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TEACHING THE ARABIC LANGUAGE
Challenges and remedial approaches

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

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PREFACE

An eloquent and accurate statement saying by the renowned scholar, Abdurrahman Ibn Khaldun, confirms the close relationship between the status of a language and the status of the nation where it is spoken. The author of the famous book (Muqaddimah) summarized this strong link with expressions carrying deep meanings: "**The dominance of a language is conditional on the dominance of its people. Its status compared to other languages is a reflection of the status of its country among other nations**". The link between "language", "dominance", "country" and "nations" is a strong and clear signal of the huge importance a language acquires when it becomes superior to other languages, becoming a synonym of growth, progress and prosperity, which the word "**dominance**" encapsulates.

There is no doubt that for a language to prosper and flourish, it should be well-taught and exert a big influence both on its private and public environment. This depends namely on the instruction methodology and teaching methods on the one hand, and the knowledge level and professional experience of teachers on the other. These two main elements cannot be disassociated in any way, and in their absence no language can reach such a degree of prevalence or enjoy such an influence.

The teaching of a language is, however, a complex process where many factors overlap. It carries difficulties that can be overcome only through developing the proper methodology and providing the highest teaching quality. If these two prerequisites are not met, there will be obstacles to developing language instruction, as well as to improving and refining teaching methods.

These are the challenges facing the teaching of Arabic language today in the Islamic world and which have a negative impact on developing the language, enlarging its scope and widening its outreach to the youth and other non-Arabic speakers, and accompanying the current advances in the field of languages internationally.

I tried hard to study this critical and complex issue and analyze the factors leading to the rise of these challenges, based on educational studies and research and benefitting from the outputs of the decisions and recommendations made in specialized conferences and seminars. I am convinced now that the main weaknesses characterizing the teaching of Arabic language can be synthesized in the overall situation of the educational process, both its inputs and outputs, and in the environment which has an influence on it. I therefore came up with a set of conclusions which, in fact, are key to handling these challenges, and which I drafted in the present paper.

The overall conclusion of this study, which is published in English, French and Arabic, is that the challenges of teaching Arabic language are, in essence as well as in their dimensions and repercussions, closely related to the challenges hindering the renaissance of the Arab-Islamic Ummah, whose sources and risks are known, and for which we try hard to find ways to address them and remove their negative impacts on Arabic language teaching process.

Certainly, if Arabic language teaching was subject to the law of supply and demand, in such a way as the basic conditions for an easily accessible supply which is attractive for demand are met, then it will represent an incentive to develop the language, improve

its quality and enhance its status in all aspects. Strenuous efforts should therefore be exerted to address such issues.

I gave out the present study on the occasion of the 83rd conference of the Academy of the Arabic Language in Cairo, held in the spring of 2017, as a contribution to reaching the lofty goal driving all our efforts, which is to enhance the language of the Holy Quran, and to build our Ummah's renaissance.

May Allah bless our efforts.

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Introduction

One of the established truths and adopted rules in educational science is that the difficulty in learning and the struggle to acquire knowledge are not due to the nature of the taught subjects themselves, but to two interrelated factors, namely:

- **First:** the adopted curriculum in education, and the instruction method.

- **Second:** the knowledge level and professional experience of instructors.

Alongside these two factors belonging to political sociology, there is a third factor which is the social environment and the political climate, given the strong existing linkages between the latter, the curriculum and the instructor, and in view of its negative or positive impact on the educational process as a whole. The student who learns a subject in comfortable environment in all respects, and at the hands of highly- professional and skilled instructors who master the subject matter they are teaching, would not feel uneasy or restless when learning a course or grappling with its difficulties. He would wholeheartedly embrace the new knowledge and indulge in studying the course with passion and desire. On the other hand, his fellow student, at the same school level, and at a similar age, who lives in a social environment where the conditions of a sound, comfortable and stable life are missing, and is learning according to ineffective methods and at the hands of inexperienced and unqualified instructors in terms of pedagogy, open-mindedness and the indulgence acquired from living decently although not comfortably, will be unable to assimilate the taught subjects, will feel reluctant to acquire knowledge and lose hope. He would attribute the inability and anxiety he feels and his hatred for knowledge and

science to their difficulty and inconsistency with his mood and abilities. He would then gradually feel unwilling to continue studies and uncomfortable with the course materials.

Current situation of the Arabic language:

While logic states that judging a thing is part of its perception, the current situation of the Arabic language in general, and on many levels, is unbecoming; not due to the nature of the language itself (syntax, structure or patterns), but mainly on account of the inattention and carelessness shown by its speakers, particularly the exclusion and marginalization displayed by public officials who hold the key of bringing Arabic back to life, instead of constraining its use.

