



Challenges Facing Non- Native Arabic Speakers in Learning Arabic as a Foreign Language at Birzeit University

التحديات التي تواجه المتعلمين الأجانب غير الناطقين باللغة العربية في تعلمها في جامعة

ببرزيت

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The sky is always full of stars even if they visibly appear in clear nights once in a blue moon. In clear nights some stars look brighter than others. Yet, in dark nights, stars shine brighter to the extent that its sparkle captures a human sight and soul. Engaged in working on this research paper, my dark sky was, all over the year, glittering with stars burning themselves to light the way for me. Some of those extremely shining stars had been constantly showing up in my way even in the darkest nights. I believe, deep in my soul, that a sparkling star deserves a "thanks";

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Abstract

Although learning Arabic as a foreign language is not a new stream of learning, this study comes as the first of its type to investigate the learning challenges facing non-native Arabic speakers in learning Arabic in Palestine. It answers one key question; *what are the challenges facing non-native Arabic speakers in learning Arabic as a foreign language?* To answer this question, this study was conducted on (24) foreign learners and (5) Arabic instructors teaching Arabic in the Palestine and Arabic Studies (PAS) Program. Data about the learning challenges facing learners was collected from Arabic instructors using semi-structured interviews and from foreign learners using focus-group discussions. The collected data was qualitatively analyzed following the thematic analysis approach; Braun and Clarke (2006) model specifically.

Research concluded that learning Arabic in Palestine, as an Arabic speaking context, is challenging although it still helpful; while the Palestinian context helps a learner to fully immerse him\herself within the context and, thus, facilitates the learning process, heavy exposure to Arabic puts the learner under language pressure. Besides, research divulged that although the Palestinian colloquial Arabic, compared to Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) variety, is more preferred to be learned, it is reported that both varieties' learning is accompanied with various learning challenges. Speaking about the kind of learning challenges, Arabic writing, sound system, grammar and vocabulary are highlighted as key resources of the learning challenges. Moreover, since the Palestinian colloquial is the means of communication in the context, participants underscored it as the preferred variety for communication. Nonetheless, communicating using Arabic still a challenging task for foreigners. As this study hypothesizes that a learner's learning intention is linked to the kind of learning challenges confronting him\her this link was proved. Nonetheless,

some other variables; e.g. teacher's teaching approach and a learner's motivation, were suggested to be added to the hypothesis as strong variables that actualize it in a better way.

Building on that, this study recommend conducting further studies on the same topic; the learning challenges facing non-native Arabic speakers in learning Arabic as a foreign language in Palestine, in addition to conducting more studies that search the ways of confronting these challenges by taking into account the link between a learning intention and the kind of learning challenges approved in the hypothesis. Further, it recommends the PAS officials to take this study results into account in tackling the learning challenges confronting their students.

المخلص

بالرغم من أن تعلم اللغة العربية كلغة أجنبية لا يعد مجال تعلم جديد، تعد هذه الدراسة الأولى من نوعها حيث أنها تبحث في التحديات التي تواجه المتعلمين غير الناطقين باللغة العربية في تعلمها في فلسطين. فجاءت هذه الدراسة لتجيب عن سؤال بحثي رئيسي؛ ما هي التحديات التي تواجه المتعلمين غير الناطقين باللغة العربية في تعلمها كلغة ثانية؟ وللإجابة عن هذا السؤال، أجريت هذه الدراسة على (24) متعلم للغة العربية من غير الناطقين بها و(5) مدرسين للغة العربية في برنامج "الباس" (Palestine and Arabic Studies (PAS)) في جامعة بيرزيت. ولجمع البيانات حول هذه التحديات، أجرت الباحثة مقابلات فردياً مع المعلمين ومجموعات نقاش بؤرية مع الطلبة.

خلصت الجهود البحثية إلى أن تعلم اللغة العربية في فلسطين، كسياق متحدث للغة العربية، يعد تحدياً وعاملاً مساعداً للعملية التعليمية في الوقت ذاته؛ بينما يساعد السياق الفلسطيني المتعلم على الإنخراط في السياق وبالتالي يسهل عملية تعلم اللغة، فإن الإنخراط الكامل في بيئة التعلم والتعرض بشكل مستمر للغة العربية يضع المتعلم تحت ضغط اللغة. إضافة إلى ذلك، على الرغم من أن اللهجة العامية الفلسطينية، مقارنة باللهجة العربية الفصحى، هي الأكثر تفضيلاً للتعلم، أثبتت هذه الدراسة أن عملية تعلم كلا اللهجتين يرافقه العديد من التحديات. وكشفت نتائج هذه الدراسة أن الكتابة العربية، النظام الصوتي للغة العربية، بنية اللغة والمفردات تشكل أهم جوانب اللغة التي تسبب الكثير من تحديات التعلم. ولما كانت اللهجة العامية الفلسطينية هي وسيلة التواصل الرئيسية في السياق الفلسطيني، فإنها ظهرت في إجابات المشتركين كلهجة مفضلة للتعلم. غير أن التواصل باستخدام هذه اللهجة يشكل تحدياً كبيراً للطلبة غير الناطقين بها. وحيث تفترض هذه الدراسة أن أهداف التعلم ترتبط ارتباطاً مباشراً بنوع تحديات التعلم التي تواجه المتعلم، فقد نجحت في إثبات هذه الفرضية. ولكن بعض المبحوثين ارتأى إضافة بعد المتغيرات للفرضية، كمنهجية التدريس ودافعية المتعلم نحو التعلم، بحيث تجعلها تتحقق بشكل أفضل.

وبناءً على ذلك، توصي هذه الدراسة بإجراء المزيد من الدراسات من نفس النوع للتعرف على التحديات التي تواجه المتعلمين في تعلم اللغة العربية بشكل أوسع وأكثر تفصيلاً وذلك بالإبحار في جوانب هذه الدراسة وبحثها كل على حدة، وكذلك إجراء المزيد من الدراسات التي تبحث في سبل مواجهة هذه التحديات مع الأخذ بعين الاعتبار الرابط بين هدف التعلم ونوع تحديات التعلم الذي نجحت الدراسة في إثباته. كما وتوصي هذه الدراسة القائمين على برنامج "الباس" (PAS) بالنظر في نتائج هذه الدراسة كسبيل لمواجهة التحديات التي أشار إليها كل من المعلمين والمتعلمين في البرنامج.

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Chapter One

Introduction

Communication among people, regardless of its type, is a wheel rotating in a progressive way. Language spoken between people is the engine that runs this wheel. Since spoken languages around the world are various, in such an era in which we live, that is predominantly characterized by accelerated technological, social, cultural, economic, political and cognitive openness, "to know only one language is abnormal" (Smith & Candlin, 2014, P.3). That is as the world is constantly and steadily growing into a smaller place, thus, language sharing turns to be a necessity to the extent that "[t]he majority of people on this globe can call themselves speakers of at least two languages" (Smith & Candlin, 2014, P.3). That's because "language is not an end in itself, just as little as railway tracks; it is a way of connection between souls and a means of communication" (Jespersen, 1967 as cited in Dawood, 2008, p.1).

In light of this evolution and transformation, the world experiences a huge orientation towards learning foreign languages. Speaking a second or a foreign language turned out to be a normal phenomenon if not a necessary, indispensable prerequisite. For instance, while the percentages of students in America who turned toward learning a second language were; 154,466 among two-year college students and 750,277 among fourth-year college students in the year 1974, it has increased to 350,297 and 1,010,241 respectively in the year 2002 (Welles, 2004).

Second language is defined as any language "learned later than in earliest childhood ... [it] may indeed be the second language the learner is working with, in a literal sense, [it] may be his\her third, fourth, fifth language" (Mitchell, Myles & Marsden, 2013, P.1). Whilst, second

language learning refers to "the process of learning another language after the native language has been learned" (Mitchell, Myles & Marsden, 2013, p.4). In a more specific term, to master a second language means to know and gain knowledge identical to a native speaker's knowledge (Mitchell, Myles & Marsden, 2013).

Arabic, side by side with Greek, Latin, English, French, Spanish and Russian, is considered one of the gigantic languages that has been enjoyed, learned and spoken as a second or foreign language since Middle Ages (Chejne, 1969). Talking about Arabic language specifically, "[t]eaching Arabic for non-natives is widely practiced in many countries in the world due to the importance of Arabic language and its culture, and because Arabic enjoys a special status not only among Arabs but also among Muslims" (Dweik & Al-Shallakh, 2015, p.53). Furthermore, this very ancient involvement in learning Arabic could be related to the fact that Arabic in Muslim societies is considered as "a medium of artistic and correct expression ... an instrument of religion ... medium of culture ... [and] mainstay of contemporary nationalism" (Chejne, 1969, p.6).

Arabic is a Semitic language. It is the official standard language of twenty-two countries called the Arab world. Yet, Arabic language is not only restricted to Arab countries. Since the nineteenth century, Arabic language started to be spoken and used outside the Middle East area especially in the United States and Europe. At a rough guess, there are nearly 250 million people speak Arabic as their native language all over the world (Holes, 2004; Versteegh, 2014).

Since ancient times, Arabic language used to be attached and restricted to Islam and the Islamic era in the Arabian Peninsula since it is the language of the Holy Qura'n. Yet, Arabic was spread out by the Islamic Arab Empire when it stretched from Spain to Persia in the second half of the seventeenth century (Holes, 2004). Over ages, Arabic started occupying a reputable status among other languages in the world. Increased enrolment rates in learning Arabic is the best

indicator of its status and acquired significance. Since the year 1960, Arabic has experienced increase in enrolment records from 541 to 10,584 (92.3%) learners and 40.2% increase since 1998 according to The Modern Language Association Statistics (Wahba, Taha, & England, 2014). By time, Arabic turned out to be ranked as "the fourth biggest language in the world, not in terms of its speakers, but in terms of the countries that adopt it as its official language" (p.19). What gives Arabic language its prestigious status is the unity it creates among the Arabic countries, in comparison to English, since the Arabic countries are not separated geographically (Meller, 2003 as cited in Aramouni, 2011).

