect to terminate their study of Arabic as soon as they complete their primary education.

To further complicate the situation, the urgent need to fill positions has led to many institutions hiring native-speakers regardless of the nature of their qualifications. For example, Al-Batal (2007) indicates that USA-based institutions hire native-speakers with little or no teacher training to fill positions and that these teachers tend to teach by emulating the techniques they were exposed to as native-speaking children learning Arabic in Arab settings. This approach incongruity does not recognize that acquiring one's first language is distinct from learning a Second of Foreign language (Gass & Selinker 2008) on the cognitive and developmental levels and impacts programs negatively.

In connection with this point, it is important to note that the overwhelming majority of teaching in the Arab world is contingent on teacher-centered methodologies (Taha-Thomure 2008) for a variety of cultural and circumstantial milieu. For example, graduates with a degree in Arabic, Arabic literature, psychology and sociology are hired as teachers of Arabic without undertaking any pedagogical training (Taha-Thomure 2008). Naturally, teachers with these types of qualifications are not the best suited for the job and are often inadvertently responsible for teacher-centered classrooms that are sometimes plagued by grammatical errors (Taha-Thomure 2008). This in turn means that many of these native-speaking teachers employed to fill positions in the USA and elsewhere, are not just emulating techniques directed at native-speakers but are in fact emulating bad methods and may be transferring non-standard use of the language.

In any case, the fact that institutions are forced to prioritize the filling of positions over the risk to program quality, emphasizes the extent of the shortage in qualified teachers. Moreover, this indicates that many Arabic-speaking teachers from the Arab world may not be properly trained. More importantly, the fact that the governmental infrastructure of the Arabic-speaking world deems a sociologist or psychologist fit to teach language means that they too place little value on the teaching of Arabic.

Unfortunately, seminars, workshops and professional development programs have not resulted in any significant improvement (Dawood 2009; M. Mall & Nieman 2002). Curiously, Mall and Nieman (2002) emphasise that although it was made abundantly clear in South Africa, since 1984, that poor teaching methods have been driving students away from Arabic classrooms and

that there is a need for re-building appreciation for Arabic, teaching methods have not changed to any significant degree. Accordingly, Mall and Nieman (2002,44) correctly determined that the problem has “not been seriously tackled or plans of action have not been implemented”. Indeed, such stagnation is highly indicative of ambivalence towards Arabic.

Textbooks and Syllabi

Unfortunately, this ambivalence to Arabic affects the full spectrum of educational parameters associated with it. This means that the textbooks and syllabi are greatly lacking in direction, poor in their pedagogical grounding and often characterized by impoverished design and overall quality. The textbook challenges are established in academic literature (Juma’Abu-Irmies 2014) and in this regard Berbeco (2011) clarifies that the pressing need for Arabic textbooks is universal. Sadly, there are no glossy, colourful and considered Arabic textbooks like those developed for languages such as French or Spanish (Berbeco, 2011). More importantly, though some post-secondary books do exist, books that cater for Foundation to Year 12 are almost non-existent (Morrison, 2003).

Unfortunately, much of the material that has been developed neither reflects Second Language Acquisition (SLA) developments or language specific matters such as Arabic diglossia (Al-Batal, 2007). In this regard, one of the more serious criticisms of existing Arabic textbooks relates to their focus on grammar and not the functional contextualised use of language. In this regard, M. A. Mall (2001) scrutinised many textbooks and concluded that their content was heavily focused on grammar, drills and long lists of vocabulary with few conversational dialogues. Such books are generally found to be complex and tedious (Emerick 2002a).

There are numerous problems associated with the prevalent grammar-heavy textbooks. Firstly, the structuring of language learning material around grammatical concepts only presents learners with a theoretical framework of the language (Alosh 1992). Secondly, authorship that assumes that learners will somehow be able to apply these theoretical frameworks to practical communicative situations is misguided (Alosh 1992). Thirdly, the provision of grammatical explanations, though ample, fails to provide a context for the use of language (Alosh 1992) because students encounter many isolated linguistic aspects that cannot be structured into a cohesive functional whole. Additionally, these books are known to partially develop reading ability because students can sometimes read-aloud with clarity but fail to understand the meaning of the written message (M. Mall & Nieman 2002).

Dawood (2009) analyzed the textbook called *Nāši-ēn* which is used in many South African schools. He identified that the authors adopt a functional methodology and that the series serves as a good starting point. However, it is emphasized that the texts bear no relevance to the South African context because they were designed for learners living in the Arab world (Dawood 2009). It is then highlighted that there is an urgent need for the re-editing and contextualization of the book’s content (Dawood 2009). Personal investigation of the series identified that it has been in circulation since the early 1980s, when it was first published by University of Umm Al-Qura in Saudi Arabia, and that the publisher’s website did not specify a target audience for the series.