While Arabic is gaining ground, albeit in a limited way, especially in social networks and the media bye and large, it is regressing at the school level for several reasons, including weaknesses in the methodology, and poor teachers' levels in addition to their dwindling social position. Suffice it to look, in this regard, at the category of students who join Arabic language departments at faculties of letters and education and teachers' training centers. They are usually composed of students who failed to join other faculties and found themselves compelled to make this choice, which, in turn, impacts badly the knowledge level of these faculties' graduates, particularly those hired as teachers in primary, secondary and high school levels. Even worse and more regretful is to see that quite a few Arabic language M.A and PhD holders, and who join academic teaching positions in universities, reflect the inappropriate situation of the Arabic language, and on many occasion present a counter-productive image of it.

The problem lies not in the language:

The problem lies not in the Arabic language which is not to blame, but in the influencing objective factors that were mentioned earlier. The language, as such, is not difficult to comprehend or learn as long as there is a willingness to learn, study, and perfect it. It does not set obstacles by itself; the obstacles come from the outside. There is no such thing as a difficult, hard-to-learn language and an easy-to-learn language. If the drive, determination and the appropriate educational environment are there, the motivations to learn and master a language become quite easy.

There is no doubt that the Arabic language teaching methods today do not overall influence nor facilitate its acceptance or attractiveness. The educational curriculum adopted in most schools did not keep abreast with the developments taking place in language teaching curricula. Despite the improvements introduced by supporters of the Arabic language, among educational experts and specialized linguists over the last seven decades, and the publishing of textbooks and books on grammar and rhetoric based on new methods and with an innovative design, the vast majority of Arabic language teachers were not influenced enough by the results reached in that field, and no significant change occurred in Arabic teaching methods. In short, the language situation did not improve enough as to mitigate the impact of the language crisis, epitomized by the prevailing language weakness, the limited scope of its perfection and promotion to restricted circles and the widespread use of vernacular Arabic and colloquialisms.

The pioneers

One of the pioneering works that served as a prelude to the transition from the old school of teaching Arabic to the modern era is the book entitled "**Atuhfa Almaktabia fi Taqrib Al-lugha Al-Arabia**" (التحفـة المكتبيـة في تقريـب اللغـة العربيـة) published by Rifaa Rafie Tahtawi in 1286 A.H. There we have an unprecedented book in the history of the Arabic library following the periods of publishing that ended in the 10th century A.H. It is a breakthrough in the area of language publishing according to modern methods that inspired its author during his stay in France in the years 1825-1833. The book helps teachers improve the quality of the educational process in teaching the arabic language according to an innovative curriculum. One can say that Rifaa Rafie Tahtawi has laid the cornerstones for facilitating Arabic language teaching at that early stage when the Arab world was still mired in ignorance and backwardness. The different chapters of the book enlighten the reader on ways to be proficient in Arabic language and bringing it within his reach[1].

The twentieth century was an important turning point in language textbooks publishing, as many books became available and focused on ways to facilitate language teaching and acquisition, such as "**Annahw Al-Wadih fi Qawaeed Al-Lugha Al-AArabia**" (النحــو الواضـح في قواعـد اللغـة العربيـة), published in the forties of the last century by Dar Al-Maaref, Cairo. More than forty editions of that book,

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(1) The Complete Works of Rifaa RafieTahtawi, Part V, a Study and Research by Dr. Mohamed Emara, Al-Shourouq Press, Cairo, 2011.

written by Ali Jarem and Mustapha Amin, were subsequently printed out. It is composed of three parts for primary school and three parts for secondary school levels. It is odd though to find that the publisher of the book is the McMillan and Partners in London. The two authors said about their book: "We adopted in this book the "generation"methodology which is the closest teaching method to the minds of children, the most influential and the nearest to logic, as it stimulates both thinking and research and identifies similarities and paradoxes. We stated numerous examples where the reader can generate rules, according to a modern and unprecedented manner:" This is absolutely true.

Another book was also written by Dr. Abbas Hassan: "**Annahw Al-ouafi**" (النحــو الـوافي), in four volumes. It is specific to secondary school and higherlevels. Until 2010, fifteen editions of the book were published by the Dar Al-Maarifprinting house in Cairo. The book compiled "**Ibn Malik Alfia**" (ابــن مالـك ألفيــة) and its different explanations, "**Qatr Annada**" (قطر الندى), "**Shodour Addahab**" (شـذور الذهــب) and other grammar books, classified and commented on odd rules, while linking them to lofty styles and innovative language usage. Reference should also be made here to the book "**Jamiee Addorous Al-Arabia**" (جامـع الـدروس العربيــة) by its author Mustapha Ghalayini published in three volumes. It was adopted by teachers' institutes and Arabic language departments in some faculties and is considered one of the major references for Arabic syntax. It gained widespread popularity because of its simplicity, good presentation and focus, in addition to the good command shown by its author of Arabic sciences which enabled him to excel in this area. The book

is prolific in citing examples from the best past written works which exempted the reader from searching in lengthy grammar books. It is a correct compilation of the «necessary» syntax rules, bringing them within the reach of learners, and makes the mission of Arabic language teachers and university lecturers also much easier.