Concerning this matter, in USA, where Arabic is highly learned and taught, Arabic was taught as a second language since a century ahead of the Declaration of Independence for theological reasons at first and for philological reasons later (Rouchdy, 1992). However, before that time Arabic was one of the least enjoyed languages to be learned as a second language. Nonetheless, after 11th September attack "the status of Arabic in the national consciousness has been transformed almost overnight to become the number-one of the American government and its various agencies" (Allen, 2007 as cited in Al-Busaidi, 2015, p.703). For instance, Arabic language learning enrollment in United States Institutions of Higher Education reached 10,584 learners in 2002. Meaning that it has attracted 92.3% of learners in America itself (Welles, 2004) which is an indicator on the mounting importance Arabic language enjoys.

Another indicator of Arabic accelerated spread and increased significance worldwide is the establishment of specialized programs for teaching Arabic either as a second or a foreign language in Arabic and non-Arabic contexts. Palestine offers several programs teaching Arabic as a foreign language. One of these well-known programs is the Palestine and Arabic Studies (PAS) Program at Birzeit University. Tracking the history of the program, one can see that the program is deeply-

rooted in the history of Birzeit University as it has been established more than 30 years ago and the number of students enrolling in the program is constantly increasing. Surprisingly, these programs are not only limited to Arabic speaking contexts, but also non-Arabic ones. For instance, enrollment in Arabic courses in U.S. universities has increased significantly in recent years. As a result of this huge expansion in learning Arabic as a foreign language, Arabic has been developed and studied, in many universities and colleges, as an "academic and professional field of its own" especially in communities that have a mixture of nationalities like the United States (Al-Mamari, 2011).

Recent years have shown a remarkable increase in learning Arabic as a second or a foreign language. Nowadays, Arabic mediates the biggest languages in the world as it comes after English and French regarding the scope of its spread (Aramouni, 2011). Globally, recent statistics have shown that Arabic is spoken by approximately over 400 million speakers. It is, as well, classified as the fifth most spoken language in the world. Moreover, it is considered as one of the fastest growing languages around the globe (Cote, 2009).

Nevertheless, learning a second language is not an easy step-by-step process. Instead, it is "a long and complex undertaking" since "your whole person is affected as you struggle to reach beyond the confines of your first language and into a new language, a new culture, a new way of thinking, feeling, and acting" (Brown, 2000, p.12). That is as language is "socially and culturally bound," hence, learning requires a deep, full involvement in the target culture (Gardner, 1978; Williams 1994). That is because the learner of a second language is very much like an infant who has no resources for the target language (Dunkel, 1948). In this regard, Chomsky (1968) stated that "when we study human language, we are approaching what some might call the human

essence, the distinctive qualities of mind that are, so far as we know, unique to [humans]" (as cited in Gass, Behney & Plonsky, 2013, p.2).

Although there is no language free from learning challenges, Arabic language is well-known for its complexity and intricacy to be learned. According to the United States Foreign Service Institution (FSI), Arabic is labeled and categorized as a difficult language alongside with languages like Chinese, Korean and Japanese (Stevens, 2006). As well, Arabic is classified under category III among the top hardest languages in the world (Wahba, Taha, & England, 2014). In this sense, to master Arabic language, a learner needs nearly 1,320 contact hours compared to other languages, such as French, German and Spanish, which are classified under category I in terms of its complexity, that requires no more than 480 contact hours (Walton, 1991).

Challenges in learning a language are normal to happen, or even there is no learning process without learning obstacles. In most cases, learning challenges are the reason to hinder learning and stop it even. In view of that, knowing the challenges facing a learner in learning a language serves as the solution of the problem. Unexpectedly, since thirty years, to the best knowledge of the researcher, this study will be the first to investigate the challenges facing non-native Arabic speakers learning Arabic as a foreign language in the PAS Program in Palestine. Thus, it aims at identifying these challenges in an attempt to improve the program and make the foreign students' experience a successful and rewarding one.

Research Problem

Literature shows an increase in orientation toward learning Arabic as a foreign language and in enrollment in the Arabic teaching programs worldwide. Focusing on teaching Arabic as a foreign language in Palestine, in addition to Birzeit University, Palestinian universities like Al-Najah National University, Bethlehem University and Al-Quds University offer programs for

teaching Arabic. The current study focuses on the Palestine and Arabic Studies (PAS) Program which started as a summer course in 1986 and as an academic program in 1994. Data collected from specialists in the PAS about students' numbers during the past years showed that the number of learners in the past used to boost gradually with the growth of the program.

Yet, at the present time, tracking the students enrollment in the program, it is noticed that the students' number is fluctuating from one semester to another. For instance, while the total number of foreign students in the Fall semesters throughout the years 2010 to 2016 was about (313) students, it has decreased to become (247) students in Spring (second) semesters and has increased again to reach (318) students in Summer semesters. This ensures that the increased interest in learning Arabic by non-native Arabic speakers in spite of the fluctuation in the learners number which is, certainly, related to some reasons.

Surprisingly, previous studies conducted in the field of teaching and learning Arabic as a foreign language were somehow limited. They are limited both in the number of studies that were conducted on the topic, which is evident from the reviewed literature, and in the issues these studies have tackled. Speaking about the Palestinian context in particular, literature shows that there are no studies were conducted on this topic in Palestine before.

Research Questions

To achieve the study main objectives, this research tries to answer one key question and six sub-questions related to the main question.

Research Question:

1. What are the challenges facing non- native Arabic speakers in learning Arabic as a foreign language?

Sub- Questions:

1. What are the challenges facing non- native Arabic speakers in learning Arabic in Palestine at Birzeit University?
2. What are the challenges facing non- native Arabic speakers in learning Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) variety?
3. What are the challenges facing non- native Arabic speakers in learning the Palestinian colloquial variety?
4. What are the challenges facing non-native speakers in communicating with Arabic native speakers?
5. What are the challenges facing non- native Arabic speakers in learning Arabic orthography, syntax, semantics, phonetics, phonology and morphology?
6. What are the purposes of learning Arabic as a foreign language by non- native Arabic speakers in Birzeit University?

Significance of the Study

All of this, in its turn, makes it worth conducting a study that investigates the challenges that non-native Arabic speakers encounter while living and learning Arabic in Palestine. Because of the uniqueness of Palestine and its special context, this study becomes more vital when conducted. Further, it will provide the program officials with a clear image about the kind of challenges foreign learners confront in learning that might affect the quality of learning they receive. This will be like empirical evidence for improving the program, meeting its students' needs and making their learning and stay in Palestine an enjoyable and rewarding experience. This as well, in a way or another, will serve the program and the university as the program and learners

are considered as a successful investment and a vital source of financial revenues. Besides, it adds to the university repertoire of educational achievements internationally.

Definitions

Second Language: "a language learned by a person after his or her native language, especially as a resident of an area where it is in general use" (dictionary.com, 2015, 10th Ed.). It is known also as the target language.

Foreign Language: "any language other than that spoken by the people of a specific place" (Your Dictionary, 2019).

Native Language: "the language that a person learns to speak first [in childhood]" (Merriam-Webster, 2015). It is also known as the first language, mother tongue and authentic language.

Palestine and Arab Studies (PAS) Program: a center for teaching Arabic as a foreign language for non-native Arabic speakers. It is located in Birzeit University campus in Palestine. The program has been started as a summer course since 1986. Later, it was established and started functioning as an academic program in the year 1994. In addition, it is still providing courses in teaching Arabic as a foreign language for non-native Arabic speakers until nowadays.

Theoretical Framework

Since an early time, linguists have tried to elucidate the nature of human development and knowledge evolution. Their efforts gave its fruits in shape of learning theories; behaviorism, cognitive and constructivism theories basically. Theories that have tried to explain human knowledge evolution are enormous and have been growing rapidly through the past centuries. Nevertheless, social constructivism was, and still, the "dominant theory of the last decade" in all fields of study (Karagiorgi & Symeou, 2005, p.17). As the present study is done in light of

constructivism theory, in general, and Vygotskyan Social Constructivism and Socio-Cultural theories, in particular, this chapter outlines the core principles of these theoretical frameworks.

Constructivism Theory

On the ground of educational psychology, in a complete opposition to behaviorism theory, appears constructivism theory. What is constructivism theory?

Defining Constructivism Theory

"Although constructivism is a concept that has been embraced recently, a great number of sociologists, psychologists, applied linguists, and teachers have provided varied definitions of this concept" (Amineh & Asl, 2015, p.9), each from his/her own outlook. Reading through literature, it is proved that "there is no universal definition of constructivism". For instance, "some consider it as a theory of learning, others as a theory of knowledge; although some other scholars and theorists consider it as a theory of pedagogy. Additional views are theory of science, educational theory or an all- encompassing worldview" (Amineh & Asl, 2015, p.10).

Focusing on the concept of knowledge, educators viewed constructivism as "a powerful folktale about human origins ... [or] about the origins of humans knowledge" (Midgley, 1985 as cited in Philips, 1995, p.5). Among those researchers is Fosnot (2013) who defined it as "a theory about knowledge and learning; [as] it describes both what 'knowing' is and how one 'comes to know'" (P. I).