Given that teachers have been deprived of high-quality instructional materials that lend themselves to communicative or learner-centered teaching, teachers need to be skilful at textbook selection or trained to be (Taha-Thomure 2008). However, given that many teachers are untrained, many poor textbook selections are made. One of the common examples of this, is the selection of textbooks that were written for native-speakers. Unfortunately, many teachers fail to recognize that such books are too difficult and irrelevant to their students (Adeyemi 2016; Campbell et al., 1993; Cruickshank 2008). Another example, is that many teachers resort to constructing their own lesson content by adapting content from post-secondary textbooks (Berbeco 2011). Unfortunately, the produced material is unsuitable from a contextual perspective and presupposes the existence of abilities that school level students have not developed (Berbeco

2011). This decision to develop content is very concerning given that many Arabic teachers are not trained or qualified to teach let alone design content and syllabi.

The problems associated with the dearth of Arabic textbooks are hardly surprising when we consider that syllabi that were purposefully designed for non-native speakers of Arabic are non-existent (Emerick 2002b). Syllabi are often developed by various institutions or individuals in isolation from each other and without consensus on how to resolve the matters associated with language specific issues. For example, the nature and content of syllabi raises questions about whether the syllabus should focus on Modern Standard Arabic (MSA), a specific dialect or combination of these to reflect Arabic diglossia (Bergman, 2009; Younes, 2009) or if the focus of syllabi designed for Muslim students should only draw on religious texts (Emerick 2002b).

However, there is an even more serious lack of clarity on the curriculum models that need to be employed to develop Arabic syllabi (Berbeco 2011; Campbell et al., 1993). Firstly, because language syllabus development presupposes the existence of a language-learning theory (Ismail 1993) which given the aforementioned lack of consensus on what Arabic learning should entail, is unavailable. Secondly, because syllabi are affected by the existing texts and resources (Bergman, 2009) and involve the development of content guided by specialists (Bergman 2009), neither of which are readily available to Arabic practitioners.

As such, problematic home-grown syllabi have become a permanent fixture of Arabic teaching in various parts of the world. For example, Campbell et al. (1993) explains that no pedagogical or philosophical milestones for Arabic, similar to the functional-notional movement of teaching English as a Second Language, exist in Australia. Additionally, Adeyemi (2016) highlights that in Nigeria syllabi vary from school to school and that schools fail to coordinate with each other. Further to this, Ajape (2015) identifies that Arabic syllabi are theoretical, abstract, bear no relevance to learners and fail to equip learners with any practical skills.

Clearly, Arabic syllabi for non-Arabic speaking students are neither effective nor do they attract consensus and remain a work-in-progress. The absence of a comprehensive attack on the curriculum problem for Arabic is greatly felt in courses developed for non-native speakers (Campbell et al. 1993). However, the most unfortunate point is that the disorganized nature of Arabic education (Sirajudeen & Adebisi 2012) that is perpetuated by ambivalence and lack of resolve to tackle issues (M. Mall & Nieman 2002) does not bode well for the development of empirically designed curricula such as those developed by earlier Muslims. Accordingly, it seems that many Muslim educators have resorted to reproducing methods, texts and curricular approaches that bear no relevance to their societies or students and have inadvertently contributed to further disengagement from Arabic.

In conclusion, there is a strong need for Muslims to look to the past in an attempt to regain their appreciation for the role of Arabic in Islamic education. It is imperative that Muslims genuinely reconnect with the religious invocations to "read" and "seek knowledge" and challenge their complacent satisfaction with *recitation* or ritual practice that is void of true comprehension. A sincere desire to reconnect with Arabic as an inseparable part of Islamic heritage will drive educators and societies to reverse the ambivalence to Arabic that has trapped the Arabic teaching profession in a vicious cycle of seemingly unsolvable problems.

Looking to the past will allow for the emulation of the Muslim civilization's spirit of empiricism and ingenuity with regards to scholarship, teaching and learning. Muslims need to revisit the works of renowned scholars such as Ibn Khaldun with new eyes. Around 600 years ago, this historian and ethnographer evaluated Arabic teaching and asserted that it endowed learners with knowledge about Arabic but not with genuine communicative ability (Ben-Ari 2009; Osman 2003). Consistent with the Islamic scholarship of the time, Ibn Khaldun made recommendations for how teaching can be improved through the employment of approaches that did not primarily focus on the teaching of grammar (Ben-Ari 2009; Osman 2003). Moreover, Ibn Khaldun distinguished between learning a first language and another language and articulated a psycholinguistic theory comparable to that of Noam Chomsky (Abdussalam 1995).

Naturally a revival of this Islamic spirit will lead to the articulation of coherent policies that deem Arabic an independent science, reinstate Arabic as a compulsory medium of Islamic education and the establish infrastructure that ensures the effectiveness of programs. Essentially, reversing ambivalence will result in the resolution of the problems that plague the profession and promote love for Arabic.

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