A successful experience in the Gulf:

In addition to these books that became widespread, other books also met with great success; for instance, the series "**I love Arabic**" (أحـب العربيـة), launched by the Arab Bureau of Education for the Gulf States in 1988. The Tenth level "**Student's Book**", "Teacher's Book" and "Teacher's Book" of the series were so far published. ABEGS aims to complete the series in fourteen educational levels. Other textbooks were also published in this field that became famous, brought Arabic closer to youth and benefitted to teachers and media practitioners whose jobs required them to have a perfect command of Arabic, in addition to judges and lawyers who used in the past to glorify Arabic and were anxious to excel in it and use it in their everyday functions. Unfortunately, this is no longer the case nowadays. Indeed, law and Islamic jurisprudence students in the past were vying to attend lectures given in Arabic language departments at the faculties of letters by renowned professors; the objective being to acquire a deeper knowledge of Arabic and new expression methods. It is a different story now where we see that most individuals working in the field of justice (magistrates or lawyers) as well as in the media, and even political leaders, reflect all an improper picture of ignorance of Arabic language rules; violating its sanctity and lowering its value. This is one facet of the challenges

facing Arabic language teaching, since such individuals further estrange people from their language and push them away from it[2].

Authors of these textbooks provided invaluable services to the Arabic language, which facilitated, to some extent, the way for succeeding generations of students. Yet the efforts made at the level of syntax or rhetoric, whether in terms of selecting the appropriate curriculum and teaching methods, or in observing coherence and consistency in teaching Arabic, were and probably still suffer from the weak educational system overall. This is the result of the numerous factors that stand asbarriers for those desiring to learn Arabic and develop a good command of it, which, from a comprehensive methodological viewpoint, constitute increasing and pressing challenges that directly impact Arabic language teaching.

In the first half of the twentieth century, with the rising awareness of the importance of teaching the Arabic language and promoting its appeal to the youth, the "**Al-Misbah Al-Munir**" dictionary (المصباح

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[2] In his daily column at the «Al-Shourouq» newspaper, Cairo (17/12/2016), Fahmi Hweidi unveiled the low level of degradation that the Arabic language attained in Egypt among media and political circles. He gave the example of an advertisement published in the "Al-Ahram" newspaper of a book published by this media outlet and aimed for the first school level in primary schools. The book was prepared by a group of educational programmes experts from different specializations. The main heading of the advertisement read as "بــشرى راغبـي التوفيــق" (Good news for those desiring to excel), while the correct spelling in Arabic should be "بــشرى". This degradation of the Arabic language can be attributed, according to the columnist, to Arabic teaching methods which make students unwilling to follow such courses. He further states that ignorance of Arabic language is the norm among students in technical and intermediate schools, who represent the vast majority of raising generations.

المنـير) by Fayoumi[3], in its concise edition published by the Ministry of Education and circulated in primary, secondary and high schools, became widespread among students in Egypt. School graduates from different levels were no less proficient in Arabic than university graduates. That was due mainly to the high quality of the methods applied in teaching Arabic. A quality that became so low today as to give rise to a very alarming situation.

Ibn Malik Alfia in primary school:

In his biography (Sab'un…), Mikhail Naimy relates how he learnt Arabic at the Mascoubia (orthodox) school in Nazareth, Palestine, between 1902 and 1906, thanks to Ibn Malik and Ibn Aqil. As a 13-year-old student, he recalled that the Arabic language program for six years started with learning Ibn Malik Alfia as explained by Ibn Aqil, and ended up with the history of Arab literature composed by one of the Russian orientalists. He goes on to say:

"It was strange how Ibn Malik Alfia was appealing to me despite the big memory effort its recitation required and the huge intellectual effort its understanding needed"[4]. The Arabic language teacher in that school was JibranFoutih from Beirut, author of the book "**Al-Bast Achafi fi Eelmi Al-Aaroud Walqawafi**"[5], a book about which Mikhail Naimy said: "We used it two years later in order to decipher

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(3) The full title of this dictionary is **«Al-Misbakh Al-Munir Fi Gharibi Al-Sharh Al-Kabir»** by its author Ahmed Bin Mohamed Fayoumi Maqri (From the Fayoum region in Iraq not the Fayoum of Egypt).

(4) Mikhail Naimy, Sab'un, V.1, p. 178, Nawfal Institution, Beirut, 1st edition 1977.

(5) Published in Beirut in 1890 by Saint George Press of the Orthodox Church.

prosody and thought that from that time on we held the key for poetry and its vast world"[6]. What a school it was that taught the Ibn Malik Alfia as explained by Ibn Aqil to its young pupils and at the hands of a skilled teacher who is the author of a book on prosody.