In the same context, stressing the learner role, some psychologists remarked that constructivism is a theory of learning that puts forward the assumption that learners learn by vigorously constructing their knowledge (Fosnot & Perry, 1996; Duffy & Cunningham, 1996). In view of that, the theory is seen as an "epistemological view of knowledge acquisition emphasizing knowledge construction rather than knowledge transmission and the recording of information

conveyed by others. [Accordingly, t]he role of the learner is conceived as one of building and transforming knowledge” (Applefield, Huber & Moallem, 2000, p.6).

Focusing on the nature of the learning process, many philosophers and educationists, Piaget and Vygotsky specifically, demonstrated that constructivism tries to solve problems of traditional teaching and learning (Amineh & Asl, 2015). Constructivism, accordingly, is a learning theory that views learning as an active, personal process; the learner actively creates his/her own representation of the world. Consequently, knowledge is constructed and modified through a learner's experience. The fact that makes problem solving, understanding, experience and authentic tasks corner-stone concepts of the theory (Christie, 2005).

Some psychologists defined the theory while focusing on the learning context. In this respect, Richardson (2003) visualized constructivism as "the creation of classroom environments, activities, and methods ... with goals that focus on individual students developing deep understandings in the subject matter of interest and habits of mind that aid in future learning (as cited in Yalmiz, 2008, p.165).

Grouping all of these specific views in one general definition, constructivism is defined as:

an epistemology, a learning or meaning-making theory, that offers an explanation of the nature of knowledge and how human beings learn. It maintains that individuals create or construct their own new understandings or knowledge through the interaction of what they already know and believe and the ideas, events, and activities with which they come in contact (Cannella & Reiff's, 1994& Richardson, 1997 as cited in Abdal-Haqq,1998, p.2).

Social Constructivism Theory

Constructivism theory has a variety of facets, "suggesting a continuum anchored by trivial constructivism at one hand, which stresses the individual as constructing knowledge, to radical constructivism, which rejects the notion of objective knowledge and argues instead that

knowledge develops as one engages in dialogue with others" (Palincsar, 1998, p.347). The latter is called, using Vygotsky's term, "social constructivism".

Defining Social Constructivism Theory

Social constructivism theory stems from the type of thinking that "[w]e do not act alone; humans are social beings. Throughout our evolution, from the hunter gatherer days to the technological present, we have sought to establish communities, societies, forms of communication, and thus cultures as an adaptive mechanism" (Fosnot & Perry, 1996, p.29). Thus, social constructivism theory, in comparison to behaviorism, is seen as neither a stimulus-response phenomenon nor passive knowledge reception. Instead, it is defined as "an adaptive activity requiring building conceptual structures and self-regulation through reflection and abstraction[within] an active process of knowledge construction influenced by how one interacts with and interprets new ideas and events" (Lambert et al., 1995; Maclellan & Soden, 2004; Glasersfeld, 1995 as cited in Yilmaz, 2008, p.165).

Social Constructivism Theory Assumptions

Reading through definitions of social constructivism, one can perceive that the theory is built based on core principles that represent its core assumptions as listed below:

First: Knowledge as a Social Construction Instead of Perception

In one of his articles, building on Piaget supposition about knowledge, Morford (2007) asks a controversial question; "*If schema exists within the mind and knowledge exists through the use of schemas, where does knowledge exist?*"(as cited in Chmiel, 2014, p.1). Social constructivism answers this question as "[t]he nature of knowledge was a hotly debated problem as far back as the 6th century B.C. "(Glasersfeld, 1983, p.35). According to Bruner, learning is about discovering the world. Following that, knowledge must be the reality of the universe to be

discovered by a learner. However, "[c]onstructivists challenge traditional educational philosophy, which assumes there is a fixed body of knowledge which can be transmitted from educators to learners" (Hirtle, 1996, p.91) or in Gary's (1997) words "a thing that can be simply given by the teacher at the front of the room to students in their desks" (p.1). That is as constructivism rejects the presupposition that truth is the actual representation of the outer world. On the contrary, constructivism views knowledge as "emergent, developmental, nonobjective, viable constructed explanations by humans engaged in meaning-making in cultural and social communities of discourse" (Fosnot, 2013, preface). That's because "we as human beings have no access to an objective reality since we are constructing our version of it, while at the same time transforming it and ourselves" (Fosnot & Perry, 1996, pp. 27-28). Building on that, constructivists assume that reality is constructed, neither discovered nor passively received, through human activity. That is as properties of the world are invented and shaped by the members of a society (Kukla, 2013).

Nonetheless, constructivists still accept Chomsky's notion of innateness "as they agree that humans are born with some cognitive or epistemological equipment or potentialities" (Philips, 1995, p.5). Even Vygotsky stressed, to some extent, Chomsky's innateness in his theory. He considered the mental development as a series of consequences that arises as a result of the interaction between "two distinct processes, one with biological roots and the other with sociocultural origins" (Lantolf, 1994, p. 418). Moreover, he supposes that "cognitive growth shows that complex mental processes begin as social interactions with more knowledgeable others" (Chmiel, 2014,p.1).

In view of that, constructivists reject the idea that "knowledge is mind- independent". Meaning that, reality does not exist as absolute truth outside our minds, and even cannot exist in advance to its "social invention". Consequently, it can never be discovered, but it is socially

constructed. (Kim, 2001; Maclellan & Soden 2004; Crotty 1998; Fosnot 1996; Hendry, Frommer & Walker 1999). In this sense, constructivists demonstrate that “knowledge cannot and need not be ‘true’ in the sense that it matches ontological reality, it only has to be ‘viable’ in the sense that it fits within the experiential constraints that limit the cognizing organism’s possibilities of acting and thinking” (Glaserfeld, 1989, p.115). Accordingly, "there is no real world beyond the world the mind creates for itself" (Glaserfeld, 2006, p. 37). That is as:

knowledge can only exist within the human mind, and that it does not have to match any real world reality. Learners will be constantly trying to derive their own personal mental model of the real world from their perceptions of that world. As they perceive each new experience, learners will continually update their own mental models to reflect the new information, and will, therefore, construct their own interpretation of reality (Driscoll, 2000, as cited in Olusegun, 2015, p.66).

Speaking about knowledge as a construction, two foremost principles of social constructivism arise; meaning making and prior knowledge. As for the first principle, what an individual learns is a key variance between behavioral and cognitive conceptions of learning. Cognitivists are more concerned with meaning than behavior as their:

emphasis is on understanding, not merely on learning how to perform a task, and on the acquisition of knowledge rather than on the acquisition of behavior. If knowledge is what an individual learns, then behavior is the result of learning rather than what an individual acquires (Stevenson, 1983 as cited in Shuell, 1986, p.418).

In view of that, Risse (2004) visualized learning from a social constructivist viewpoint saying that "it is a truism that social reality does not fall from heaven, but that human agents construct and reproduce it through their daily practice" (p.145). Building on Risse's assumption, learning is a social construction of meaning. Individuals construct their knowledge through interaction with each other and with the surrounding social and cultural environment (Kim, 2001, p.3). Learning is viewed as a social process; it is neither a process that takes place within an individual nor passive development of a learner's behaviors that are created by external environmental forces (McMahon, 1997). However, in constructivist model, "both the structure of

the mind and the knowledge we construct of the world" cannot be separated because each one of them affects the other; "[b]oth are being developed as the natural outcomes of the evolution of auto-poetic systems characterized by dissipative structures (this includes the social world)" (Fosnot & Perry, 1996, p.29).

As for the other principle, Ausubel (1968) argued that "*[i]f I had to reduce all of educational psychology to just one principle, I would say this: [t]he most important single factor influencing learning is what the learner already knows. Ascertain this and teach him accordingly*" (in Hansen, PowerPoint Presentation). Ausubel assumes that "[l]earning is cumulative in nature; nothing has meaning or is learned in isolation" (Shuell, 1986, p.416). Building on that, early studies, e.g. Bransford & Johnson, 1972; Dooling & Lachman, 1971, proved that "what the learner already knows and the extent to which this knowledge is activated at the time of learning has important implications for what will be acquired and for whether or not the material being studied will make any sense to the learner" (Shuell, 1986, p.417). In this sense, learning is a process of knowledge construction upon the foundations of previous learning. Constructivists suggest that humans construct knowledge from their experiences (Olusegun, 2015) since learners come to the learning situation equipped with knowledge previously gained from earlier experiences, which, in its turn, shapes and modifies the new acquired knowledge (Phillips, 1995). "This view sharply contrasts with one in which learning is the passive transmission of information from one individual to another, a view in which reception, not construction, is key" (Olusegun, 2015, p.67).

Social constructivists highly appreciate the "prior experience" a learner brings to the classroom. That is because "[r]egardless of the nature or sophistication of a learner's existing schema, each person's existing knowledge structure will have a powerful influence on what is

learned and whether and how conceptual change occurs” (Applefield, Huber & Moallem, 2000, p.8). When “[i]ndividuals are assumed to construct their own meanings and understandings [individually], ... this process is believed to involve interplay between existing knowledge and beliefs and new knowledge and experiences” (Richardson 1997, 2003; Schunk 2004 as cited in Yilmaz, 2008. p.162) which is referred to as cognitive conflict; a state that causes the learner to consider other conceptual views in the process of conceptual change, in case of leaning a new concept or receiving new information (Jones & Brader-Araje, 2002, pp.3-4). That is as learning must be meaningful; the acquisition of bodies of knowledge is structured and organized (Shuell, 1986).

Second: The Social Environment as a Learning Context

Bakhtin (1984) acknowledges that “[t]ruth is not to be found inside the head of an individual person, it is born between people collectively searching for truth, in the process of their dialogic interaction” (as cited in Doolittle and Tech, 1999, p.110). This saying of Bakhtin highly stresses Vygotsky's argument that “the context of learning is inspirable from thoughts” (Applefield, Huber & Moallem, 2000, pp.7-8). Bakhtin strongly emphasizes, as well, the essentiality of a social context that involves interactions with others. That's as “[s]ocial constructivism emphasizes the importance of culture and context in understanding what occurs in society and constructing knowledge based on this understanding” (Derry, 1999; McMahon, 1997 as cited in Kim, 2001, p.2).

Moving to instructional, pedagogical or scholastic environments that adopt the social constructivist learning, collaboration among individuals is seen as a prerequisite for learning to happen (Lave & Wenger, 1991; McMahon, 1997). Since society's practical knowledge is situated in relations among practitioners, their practice, and the social organization and political economy

of communities of practice,” (Lave & Wenger, 1991 as cited in Kim, 2001, p.5) learning must be based on such knowledge. Accordingly, approaches like “reciprocal teaching, peer collaboration, cognitive apprenticeships, problem-based instruction, web quests, anchored instructions” and other methods which are based on learning through interacting with others are approaches to social constructivist learning and teaching (Shunk, 2000 as cited in Kim, 2001, p.5). That's since, according to Lantolf and Throne, “learning is embedded within social events and occurring as an individual interacts with people, objects, and events in the environment” (Aimin, 2013, p.162).

Intersubjectivity; the situation of having individuals who have some shared assumptions, beliefs, understanding, and interests that create the base for their communication (Rogoff, 1990), is a substantial prerequisite for social learning. Such shared beliefs, meanings and assumptions are the product of culture and history of the community (Gredler, 1997; Prawat & Floden, 1994). Intersubjectivity does not only affect the creation of social meaning that aids the social communication within the community, but also supports individual understanding of the newly received knowledge. For instance, any personal understanding a learner creates within a group is affected by the group intersubjectivity (Rogoff, 1990; Vygotsky, 1987). The more the individuals are aware of their shared beliefs, meanings and assumptions, the more they become able to swallow any new information that arises as a consequence of social interaction (Kim, 2001, p.3).

However, the concept of intersubjectivity does not cancel the notion of socio- cognitive conflict. In social constructivism, for learning to occur a learner must experience a state of socio- cognitive conflict which arises from the contradictions between the learner's existing understanding and the new experienced knowledge. For experiencing such a conflict, constructivists claim that a learner have to be in an environment "in which problems are posed, questions are raised and alternative perspectives are presented.“[S]uch environments promote peer

collaboration and exchange of ideas, which are the major sources of cognitive conflict” (Piaget, 1976 as cited in Applefield, Huber & Moallem, 2000, p.30).

Third: Learning is a Social and Cooperative Process.

According to Vygotsky, “cooperative learning is an integral part of creating a profound understanding. Cooperative learning is a part of creating a social constructivist classroom.” In case of structured learning inside the classroom, students do not only rely on their interaction with the teacher to learn, but they interact with each other. “Students have a lot to offer one another. When students master completion of projects or activities in a group, the internalization of knowledge occurs for each individual at a different rate according to their own experience” (Powell & Kalina, 2009, p.244). That is as “the nature of the learner's social interaction with knowledgeable members of the society is important. Without this social interaction with more knowledgeable others, it is impossible to acquire social meaning of important symbol systems” (Kim, 2001, p.4).

Fourth: The Active Role of the Learner

In such a social constructivist context “[t]he classroom is no longer a place where the teacher (“expert”) pours knowledge into passive students, who wait like empty vessels to be filled.” Instead, “students are urged to be actively involved in their own process of learning. The teacher functions more as a facilitator who coaches, mediates, prompts, and helps students develop and assess their understanding, and thereby their learning” (Olusegun, 2015, p.68). This type of learning entails that “knowledge is constructed by learners through an active, mental process of development ... [and] the learners are the builders and creators of meaning and knowledge” (Gary, 1997, P.1).

Fifth: The Teacher Role; a Facilitator and Coach.

“Constructivism should not only happen sometimes in the classroom, or happen in one or two of the student's classes, but in all of the student's classes and in every teaching activity so that true learning can occur” (Powell & Kalina,2009, p.247). This ensures that constructivist learning must take place in all situations and under all circumstances. This is impossible without having a teacher who is aware of constructivist teaching strategies. That is because:

[t]eachers from every subject area need to develop psychological or strategic tools to create a constructivist environment for all students ... to ensure an effective constructivist environment, teachers need to learn teaching strategies or activities that employ the theories of both Piaget and Vygotsky when assigning tasks or imparting information (Powell & Kalina,2009, p.247).

This supposition implicitly defines the teacher role as a coach. Accepting the fact that:

knowledge is not a transferable commodity and communication not a conveyance[, and c]hildren are not repositories for adult “knowledge,” but organisms which ... are constantly trying to make sense of, to understand their experience [and] we come to see knowledge and competence as products of the individual’s conceptual organization of the individual’s experience,

then, “the teacher’s role will no longer be to dispense “truth,” but rather to help and guide students in the conceptual organization of certain areas of experience" (Glaserfelds, 1983, p.33).

Socio-Cultural Theory (SCT)

Language is a social activity in which the learner’s cognitive development is directed by received input from others. Therefore, “cognitive development occurs within a social context.” Thus, it is assumed that every learner's learning is different than another's depending on the context where the learning takes place. Building on this assumption, Vygotsky has developed a theory that is more concerned with human mental activity than social constructivism, hence, it has much more to provide about second language acquisition. (Lantolf, 2011, p.24). This theory is called the Socio-Cultural Theory (SCT).

Defining SCT and Highlighting its Basic Assumptions

SCT is an approach to learning and mental development. It is one of the second language acquisition modules, mainly social constructivism theory, that:

argues that human mental functioning is fundamentally a mediated process that is organized by cultural artifacts, activities, and concepts (Ratner, 2002). Within this framework, humans are understood to utilize existing, and to create new, cultural artifacts that allow them to regulate, or more fully monitor and control, their behavior (Lantolf, Thorne, & Poehner, 2015, p.2).

Speaking about the SCT assumptions, it basically assumes that “the best way to acquire a language is to learn it from the place it is being used and to interact with native speakers” (Aimin, 2013, p.166). Moreover, “learning in an L2 context should be a collaborative achievement and not an isolated individual's effort where the learner works unassisted and unmediated” (Turuk, 2008, p.244). This, in its turn, stresses the vitality of culture, a cornerstone issue in Vygotsky's theories, as “culture is a primary determinant of [a learner's] cognitive development.” That is as a learner has the ability to use the newly learned language to "mediate", "regulate" or "control" his\her "mental and communicative activity" (Lantolf, 2011, p.24).

Research on SCT “seeks to study mediated mind in the various sites where people engage in the normal activities affiliated with living” (Lantolf, 2000, p.18). It reveals the social context role in forming and shaping the human mental activity since the biological factors, which are responsible for developing the basis of the human mind, remain insufficient. Therefore “internalization of culturally mediating artifacts including, above all, language”, is used to fill the gaps that the biological factors cannot fill (Lantolf & Thorne, 2000, p.202). In view of that, Vygotsky “argues that human mental functioning is fundamentally a mediated process that is organized by cultural artifacts, activities, and concepts” (Ratner, 2002 as cited in Lantolf & Thorne, 2000, p.197).

SCT Constructs

Vygotsky's proposal about SCT points at some central correlated concepts that create the constructs of the theory as explained below:

Mediation

“Physical tools allow us to change the world in ways that simple use of our bodies does not” (Lantolf & Thorne, 2000, p.199). Metaphorically speaking, digging a hole can be done with a great physical energy and time depleted by a person. However, using any kind of digging devices can reduce the amount of time and effort required for digging and make the activity easier (Lantolf & Thorne, 2000). This metaphor that visualizes mediation in learning is derived from Vygotsky's argument that:

humans do not act directly on the physical world but rely, instead, on tools and labor activity, which allows us to change the world, and with it, the circumstances under which we live in the world[. We] also use symbolic tools, or signs, to mediate and regulate our relationships with others and with ourselves and thus change the nature of these relationships (Lantolf, 2000, p.1).

That is, according to Vygotsky, because:

while biological factors formed the basis of human thinking, in and of themselves, they were insufficient to account for our ability to voluntarily and intentionally regulate our mental activity. We achieve this ability as a result of the internalization of culturally constructed mediating artifacts including, above all, language (Lantolf & Thorne, 2000, p.202).

In this quote, Vygotsky acknowledges that the human mind is “comprised of a lower-level neurobiological base, but the distinctive dimensions of human consciousness are its capacity for voluntary control over biology through the use of higher-level cultural tools (i.e., language, literacy, numeracy, categorization, rationality, logic)” that “serve as a buffer between the person and the environment and act to mediate the relationship between the individual and the social-mental world” (Lantolf, 2000, p.198; Lantolf, Thorne & Pohner, 2015, p.3). Such thinking was developed by Vygotsky based on the assumption that:

all higher mental abilities appear twice in the life of the individual: first on the intermental plane in which the process is distributed between the individual, and some other person(s) and/or cultural artifacts, and later on the intra-mental plane in which the capacity is carried out by the individual acting via psychological mediation(Lantolf, 2000, p.17).