At an early period of the twentieth century, Mustapha Sadeq Arrafii enumerates how to revive the Arabic language, in his replies to the questions of the "Al-Hilal" Magazine, citing "Reforming the teaching of Arabic and its literatures, discarding thesmall booklets for students, and returning back to the method of early narrators (the encyclopedic way) – the parenthesis are made by Arrafii- which brings together arts, literature,languages and rhetoric. The young child is then prepared on sound footing and develops a refined language, placing the books themselves instead of Arabs and storytellers who were the best in rhetoric, and teaching all sciences- except language and literature sciences- in Arabic, and Arabizing and editingtexts in other languages, and publishing invaluable Arabic books"[7].

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(6) Idem, p. 177

(7) Mustapha Sadeq Arrafii's answers to a questionnaire addressed by "Al-Hilal" Magazine to an elite of writers and scientists, Issue No. 5, Year 28, February 1920. In 1923, "Al-Hilal" published a book containing these articles and replies under the title "Fatawas of big writers and authors". The Qatari "Doha" magazine reissued it in 2013 with a preface by Said Bengrad. By the encyclopedic method, Rafii means the circle of knowledge, better known in arab-Islamic heritage by the name of "Jamharat", which was predominant in knowledge institutes. The commentary is an extract from the book "مقـالات الرافعـي والأدب اللغـة في الموجــودة»، العربيــة المجلــة كتـاب» by Walid Abdel Majid Kassab, No. 242, Riyadh, 2017.

We cited this example to show that Arabic language teaching methods in the past periods were much appropriate compared to nowadays. There we had a school affiliated to the Czarist Russian, located at the heart of Palestine during the Ottoman rule, which was based on teaching Arabic to the children of Arab orthodox Christians, through a curriculum that we would not exaggerate as to claim that it is far better than the one adopted in some Arab universities today. And there we had one of the brightest figures of Arabic language in the 20th century, who considered that reforming the teaching of Arabic was the only way to revive and promote the language, at an early period of the 20th century. At that time, educational services were very limited, and school curricula were broadly sterile, except for the teaching of Arabic language curriculum which was of high quality. Yet, we should not look at that curriculum from our perspective, or judge it in light of our current context lest it would seem difficult and hard for primary and secondary school students. That comparison is not valid. The teaching of Arabic during these times did not face the many difficult challenges as today, for two reasons: **Firstly**, the school curriculum was rigorous, complete and meaningful; **secondly**, teachers' level enabled them to make Arabic sound appealing to learners in a general context where Arabic was highly valued and regarded in society.

Internal challenges:

The internal challenges facing the teaching of the Arabic language, using advanced means and methods that appeal to the youth are in essence different from external challenges as they have a bigger impact on student's low performance in the Arabic language and have a lasting effect on Arabic backwardness. External challenges

are reflected mainly in the attitude adopted by Arabic opponents, both from within and without, who strive to curb its expansion, distort its image, stain it with vernacular and local dialects so as to give the latter prevalence over the standard Arabic, and put obstacles to its teaching in order to pave the way for foreign languages that are backed by traditional colonial powers and their institutions, bodies, financial resources, technological means and progressive ways. Internal challenges are, however, multi-faceted and have diverse repercussions and impacts, embodied in the general weaknesses that characterize the educational system by and large, and in deficiencies of educational curricula in all subjects, not only in Arabic language, and its backwardness in using modern teaching methods of languages, in addition to the shaky overall situation prevailing in most Arab and Islamic countries, which has a negative and very dangerous impact on the identity, memory, consciousness, intellect and culture. All these functions combined have created uncertain context where confusion and disruption carry the risk of destabilizing entire societies.

We can sum up the main challenges facing the teaching and learning of the Arabic language as follows:

- The influence of local dialects on the standard Arabic which would end up eclipsed by them;

- The adaptation of the standard Arabic in such a way as to make it similar to the vernacular Arabic and eventually lose its characteristics and structure.

- The virulent attack on Arabic alphabet, and the call for using Latin letters instead;

- The disregard of declension in written and spoken Arabic.

- The calls for flooding the Arabic language with foreign words.

- The fight for the application of European languages methods to the Arabic language and the teaching of vernacular languages[8].

Low learning performance in specialized faculties:

This is the main challenge – if not the most important- that weakens the quality of learning and teaching Arabic on a broader scale, thus representing a major serious civilizational crisis.

A quick review of the instruction quality in teacher training institutes and in faculties of education sciences in Arab countries and their admission requirements will provide clues to such weaknesses of the educational system as a whole. Graduates of these institutes and faculties lack the needed vocational training and the proper knowledge of modern teaching methods. They are unable to fulfill completely their roles, particularly in terms of teaching Arabic. Therefore, reform should start from an overhaul of the adopted curricula in teachers training institutes and schools and faculties of education sciences, parallel to changing the adopted curricula in teaching Arabic in primary, secondary and high schools, for it is the pillar and foundation to be built upon.