In view of that, mediation can be defined as:

the introduction of an auxiliary device into an activity that then links humans to the world of objects or to the world of mental behavior. Just as physical tools (e.g., hammers, bulldozers, computers, etc.) allow humans to organize and alter their physical world, Vygotsky reasoned that symbolic tools empower humans to organize and control such mental processes as voluntary attention, logical problem-solving, planning and evaluation, voluntary memory, and intentional learning (Lantolf, 2000, P.418).

Building on that, SLL is a socially mediated process in which language is “a cultural artifact that mediates social and psychological activities” (Aimin, 2013, p. 164). According to Vygotsky, mediation in language learning is about interposing others as well as tools like language, which is the most popular mediated tool, in learning a second language.

Mediators are classified into two categories: human and symbolic mediators. Human mediation can be understood as the "part played by other significant people in the learners' lives, people who enhance their learning by selecting and shaping the learning experiences presented to them(Vygotsky, 1978 as cited in Turuk, 2008, pp.250-251). On the contrary, "symbolic mediation concerns changes on a child performance that result from introducing a child into a "symbolic-tools mediators" (Kozulin, 2002). This is true, according to Vygotsky, only and only if learning is based on social interaction between people with various levels of skills and knowledge (Turuk, 2008). Accordingly, mediation in SLL takes different forms; *other-mediation* which refers to the mediation accomplished through the interaction between more capable peers and less capable ones, *self-mediation* that involves private speech or self-talk which is an “observed speech spoken to oneself for communication, self-guidance, and *self-regulation* of behavior and gestures and mediation of cultural artifacts which "concerns the socio-cultural environment and first language. In relation to the last type, in second language acquisition, "individuals should try to apply the

socio-cultural environment and first language to acquire the target language” (Aimin, 2013, p.164).

Artifacts

The tools that learners use to mediate their learning are previously referred to as artifacts. Artifacts are defined as the “[p]hysical as well as symbolic (or psychological) tools ... created by human culture(s) over time and are made available to succeeding generations, which can modify these artifacts before passing them on to future generations.” The learner uses such physical and symbolic artifacts to create an "indirect" or "mediated" relationships between him\herself and the world (Lantolf, 2000, p.1). Thus, it helps learners in constructing their consciousness by taking control over the surrounding physical world, which, in its turn, prevents undesirable reactions.

That is as artifacts:

allow ... humans, ... to inhibit and delay the functioning of automatic biological processes. Rather than reacting automatically and non- thoughtfully to stimuli, which could result in inappropriate and even dangerous responses, we are able to consider possible actions (i.e., plan) on an ideal plane before realizing them on the objective plane. Planning itself entails memory of previous actions, attention to relevant (and overlooking of irrelevant) aspects of the situation, rational thinking, and projected outcomes. All of this, according to Vygotsky, constitutes human consciousness.(Lantolf and Thorne, 2000, p.201)

Artifacts can be either physical or symbolic tools. In addition to the physical tools, “Vygotsky reasoned that humans also have the capacity to use symbols as tools- not to control the physical environment but to mediate their own physical activity” (Thorne & Lantolf, 2000, p.201). Vygotsky differentiates between the two forms proposing that “while physical tools are outwardly directed, symbolic tools are inwardly directed or cognitively directed”(Lantolf, 2000, p.201). In other words, “[j]ust as physical tools serve as auxiliary means to enhance the ability to control and change the physical world, symbolic tools serve as an auxiliary means to control and organize our biologically endowed psychological processes” (Lantolf, 2000, p.201). In spite of the various

forms of artifacts, one point cannot be ignored; “there is no tool adequate to all tasks and no universal proper form of cultural mediation” (Liu & Chin, 2010, p. 65).

In the field of second language learning, “[l]anguage is the most pervasive and powerful cultural [symbolic] artifact that humans possess to mediate their connection to the world, to each other, and to themselves” (Lantolf & Thorne, 2000, p.201; Lantolf, Thorne & Poehner, 2015, p.5). Since artifacts are not of a fixed pattern and go under human modification to meet their needs, “[w]hether physical or symbolic, artifacts are generally modified as they are passed from one generation to the next. Each generation reworks its cultural inheritance to meet the needs of its communities and individuals.” Similarly, language as a cultural artifact is “continuously remodeled by [its] users to serve their communicative and psychological needs” (Lantolf, 2000, p.2).

Scaffolding

Vygotsky claimed that at certain times in language acquisition “the child is completely dependent on other people ... who initiate ... actions by instructing him\her as to what to do, how to do it, as well as, what not to do. [Others] actualise [sic] these instructions primarily through language”(Vygotsky, 1978 as cited in Lantolf, 2000, as cited in Turuk, 2008, p.246). Vygotsky refers to this process as scaffolding. “[S]caffolding performance is a dialogically constituted interpsychological mechanism that promotes the learner's internalization of knowledge co-constructed in shared activity” (Wertsch, 1979 as cited in Donato, 1994, as cited in Turuk, 2008, p.252).

According to Vygotsky, a second language learner is just like a child learning a first language needs scaffolding. Nonetheless, “it would be a mistake ... to think that these learners will acquire the language the way children acquire their L1. In L2 learning, the concept of

scaffolding implies that explicit instruction in language learning context is a necessity. In addition to that, second language learners need coaching and explicit instruction in order to ... [appropriately acquire] the fundamental skills of L2” (Turuk, 2008, pp. 257-258).

When scaffolding in a child’s acquisition of first language is done by different agents; parents, peers, older adults, ... etc., in second language learning, the teacher is the one who mostly does scaffolding. "Rather than a dispenser of knowledge, the teacher is a guide, facilitator, and co-explorer who encourages learners to question, challenge, and formulate their own ideas, opinions, and conclusions (Abdal-Haqq, 1998, p.2). This view, that both cognitive and social constructivism agree on, contradicts what Cennella & Reiff (1994) called didactic, memory-oriented transmission models that visualize learning as a “banking model-the teacher fills students with deposits of information considered by the teacher to be true knowledge, and the students store these deposits, intact, until needed” (Oldfather, Bonds & Bray, 1994). Such transmitted information are not well-integrated with a learner’s prior knowledge, which result in, to use Ausubel terminology, a rote-kind of learning (Richardson, 1997 as cited in Powell & Kalina, 2009).

Internalization

As constructivists believe that “the source of consciousness resides outside of the [learner's] head and is in fact anchored in social activity,” (Lantolf, 2000, p. 13) how can a learner reach to a level in which he\she is conscious? Vygotsky (1987) answers this question in his general law of genetic development which presupposes that:

[a]ny function in the child’s cultural development appears twice, or on two planes. First it appears on the social plane, and then on the psychological plane. First it appears between people as an interpsychological category, and then within the child as an intrapsychological category (Vygotsky, 1981, p. 163 as cited in Lantolf, Thorne & Poehner, 2015, p.7)

Vygotsky called this process Internalization. He defines internalization as “the developmental process whereby humans gain the capacity to perform complex cognitive and physical-motor functions with progressively decreasing reliance on external mediation and increasing reliance on internal mediation” (Lantolf, Thorne & Poehner, 2015, p.7). To put it simply, it is “the process of making what was once external assistance a resource that is internally available to the individual (though still very much social in origin, quality, and function)” (Lantolf & Thorne, 2000, p. 200). In this sense, internalization is a fundamental element in the “formation of higher mental functions” (Kozulin, 1990, P.116). That is as a learner’s higher cognitive functions, including “planning, categorization and interpretive strategies”, are social at early phases of learning and, then, are internalized into “cognitive resources” at subsequent stages. However, it is worth mentioning that it is not “a wholesale transfer of external mediation to a preexisting internal plane” (Lantolf, 2000, p.14).

According to Vygotsky, “internalization occurs more effectively when there is social interaction”. That is as “cooperative learning is an integral part of creating a deeper understanding [and] a social constructivist classroom”(Powell & Kalina, 2009, p.244). Learners do not only have to interact with the teacher, but also, they have to interact with each other. That is because “[s]tudents have a lot to offer one another. When students master completion of projects or activities in a group, the internalization of knowledge occurs for each individual at a different rate according to their own experience”(Powell & Kalina, 2009, p.244).

Private Speech

Lantolf & Thorne (2006) remarked that:

[t]he key that links thinking to social and communicative activity resides in the double function of the linguistic sign, which simultaneously points in two directions—outwardly, ‘as a unit of social interaction (i.e., a unit of behavior),’ and inwardly, ‘as a unit of thinking (i.e., as a unit of mind)’ (Prawat 1999: 268, italics in original)(as cited in Lantolf, Thorne & Poehner, 2015, p.5-6).

As this quote makes clear, "[w]hen we communicate socially, we appropriate the patterns and meanings of this speech and utilize it inwardly to mediate our mental activity" (Lantolf and Thorne, 2000, p.202). This "inward or self-directed use of language as a symbolic tool for cognitive regulation is called 'private speech'." Private speech stems from the belief that "collaborative mental activity is carried out primarily through linguistic means (initially speaking but later writing, in literate cultures, at least)." Thus, Vygotsky assumed that "self-controlled cognitive functioning, would also be linguistically mediated and would carry traces of its social beginnings" (Lantolf, 2000, p. 419).

Private speech, according to Vygotsky, results from the "process of privatization speech that higher forms of consciousness arise on the inner plane and in this way our biological capacities are organized into culturally mediated mind" (Lantolf, 2000 p.15). This process results in a:

speech that has social origins in the speech of others but that takes on a private or cognitive function. As cognitive development proceeds, private speech becomes subvocal and ultimately evolves into inner speech, or language that at the deepest level loses its formal properties as it condenses into pure meaning (Lantolf, 2000, p.15).

In view of that, private speech is a way of utilizing language as a mediation tool for regulating our mental and cognitive functioning (Lantolf & Thorne, 2000, p.202). Thus, private speech helps in focusing the learner's attention on the activity between hands or on "what needs to be, how to accomplish it and when something has been accomplished, and then allows the speaker evaluate what has been accomplished" (Aimin, 2013).

Regulation

In the process of language acquisition, children subordinate their behavior and speech to adult's. This way, they can acquire the language used by adults and older peers. The acquired language, in later stages, is mostly used by the child to regulate his\ her own speech or behavior.

This process is called regulation; that is when “children develop the capacity to regulate their own activity through linguistic means by participating in activities (mental and physical) in which their activity is initially subordinated, or regulated, by others” (Lantolf & Thorne, 2000, p.200). As this explanation indicates, regulation is one form of mediation. That is as “[w]hen children learn language, words not only function to isolate specific objects and actions, they also serve to reshape biological perception into cultural perception and concepts” (Thorne, Lantolf & Poehner, 2015, p. 4).

A learner moves through a number of stages of regulation. In the first stage, which is known as *object-regulation*, children depend on using objects from the surrounding environment to scaffold them in thinking and, then, learning. The second stage, which is termed *other-regulation*, “includes implicit and explicit mediation (involving varying levels of assistance, direction, and what is sometimes described as scaffolding) by parents, siblings, peers, coaches, teachers, and so on.” In the final stage, which is called *self-regulation*, the child can accomplish activities with "minimal or no external support." Social constructivists believe that language mastery, first language or otherwise, can never be accomplished without being a self-regulated learner which actualizes only through internalization (Lantolf & Thorne, 2000).

The Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD)

Vygotsky’s genetic law of cultural development shows that the learner's cognitive development is an outcome of the transformation of the social "interpersonal" activity into an intrapersonal, the process referred to previously as internalization (Lantolf & Thorne, 2000). During this transformation, a learner reaches a zone called the ZPD. Vygotsky (1978) defined ZPD as “the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving

under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers” (p. 86). Or it is the “difference between what a person can achieve when acting alone and what the same person can accomplish when acting with support from someone else and/or cultural artifacts” (Lantolf, 2000, p.17).

As these definitions indicate, “[t]he notion upon which the ZPD is based is the collaborative work.” That is as “when learners work together...strengths and weaknesses may be pooled, creating a greater expertise for the group than of any of the individuals involved” (Ohta, 2001, p. 76 as cited in Lantolf, Thorne & Poehner, 2015, p.9). That is because “while human neurobiology is a necessary condition for higher mental processes, the most important forms of human cognitive activity develop through interaction within social and material environments, including conditions found in instructional settings” (Engeström, 1987 as cited in Lantolf, Thorne & Poehner, 2015, pp.1-2).

This explains why a child, mostly, learns better and more easily when s\he is involved within this zone and receives scaffold from others. Afterwards, once s\he accomplishes certain activities under the supervision of others, his\her zone gradually expands, thus, s\he produces more on his\her own. This understanding involves the social constructivist method “where students act first on what they can do on their own and then with assistance from the teacher, they learn the new concept based on what they were doing individually” (Powell & Kalina, 2009, p.244). Nevertheless, “[i]nstruction should be designed to support a dialogue between the child and his or her future; not a dialogue between the child and the adult’s history. Adult wisdom does not provide a teleology for child development” (Adapted from Griffin and Cole’s discussion (1984) of the zone of proximal development as cited in Duffy & Cunningham, 1996, p.1).

Imitation

Talking about internalization and the ZPD concepts calls for talking about imitation. Although imitation is directly associated with behaviorism, "Vygotsky proposed that the key to internalization resides in the unique human capacity to imitate the intentional activity of other humans" (Lantolf & Thorne, 2000, p. 203).

Building on Vygotsky's (1987) presupposition that "development based on collaboration and imitation is the source of all the specifically human characteristics of consciousness that develop in the child," (p.210) imitation cannot be understood as "mindless mimicking" or "a simple copy of what someone else says"(Tomasello, 2003 as cited in Lantolf & Thorne, 2000, p.204). Nonetheless, imitation is "a complex mechanism involving motor and neurological processing" (Speidel and Nelson, 1989 as cited in Lantolf & Thorne, 2000, p.204) that "involves goal directed cognitive activity that can result in transformation of the original model into a learner's mind" (Lantolf & Thorne, 2000, pp. 203-204).

Imitation does not need to occur directly after a learner notices an action. That is as delayed imitation helps children, learners in SLL, to analyze the language (Meltzoff & Gopnik, 1989, as cited in Lantolf & Thorne, 2000). That is as there is "a continuum between imitation and spontaneous language production, with deferred imitation serving as "essential building blocks for spontaneous speech"" (Speidel, 1989 as cited in Lantolf & Thorne, 2000, p.204).

Summary

Constructivism is a learning theory that discusses human knowledge evolution. That is, it depicts the learner role as one who constructs; the learner actively and personally creates his/her own depiction of the world, and transfers knowledge. The thing that can impossibly be except within an environment that aids cooperation and interactivity. As one facet of constructivism,

social constructivism, while stresses constructivism assumptions, it focuses mainly on the social variable in the learning equation. That is, although constructivists believe in knowledge innateness, constructivism views knowledge as a social construction. In this sense, knowledge is not totally inside a person's head, but, instead, it is found between people socially interacting within a community of people sharing the same beliefs, customs and values. The fact that makes the learner able to mediate artifacts from the surrounding to aid his\her learning. And the teacher role, in this respect, is no longer a knowledge bank but a facilitator and coach who scaffold learners to reach their potentials and be able to act alone within their Zone of Proximal Development.

Conclusion

This chapter presented the research problem, significance of the study, research questions and the theoretical framework in light of which the study results were analyzed.

Chapter Two

Literature Review

A considerable amount of literature was devoted for searching the phenomenon of teaching and learning Arabic as a second and foreign language in different parts of the world specially in the USA. Nevertheless, few studies focused on investigating this issue in the Arab world. To the best knowledge of the researcher, up till the time of conducting the research there were not any studies tackled this topic in Palestine. Since this study is the first to reflect on learning Arabic as a foreign language in the Palestinian context, this chapter reviews the purposes of learning Arabic, the challenges facing foreign learners in learning Arabic and the factors standing behind those challenges as presented in literature.

Purposes of Learning Arabic as a Second or Foreign Language

Assuming that the reason for learning Arabic has an influence on the kind of the obstacles a foreign learner encounters, a substantial number of studies talked about learners' learning intentions. Both Abu-Irmies (2014) and Taha (2007) briefly summed the purposes that push learners with different nationalities, cultures and backgrounds to learn Arabic as a second or foreign language. Abu-Irmies, on the first hand, remarked that learners choose to learn Arabic either for their work, to know the Arab culture, to get jobs in companies working in the Arab World, "to understand Arabic heritage and to attain familiarity with the language of their ancestors", or, in the case of Muslim learners, "to be able to read and understand the Holy Qur'an and Hadith" (p.2). Taha, on the other hand, studied the reasons for learning Arabic only in the USA. She concluded that the foremost reasons for studying Arabic as a foreign language in America are the increased need for bilinguals after 11th September attack, the importance of Arabic for international business, economy, trade and diplomacy, the need of Arabic for every

Muslim's daily practices as it is the language of the Holy Qura'n, and the need of Arabic for constructing communication and relationships for world peace negotiations.

Similarly, talking about the importance of Arabic for non-native speakers, Husseinali (2006) has ordered motives that stimulate learners as:

[u]nderstanding Arabic literature and culture ranked as the number one reason for learning Arabic as a foreign language, followed by the desire to travel or live in the Arab country in the future. In third place came speaking to Arabs. Not surprisingly, only 19.9% of the respondents thought that learning Arabic would help them in their careers. Finally, small percentages 14.4% were learning Arabic for heritage reasons (p. 398).

In the same regard, Qiao, Abu & Kamal (2013) conducted a comparative study on teaching Arabic as a second language between two Islamic schools in China, and they concluded that while some foreign learners learn Arabic for the sake of understanding Quran, others learn it for their own self-enjoyment and personal development (as cited in Abu-Irmies, 2014).

Challenges Facing Foreign Learners in Learning Arabic as a Second or Foreign Language and Their Causes

Diglossia as a Major Cause of Arabic Language Learning Challenges

Arabic is one of the hardest languages in the world. In this regard, Ryding (2006) remarked that among the top super-hard languages in the world that is classified under "category III" in relation to learning difficulty, including Cantonese, Mandarin, Chinese, Japanese and Korean, Arabic is the only Semitic language that is classified under this category. Like many other researchers who preceded as well as those who came after her (i.g. Rouchdy, 1992; Maamouri, 1998), Ryding related this classification to the diglossic nature of Arabic. Likewise, Ferguson (1959) in his landmark article "Diglossia" classified Arabic as a diglossic language. In this essence, as he was the first to introduce the term, Ferguson provided a full and clear definition of diglossia, which is still the most used definition till our time, saying that it is a:

relatively stable language situation in which, in addition to the primary dialects of the language (which may include a standard or regional standards), there is a very divergent, highly codified (often grammatically more complex) superimposed variety the vehicle of large and respected body of written literature either of an earlier period or in another speech community that is learned largely by means of formal education but is not used by any sector of the community for ordinary conversation (p.245).