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(8) Dr. Mahmoud Essayed, (Empowering the Arabic language….Horizons and solutions), Bulletin of the Arabic Language Academy in Damascus; Part 2; Volume 83, p. 311, Rabii I 1429.

Effective recommendations:

A report entitled "Arabic for life", prepared by the Commission for the Modernizing Arabic Language Teaching[9], issued recommendations of utmost importance thatare worth-mentioning in this regard. They lay out the needed methodological tools, based on studies carried out by researchers in order to overcome the difficulties/challenges in teaching Arabic. We mention them here, on an indicative basis:

- Providing Arabic language teachers with the needed training and allowing them the necessary time to discuss their educational practices and indulge in professional debates that will be an added value to their careers. Indeed, the sharing of expertise and the reflection on issues faced by the teacher during the teaching process and in classrooms will, according to relevant studies, positively impact teachers' performance, and eventually students' overall performance in all school subjects.

- Training Arabic language teachers to use the correct standard Arabic and speak it extensively in the classroom, and urging instructors of other subjects taught in Arabic to use the standard Arabic in class and train them to this end.

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(9) A Commission for the Modernization of Arabic Language Teaching was set up by instructions from Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid, Vice President and Prime Minister of the United Arab Emirates and Ruler of Dubai, on 13 April 2012. The Commission chaired by the Egyptian scholar, Dr Farouk El Baz, is an initiative to prepare a modern conception of learning and teaching the Arabic language. The Commission is composed of eminent educational experts, academics, politicians and media professionals.

- Training Arabic language teachers on the implementation of the different types of evaluation, including personal, formative, continued and summative assessment, and also training them on the appropriate context of every type of evaluation of training and ways to implement it and explain its outputs, and use them to improve the learning process.

- Training Arabic language teachers on the implementation of the best teaching practices in their classrooms, which entail speaking standard Arabic, adopting cooperative approach, applying the four reading types, and what is known as the reading workshop and the writing workshop, holding individual meetings and implementing the standard-based learning and the literature-based learning, etc….

- Training Arabic language teachers on how to use extra-cognitive skills, which include thinking about classroom practices on a daily basis (thinking before, during and after the pedagogical act). Thus, they will learn through teaching (learning by teaching), so that teaching becomes a facilitation tool for the learning process (teaching for learning).

- Providing schools with trainers on reading skills in every school, who will be entrusted with the training of teachers in schools on developing their practices and the teaching methods they are using, in addition to helping teachers search for learning sources, model some classrooms teaching, or participate in collaborative learning.

- Providing a proper training to Arabic language teachers on how to use the findings of studies and pedagogical research relating to reading skills in order to improve their classroom practices and students' learning.

- Providing Arabic language teachers enough time to meet their colleagues and exchange ideas, opinions and expertise, whether on teaching or assessment methods, or else on classroom decision-taking skills within the classroom.

- Train Arabic language teachers in Arabic at the hands of skilled trainers, specialized in education and language teaching. To save both time and money, schools should adopt the "Training of trainers" model, which rests on experts' training a sufficient number of teachers and supervisors within a school district who, in turn, will train Arabic language teachers at different school levels.

- Training Arabic language teachers in all schools on ways to set up a language proficiency system likely to improve students' abilities, taking into consideration that such an action would also depend on school principals and competent teachers.

- Focusing on students' achievement within the classroom as the ultimate goal of training. Teachers are trained with the aim of developing their skills and abilities, and by corollary their students' skills and abilities. Any training that misses this point will be futile and meaningless.

Complementarity in addressing the issue:

In order to achieve complementarity among the different factors of addressing the challenges of teaching the Arabic language, through using efficient scientific methods that have a big impact on the educational process, the above-mentioned report provides recommendations concerning the updating of teaching grammar. In fact, it is known that grammar plays a pivotal role in regulating the correctness of language. It is a means and not a goal for most people;

particularly students who do not feel the need for it to communicate and therefore do not explore its depths. These recommendations highlight the weaknesses of teaching grammar which is essential for teaching Arabic. This indeed is one of the challenges negatively bearing on the educational process as a whole.

While adjusting the correctness of language is important, giving emphasis to grammar for communication purposes should be in the first place motivated by the meaning. The almost "exclusive" emphasis on grammar in our curricula and schools, under the pretext of adjusting the correctness of the language product while speaking, reading or writing, should be a means to serve the content, which lies at the heart of communication and is the ultimate goal of learning.

One of the ways to simplify Arabic instruction is for the curriculum or the instructor to refrain from presenting some grammar courses at one go, but rather to divide them into several units so as to facilitate their learning and teaching. Unlike common practice, we can start units or courses with lessons on verbs such as "*kana wa akhawatuha*" (كان وأخواتهـا), or "*Inna wa akhawatuha*" (إن وأخواتهـا) or the different types of adverbial expressions "*hal* and *tamyeez*" through different modules and lessons, accompanied by modern texts, instead of old sentences taken out of their context, in order to breathe life into grammar and make it appealing to students.

Another aspect of this simplification is to accept the principle of the common in grammar. Grammar changes in the same way as the lexicography changes with the development of the Arabic language in its modern format. Early Arab lexicographers tried to keep abreast with such an evolution and be inspired by it in developing Arab syntax so as to facilitate the learning experience and leave aside complex rules in syntax that already posed a challenge to early Arab

linguists; even though the latter were living in times when eloquence in Arabic and syntax was at its peak.

While the ultimate goal is to make of Arabic a language for life, the school curricula should be founded on solid bases so as to mirror the main functions of the language which are description, narration, guidance, transfer of information, persuasion, arguing… etc, which collectively are the functions that represent the Arabic language instruction system. If used in a proper and complementary manner, they would be one of the means to neutralize the effect of the challenges facing Arabic language teaching.

A commitment to implement these clearly-formulated recommendations that carry a deep content will inevitably lead to a practical and flexible approach in addressing the difficulties facing Arabic language learning and instruction. These recommendations and many others included in the studies carried out in this pedagogical field are the gateway to a comprehensive reform of Arabic teaching curriculum. A reform that would repair distortions, bridge gaps, and make the Arabic language appeal to students and individuals interested in learning Arabic among non-speakers whose number keeps increasing, both within and outside the Islamic world, particularly after declaring the World Arabic Language Day (18 December annually) by the UNESCO[10].

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(10) Studies indicate that the percentage of individuals interested in learning the Arabic language in the USA, for instance, jumped by 127% during the period 2000-2006, as the number of Arabic language students reached 24 thousand students. In addition, the number of research centers, foreign language departments and even high schools that teach the Arabic language and Middle-east and North Africa culture also increased, which enabled Arabic, forthe first time since its adoption in American schools, to rank among the 10 most studied languages. The number of Arabic language learners in

Language reforms:

An in-depth look at the issue that goes beyond its apparent reforms to its essence shows us clearly that "language reforms" is closely and directly related to other wide-ranging forms of reform, including political, administrative, economic, cultural and educational reforms. It is the conduct and achievement of these reforms that will eventually mitigate the challenges facing Arabic language instruction, and pave the way for those interested in learning Arabic.

Such a comprehensive vision will allow us to find practical and effective solutions to overcome all challenges, in line with the saying that goes "Improving one's situation starts with improving one's tongue". Perfecting language teaching represents the backbone of such a reform, as is evident to any reasonable and clear-sighted mind.

The early pioneering generation who laid the cornerstones of cultural, intellectual and educational renaissance in the Arab world has fulfilled their duties towards their nation in linewith the existing and limited resources available at the time (late 19th century-beginning of the 20th century). The first initiatives were promising and continued to develop and mature until the time when the Arab world entered a period of civilizational backwardness, for several reasons that cannot be tackled in the present study. This weakening

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universities also rose by 92% during the period 1988-2002. These numbers revived and brought the Arabic language to the fore, changing its status, after staying for more than a quarter of a century outside the list of the ten most studied languages in American universities. (Ahmad Ferhadi, Voice of Arabic network: www.voiceofarabic.net).

included the Arabic language which, albeit expanding and spreading over a larger area given the development of media and social networks,failed to evolve in terms of status and content and remained unable to meet the requirements of modern life because of the ills that befell its teaching process on more than one level. This represents a challenge that needs to be addressed in order to promote the Arabic language, with a clear determination and the political will which arekey for the language to reach new horizons and renew itself so as to keep abreast with the advancement of knowledge that is leading humanity towards a future where peace prevails.

As there are both internal and external challenges to the teaching of Arabic language today, the need to achieve the goal of sustainable comprehensive development in all fields, including education, culture, science and technology, requires rigorous efforts to remedy the situation, correct defaults and overcome the challenges in order to remove the dangers which threaten the Arab-Islamic identity. This is the mission of public policy-makers; it should not be limited to language academies for the issue is much bigger than a simple linguistic question.

While such an arduous task requires some linguistic "discretion", so to speak, to compensate for the shortcomings in Arabic language teaching as pinpointed   earlier, it needs first and foremost a conscious, rational and responsible political will, capable of adopting the appropriate decisions to promote the Arabic language in all its aspects, rehabilitate its status, place it in its befitting position, and create the means and tools to make it appeal to its speakers as well as to people from other countries in the world.