Ferguson depicted the situation of Arabic language in the Arab world in a very plain way. As it is clear from the definition, Ferguson differentiated between two major varieties of Arabic, High (H) and Low (L), based on their functions and usages in a native speaker's life. The H variety could be used in situations like: sermon in a church or a mosque, writing a personal letter, presenting a university lecture, broadcasting news, writing poetry, ... etc. Yet, this variety could not be used in giving instructions to a servant, conversing with a family member or a friend or in folk literature, for example, in which the L variety is more appropriate to be used (Ferguson, 1959).

Haeri (2000) followed Ferguson's division of Arabic varieties. He talked about two main varieties; a Low (L) and another High (H) one. While the L variety is used by speakers for everyday communication, the H variety is limited to formal education, either in Qur'anic schools, modern government schools, or private tutors (as cited in Cote, 2009).

Complementing and updating Ferguson's description of diglossic situation of Arabic, Al-Batal (1992), after roughly three decades, came up with another oversimplified portrayal of the situation stating that Arabic is mainly composed of:

al-Lugha al-Fusha (Literary Language) which represents the H-variety, and al-lahajat al-ammiyya ("the dialects"), which represent the L-variety" (1959,327). [A]l-Fusha, commonly referred to today as Modern Standard Arabic (MSA), is described as a mainly written, literally, and formal language that display a high degree of uniformity and functions as the official standard language in all Arab countries (al-Toma 1969, 3). Al-Lahajat al-ammiyya, on the other hand, are mainly spoken dialects, which represent the vehicles of daily life communications and folk literature and vary widely along geographical, religious, and socioeconomic lines from one Arab country to another and from one community to another within the same country (pp.284-285).

Yet, despite the fact that both Ferguson and Al-Batal had categorized Arabic varieties into two major registers, the situation of Arabic is much more complicated. In this regard, Al-Batal (1992) continued saying that "the situation in Arabic ... is not diglossic but, rather, appears to be triglossic or multiglossic, with more than two varieties and a continuum along which native speakers shift according to a number of different variables"(p.285). Badawi's (1973) interpretation of the situation seems to be consistent with Al-Batal's as he classified the spoken varieties in the Arab world under five categories; "Classical Arabic, Modern Standard Arabic, Educated Spoken Arabic, Semiliterate Spoken Arabic and Illiterate Spoken Arabic" (p.89, as cited in Ayouby, n.d). Similarly, Bani-Khaled (2014) gave a very close classification to Badawi's as he classed Arabic varieties into:

a. Classical Arabic which is the language of the Holy Quran and pre-Islamic era and the language of literature, b. Modern Standard Arabic ... referred to as the FusHa; the language of writing, education, and administration, [and] c. Colloquial spoken varieties considered as dialects used in informal oral communication (p.182).

In the same regard, talking about the Egyptian context, Badawi (1973) in his book "*Mustawayat al-arabya al-musira fi Misr*" remarked that in Egypt there are five sociolinguistically related dialects. There are two dialects in the domain of classical Arabic which are fusha al-turath (Classical Arabic of the heritage) and fusha al-asr (Modern Standard Arabic, the modern literary language). There are also another three dialects in the domain of colloquial which are ammiyyat al-muthaqqafin (high standard Colloquial), ammiyyat al-mutanawwirin (middle standard Colloquial) and ammiyyat al-ummiyyin (low standard Colloquial) (as cited in Elgibali, 1996).

Still, even within the same context that has H and L varieties, there may arise other regional L's specially in communities that have no central, most important variety of communication (Ferguson, 1959). In this regard, Ferguson (1959) presented the Arabic of Cairo

which is considered a standard L for Egypt as an example. Hence, it is not enough for educated individuals to know and speak only the H variety, but also a standardized L. In the same context, Ferguson supported this notion with another example of the variations between the varieties used by Muslims and Christians in Baghdad. He remarked that "Christian Arabs speak "Christian Arabic" dialect when talking among themselves but speak the general Baghdad dialect, "Muslim Arabic", when talking in a mixed group (p.232).

Learning Challenges Related to Arabic Diglossia

The diglossic nature of Arabic imposes serious and real challenges on processes of both teaching and learning the language (Al-Batal, 1992). Surprisingly, this duality in language brings about various and numerous problems not only in the face of foreign learners who intend to learn the language, but also for native speakers themselves. For more than a decade, Suleiman (2003) alluded to such a problem stating that “Arabs need a unified language which can in turn unify them, an instrument of fusion rather than fission” (pp. 142-143). In the same context, Al-Husri (1985) in an attempt to show the seriousness of the problem declared that “Arabs need a ‘unified and unifying language’, rather than a series of dialect-languages which will lead to further fragmentation” (as cited in Suleiman, 2003, p.143). Limitation in the function of Arabic varieties, distinctive features of Arabic varieties and selecting the variety to be taught were reported as major challenges facing a learner in learning Arabic.

A. Limitation in the Functions of Arabic Varieties

One of the most remarkable problems caused by Arabic diglossia and hinders both foreign learners and native speakers from using the language smoothly and easily is the limitation in the usages of each variety. In this regard Haeri (2000) pointed that:

[f]or most Arabs, Classical Arabic had not been a language they had to learn to write in or take exams in, but one that belonged to reading of the Quran and their obligatory daily prayers, [hence] little knowledge of its syntax or any of its intricacies, rhetorical

styles, genres, and so on, was necessary for such ritual activities (as cited in Bani-Khaled, 2014, p.184).

According to Abu-Irmies (2014) "twenty-nine of the learners [participating in her study] agree[d] that the existence of different varieties of Arabic is one of the factors that causes challenges for non-native learners of Arabic" (p.61). Al-Batal's (1995) point of view is consistent with Abu-Irmies' as he pointed out that "the teaching of a formal variety of Arabic creates a fake model of oral proficiency by presenting ... students with an artificial variety that is not used by the native speakers since no one uses [standard Arabic] for daily life situations"(as cited in Abu-Irmies, 2014, pp.56-57).

Regarding the same issue, Fakhri (1995) elucidated the reason for such a problem. He pointed that "Arabic speaking communities employ two separate linguistic varieties, Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) and a regional vernacular variety (e.g., Egyptian Arabic, Syrian Arabic, or Moroccan Arabic), both of which are functionally and structurally distinct" (p.136). Trying to visualize the possible consequences of such a challenge on a foreign learner, Ferguson (1972) declared that:

the teacher and the student alike must face the fact that there is more to be learned than one language; perhaps it is not as much as two full languages, but it is certainly more than is generally attempted in a single language course (as cited in Aramouni, 2011).

B. Distinctive Features of Arabic Varieties

Foreigners also experience problems resulting from the various distinctions that exist between Arabic varieties. Versteegh (2001) differentiated between five major dialects spoken in the Arab world based on the geographical region. These dialects are: dialects of the Arabian peninsula, spoken in Saudi Arabia and the Gulf area; Mesopotamian dialects, spoken in Iraq; Levantine dialects, spoken in Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, and Palestine; Egyptian dialects, spoken in Egypt ; and Maghreb dialects, spoken in North Africa (cited in Aramouni, 2011). Aramouni

(2011), in respect to this matter, declared that native speakers of Arabic can overcome the complicatedness they encounter in communicating with people of other dialects through cross-dialects communication strategies. However, foreigners find it a really hard task to understand and communicate with someone speaking a variety other than the one they know.

Yet, MSA and the vernacular varieties still hold between their folds lots of functional and structural overlaps, which is also a dilemma. Regarding this fact, Fakhri (1995), emphasized the distinctions as well as the interferences between MSA variety and Moroccan colloquial in two regards; word order(sentence structure) and lexicon. He used sentences from the two varieties as examples. In light of the comparisons he conducted between sentences, Fakhri concluded that "the structural and lexical differences are so important as they obscure the relatedness of the two varieties" (pp.136-137).

C. Which Variety of Arabic to Teach?

In case of teaching Arabic as a second language especially in language teaching programs, another challenge arises on the background of Arabic diglossia regarding the question: "which variety of Arabic, Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) or colloquial Arabic, to teach?" Al-Batal (1992) and Alesh (1992) gave insight to such a challenge through focusing on the state of confusion Arabic teachers experience in making their decision about which variety to teach in a foreign language classroom. By the way, this state of confusion is not only restricted to teachers, learners could be affected as well. For instance, generally speaking, "prominence and prestige are assigned to the higher register [High variety], and the low register [Low variety] is thought to be ungrammatical and not worthy of academic attention" (Palmer, 2008, p.85). Consequently, students will be discouraged when discovering that the dialect they have learned is completely

unrelated to the most commonly used ones. This is especially when a foreign student is given the freedom to select the dialect to learn by him\herself (Aramouni, 2011).

Linguists and researchers' opinions concerning this issue are varied and conflicting as well. Researchers based on their views are divided into three groups; the first group supported the approach of teaching the MSA only, the second group supported the approach of teaching one variety of the colloquial Arabic; and the third group supported the approach of teaching both MSA and a colloquial variety interactively.

The First Group: Teaching Only MSA Variety

Regarding teaching MSA only, as an opponent of this approach, Alish (2002) stated that:

[t]he Arabic you will be learning is the variety used in the Arab world for formal instruction, in the media, and in formal situations. It is more or less invariable all over the Arab world, thus[,] giving the advantage of learning the language that is readily understood everywhere in the Arab Middle East. Learning this form of Arabic lets the learner identify with the educated population and have access to the literature and the written and spoken media (p.6 as cited in Aramouni, 2011, p.48).

Versteegh (2004), agreed with Alish and determined the reasons behind preferring teaching MSA variety over vernaculars stating that:

it remains difficult in the Arab world to arouse interest in the dialects as a serious object of study. Many speakers of Arabic still feel the dialect is a variety of language without a grammar...and even in the universities, there is a certain reluctance to accept dialect studies as a dissertation subject (p.132).