Challenges of teaching Arabic to speakers of other languages:

The challenges facing Arabic language teaching to its speakers are no less daunting than those faced by non-speakers. The latter, who are interested in learning Arabic, meet numerous challenges that deserve to be discussed in order to find suitable solutions. Indeed, the challenges differ depending on the nature of the learners themselves. Those who are learning Arabic as a foreign language in non-Arab countries find themselves confronted with a big challenge, which is the lack of opportunities to use the language in their everyday life. This issue is not problematic for learners of Arabic who are living in Arab countries and wish to study it as a second language. Such a challenge can be met through providing interaction opportunities with teachers and classmates and even Arab students in their universities. Inside the classroom, conversation should be encouraged as a major skill through dialogue, discussion and bringing to an end the "lecturing" method. Dialogue and conversation enhance the learner's self-confidence and enable him to engage in daily talks with his teacher and classmates. The process becomes even more interesting when there are students of Arab origin who join the class to develop the linguistic skills they acquired at home, or from the frequent visits to their countries of origin. Group activities both inside and outside the classroom also help compensate for the lack of speaking opportunities in Arabic. In addition to educational institutions, other activities can also be carried out from time to time such as language camps where students can spend weekends or holidays speaking, reading, watching and listening to no other

language than Arabic, as audio-visual tools such as movies, plays, news and talk-shows[11] are widely available in Arabic.

The second challenge is the lack of trained teachers on how to teach Arabic as a foreign language. Many Arabic language teachers in foreign countries are, in fact, Arabs who graduated from Arab universities and received training on teaching Arabic language to nativespeakers. In addition, a good proportion of teachers are not graduates of Arabic language departments, as sometimes, particularly in private Arab schools, we find volunteers from engineering, medical and other schools… Overcoming this challenge requires above all to intensify the training of these teachers[12].

Negative attitude towards Arabic:

Arabic language in Arab countries suffers from a negative perception both in terms of attitude and practice. The negative attitude towards Arabic takes different forms and has several underlying justifications, particularly in using it as a language of instruction even in the first stages of education. This negative attitude is shared by politicians, educators as well as ordinary citizens alike. A study on early education in Lebanon, for instance, found that most households (43%) prefer to teach their kids first a foreign language at school, considering that they are learning their language at home, while the percentage of those who prefer their kids to study first the

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(11) www.voiceofarabic.net

(12) Idem

Arabic language stood at 13%, and two languages simultaneously (39%), while female teachers' responses were different, 13% of them prefer acquiring a foreign language first, 48% prefer the two languages together, and 23% are in favor of perfecting the mother tongue first[13]. This is an example of the challenges in teaching Arabic language which reflect realities that need to be addressed with firmness, resolve and determination in order to rehabilitate the Arabic language.

Studies carried out by educational experts confirmed that the unwillingness to learn the Arabic language, both inside Arab countries and abroad, is due essentially to the inappropriate teaching methods and the of interest or attraction elements. This, by itself, is one of the main challenges facing Arabic teaching in the Arab world.

ISESCO efforts in teaching the Arabic language:

ISESCO has an effective and intertwined role in teaching Arabic language to speakers of other languages and upgrading its teaching methods and learning tools, both inside and outside of the Islamic world. It is one of the salient projects carried out by the Organization since its establishment in 1982. ISESCO Charter and all its reference documents, such as the medium-term and three-year action plans and sector-based strategies, particularly in the areas of education and culture, all emphasize the close bonds

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(13) Dr. Najlae Nasir Bachour, Mother Tongue from a Pedagogical Perspective, p. 24, Center for Arab Unity Studies, Beirut, 2013.

between the Arabic language and Islamic culture. In this regard, ISESCO shows a deep awareness of the important role played by language in strengthening cultural and civilizational immunity of Islamic peoples in general, promoting cultural, scientific and economic exchange among them and laying the groundwork for fair dialogue among followers of different cultures, in a context where peoples, nations and civilizations are increasingly opening up to each other thanks to communication technologies, just as tensions and cruel aggressions against innocents exacerbate and calls for rupture, confrontation and hatred are on the rise.

While it is one of ISESCO's missions to ensure coordination among Member States so as facilitate the exchange of successful experiences and leading initiatives, it worked since its establishment to support projects and programs aimed at encouraging Arabic language teaching to non-speakers and providing all its specialized educational expertise and modern technology tools to non-Arab Member States and Islamic communities outside the Islamic world. This contributed to building up national educational capacities in this field, and enabled individuals and institutions to acquire the needed educational skills and use modern and effective teaching tools to promote Arabic language teaching and address its challenges.

Capitalizing on its accumulated experience in this area, and conscious of the challenges facing Arabic language teaching on many levels, ISESCO efforts centered on three main axes: the axis of education and training of educational leaders working in this field through specialized training centers, training sessions, workshops and organizing visits for teachers; the axis of providing technical support to education institutions, programs and entities; and the axis of the

school textbook, educational tools and specialized studies[14]. Some of the studies issued by ISESCO in the field of teaching Arabic language to non-speakers include:

- Assessment of training programs for teachers of Arabic language to non-speakers, Dr. Ali Madkour.

- Teaching Arabic to Non-Arabic Speakers: Methodologies and Methods, Dr. Rouchdi Touaima.

- ISESCO Methodology for Training Teachers of Arabic Language to Non-speakers, Dr. Ishaq Al-Amin.

- Arabic Language Teaching Methodology for Basic Education in the African Sahel Countries; Dr. Youssef Al-Khalifa Abu Bakr.

- The Guiding Methodology for Teaching Islamic Education and Arabic Language to Children in Islamic Communities, Dr. Mahmoud Kamel Naqa and Dr. Fathi Ali Youness.

- Teaching Methods of Arabic Language to Non-speakers; Dr. Mahmoud Kamel Naqa and Dr. Rouchdi Touaima.

- Teaching Communicative Language, Methodologies and Strategies, Dr Mahmoud Kamel Naqa and Dr. Rouchdi Touaima.

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(14) Mohammed bin Rashid Prize for the Arabic Language was awarded to ISESCO in the category of the best initiative for teaching Arabic to non-native speakers in an official ceremony held in Dubai on 11 April 2019 on the occasion of the 8th International Conference on the Arabic Language.

Through its action in this area, the main conclusions made by ISESCO is that the challenges of teaching Arabic language are, in their essence, dimensions and implications, similar to those that prevent the renaissance of the Arab Islamic Ummah and hinder its development in all areas, although seemingly they look different. In reality, the weaknesses identified in the teaching of Arabic language in general are quasi-similar to the weaknesses impacting the Ummah, making it lose its power and immunity, for language is one facet of steadfastness and strength. Language grows even stronger as it spreads and its use expands. Language is the soft power, as they nowadays refer to literature, arts and creativity bye and large. Therefore, improving Arabic language teaching conditions is one of the clues to address all challenges, and not only Arabic language challenges.

As conditions for surmounting the obstacles facing Arabic language teaching improve across the board, it becomes easier to overcome the wide-varied challenges of teaching Arabic, making it attractive to the youth and encouraging them to love and cherish it, as well as strengthening the sense of belonging to that language.

These are the objective conditions for dealing with this complicated equation and overcoming it over the short term so as to ensure a prosperous future for our beautiful language. May Allah have mercy on the intellectual and founder of sociology, Abdurrahman Ibn Khaldoun, who said in his conclusive and comprehensive "Introduction": "The dominance of a language is conditional on the dominance of its people. Its status compared to other languages is a reflection of the status of its country among other nations".

Recommendations of the Conference of the Academy of the Arabic Language in Cairo at its eighty-third session

1. The Academy reaffirms the recommendations and decisions taken in the previous conferences.

2. Working toward expediting the passing of the comprehensive law for the protection of the Arabic language.

3. Involving the Academy with the Ministry of Education in selecting Arabic language curricula and mainstreaming them to all public and private schools irrespective of their types and appellations.

4. Ensuring coordination between the Academy and the Ministries of Education, Higher Education, and Information in developing language programs, correcting common mistakes, and identifying and addressing linguistic difficulties.

5. Giving due care to Arabic teaching curricula in terms of listening, reading, writing and oral expression, combining -carefully selected- literary texts with grammar and morphology, and giving attention to free reading, handwriting skills and spelling rules.

6. Setting up a specialized joint committee composed of representatives from the Academy and the executive and legislative bodies with a view to following up the implementation of the recommendations and ensuring communication with the parties concerned.

7. Deferring the teaching of foreign languages until the end of the primary phase to enable the child to comprehend his national language without the competition of foreign languages, along the lines of what all nations do with regard to their national languages.

8. Explaining grammar rules with literary examples, poetry in particular.

9. Publishing a book entitled "**The Selected in Arabic Literature**" by the Academy to be distributed by the Ministry of Education to students in a similar way as the brief dictionary.

10. Coordinating with Arab embassies in countries where centers for teaching Arabic, both formal and informal, are located in order to provide them with books, magazines, literary, linguistic and grammatical studies, and to contribute to their transformation into cultural centers to encourage translation and scientific research.

11. Recommending university professors who have obtained their higher degrees overseas to author a book in their specialization in standard Arabic and translate another book in the same field into Arabic.

12. Recommending Arab foreign ministers to agree on a plan to actively engage Arab embassies in protecting the Arabic language and spreading it abroad, and require Arab ambassadors and delegates to international organizations to deliver their speeches in standard Arabic.

13. Requiring students of Arab universities, in all disciplines, to study a number of hours of Arabic-related subjects, and requiring researchers in practical scientific colleges to acquire a proficiency level of Arabic (International Certificate of Arabic Proficiency).

14. Dedicating annual rewarding prizes by Arabic language academies and educational organizations for the best Arabic teaching programs.

15. Appointing linguistic experts in all bodies and institutions that address public opinion, to be tasked with reviewing the laws, regulations and decisions that they issue to ensure that they are written in sound Arabic.

16. Making eligibility for public office conditional on passing an Arabic language proficiency test.

17. Taking interest in the methodology of distance learning in literacy, achieving continuing education, providing trainings, and acquiring professional and technical skills.