In relation to this matter, one of the participants in Aramouni's (2011) study preferred learning Fusha illustrating that it functions like a passport between the twenty- two Arabic countries. Aramouni supported this personal opinion by remarking that one of the instructors participating in the study revealed that one of his\her students preferred to learn the MSA variety. The instructor illustrated that saying that "[Fusha] is the good foundation in MSA that helped her learn the different dialects when abroad" (p.85).

The Second Group: Teaching a Colloquial Variety

Accepting the fact that the colloquial is the variety that should be taught, many researchers have supported this approach. For instance, Grigore & Bituna (2015) believed that in spite of the fact that Arabic is known for its difficulty, "[w]ith modern approaches to language learning, however, Arabic is not so difficult...“especially if students begin with the spoken [colloquial] language”" (p.220). Aramouni's (2011) view goes in line with Grigore & Bituna's. She asserted that the difficulty of learning Arabic could be overcome only if learners begin with learning the spoken variety of Arabic. Besides, she remarked that teaching only the MSA "offers the students little opportunity for typical everyday oral interaction" (p.48). Maamouri's (1998) point of view goes side by side with Aramouni as he pointed that MSA is "nobody's mother tongue and is rarely or almost never used at home in the Arab world" (p. 33).

Dajani, Mubaideen & Omari's (2014) found that "Europeans[who] are seeking to learn Arabic with a high level of enthusiasm,... give up when they realize that they are making every effort in learning a language that is not spoken in daily life at any Arabic country" (P.4). This finding is consistent with Aramouni and Maamouri's findings and, concurrently, is contradictory with both Alish and Versteegh's.

Aramouni (2011) reported in her study that all participants except one "admitted the importance of knowing and using a spoken variety to be able to integrate in the society of the hosting country." He added that "[t]his is not to say they never used MSA because they did, but they also spent time learning from the natives so they could integrate more easily in the society and gain the natives' trust " (p.81). Abu-Irmies' finding is in disagreement with Aramouni's as she discovered that "a large number of the [foreign] learners [learning Arabic in Jordan] face high difficulty in comprehending Jordanian colloquial Arabic" (p.57).

The Third Group: Teaching Both Varieties of Arabic; MSA and a Colloquial Variety

Fakhri (1995) in his article "*Arabic as a Foreign Language: Bringing Diglossia into the Classroom*" seems to have a different opinion regarding the selection of the variety being learned. In this context, he remarked that "the traditional use of MSA alone is both psycholinguistically and sociolinguistically invalid and that the selection of a regional vernacular alone severely confines the learners' functional use of Arabic" (p.141). Believing that teaching MSA and a regional vernacular variety in integrative way is the most desirable option, Fakhri broadly reexamined this issue proceeding from two main reasons, which are:

[f]irst, the decision as to which language variety or varieties should be taught must be informed by recent developments in foreign-language teaching pedagogy, which favor communicative, proficiency-oriented approaches. The pedagogical merit of a particular solution ... should depend, in part, on whether such a solution is congruent with the principles and goals of these new approaches. Second, the specific proposal of adopting a middle variety of Arabic seems to be gaining appeal (Ryding 1991; Abu-Absi 1991), but it needs to be scrutinized more closely (p.137).

One of the other supporters of this approach is Al-Batal (1992). In his article "*Diglossia Proficiency: The Need for an Alternative Approach to Teaching*", he called for improvising a new approach that teaches both MSA and colloquial varieties. That is to reflect the real situation of Arabic in the Arab World. Yet, Al-Batal's position differs from other supporters of this approach as he linked the selected variety to be taught with the student level of proficiency; while lower proficient students get exposure into the vernaculars, higher level students focus more on MSA. Wahba (2006) agreed with Al-Batal as she believed that selecting only one variety to be taught will cause serious challenges for non-natives in communicating in Arabic speaking community. Thus, both varieties should be taught mutually. Wahba described the situation of Arabic learning saying that "[e]ach side of this system is used in situations and functions for which it is uniquely suited, and both sides are necessary for functioning in the full range of situations where an educated native speaker is expected to function" (p.159). In the same context, Fakhri (1995)

believed that "communicating appropriately in the target language ... requires the mastery of two structurally distinct varieties of that language" (p.136).

Grigore & Bituna (2015), attached the selection of the variety to be learned to the learner him\herself since they believe that Arabic varieties are two sides of the same coin. They suggested that "universities should teach formal Arabic first before opening up to different dialects of the language" (p.220). Besides, they stated that the university should introduce learners to more than one variety, so, if a learner is interested in learning a certain variety, then he\she can learn it.

Kataw's (2016) point of view is in line with Grigore & Bituna as she remarked that:

[m]y opinion has always been for students to study MSA first since the Arabic dialects stem from the standard variety, and then venture out to learn a dialect depending on which Arab country they decide to visit or what study abroad program they come by (p.14-15).

Abu-Irmies' (2014) findings seem to take another track regarding teaching both varieties. She reported that "learners encounter high difficulty in using both standard and colloquial Jordanian dialect because the differences [between the two varieties] are too many" (p.58). However, the findings of the interviews that were conducted with the teachers respondents indicated that "learners of Arabic should work hard on learning grammar, practicing speaking and writing of MSA and understanding MSA texts as well as practicing different varieties of colloquial Arabic" (p.64). Hirsch (2009) and Al-Shalakh (2010) agreed with Abu-Irmies as they all supported the notion that both MSA and colloquial should be taught in an integrated way.

In relation to this approach, Aramouni (2011) pointed to a dilemma related to this approach; teaching both varieties. In spite of the fact that instructors participating in her study revealed that students should learn a vernacular variety along with Al-Fusha and in a systematic way, they have shown conflicting various responses regarding the timing of teaching each variety. Some instructors "were in favor of the immediacy of teaching it, [others] went along with

introducing it at a later stage, and some felt it was important to strictly learn MSA from the beginning while others left the timing flexible" (p.92).

Arabic Language System

Though the great percentage of previous literature talked about diglossia as the fundamental reason for Arabic language learning challenges, still, there are other reasons to participate in creating such challenges. Yet, obstacles caused by any reason cannot be examined in separation from the diglossic nature of the language. This is what Al- Shallakh (2010) asserted in his study which is titled *"Teaching Arabic for Non-Natives in the Public Jordanian Universities: Problems, Causes and Solutions."* He found that difficulties in grammar, reading unpunctuated words, comprehending Jordanian colloquial, using the Modern Standard Arabic, understanding words out of their context, using both standard and colloquial Jordanian varieties and articulating and pronouncing Arabic sounds were the major areas in which participants were experiencing real difficulties as a consequence of Arabic diglossia.

A considerable amount of literature related learning challenges to the Arabic language system. That's because Arabic does not belong to the Latin languages group, that the majority of the speakers in the world speak, or at least, know a second or international language like English. Arabic writing system "orthography", phonetics and grammar were reported as the most areas of Arabic language system in which learners experience difficulties.

A substantial amount of literature was devoted for searching the Arabic orthography (i.g Maamouri, 1989; Ryding, 2013). Though Arabic language has 28 letters, which are few in comparison with other languages like Japanese in which a learner needs to memorize thousands of letters, be familiar with three writing systems and two syllabary systems (Wikipedia). Yet, the real problem arises from the "close similarity between most of the letters (22 out of 28) to the extent

that some of them are only distinguished from each other by additional dots or strokes" (Maamouri, 1998, p.50). What complicates the matter even more, from Maamouri's point of view, is that:

most letters of the Arabic writing system do not occur in isolation and ... traditional Arabic writing has always made ample use of ligatures and letter combinations to save typesetting time or to increase the aesthetic beauty of the script, [thus,] orthographic variation and the use of multiple letter forms became a significant learning problem and an obstacle to printing (p.51).

In the same context, Kataw (2016) in her article which is titled "*Teaching Arabic as a Foreign Language: The Role of Communicative Competence, Pragmatics, and Literacy*" quoted Ryding (2013) who described the Arabic writing system saying that "Arabic has right-to-left directionality with a non-Roman alphabet containing letters that change shape according to their position within the words, making words difficult to decode while reading" (p.112). Al-Shalakh (2010), as well, remarked that 59.2% of learners participating in the study reported that they encountered problems in learning Modern Standard Arabic writing. Nonetheless, Abu-Irmies' findings contradict both Ryding and Al-Shalakh's results. The respondents in her study reported that they encounter no difficulties regarding the writing of Arabic letters. Yet, Abu-Irmies attributed this finding to the fact that respondents in her study have taken an introductory course to Arabic in their homelands (p.59).

Phonetically, learners also experience difficulties regarding sound articulation. Abu-Irmies (2014) reported that a high level of Arabic learning difficulties the participants in her study have encountered resulted from the difficulty of articulating and pronouncing Arabic sounds properly. Whilst only 15 frequencies (nearly 34% of participants) encountered a low difficulty in articulating and pronouncing Arabic sounds, the majority, which resembles 28 frequencies (nearly 65 % of respondents) reported that they have a high difficulty. Investigating about the students' point of view concerning Arabic language system, Abu-Irmies reported that while 5.2% of

respondents believe, hence, agreed that "the very large number of morphological and syntactic restrictions in Arabic" is a major reason of learning challenges, 37.2% were neutral and 11.6% disagreed.

In this respect, Al-Shalakh (2010) reported that 68% of learners respondents agreed that they have a problem in learning Modern Standard Arabic pronunciation, and 62.2% of them agreed that they have a problem in learning Modern Standard Arabic speaking. Similarly, Alsarhid (2013) reported that sounds like "hamza, elgin & ha" are sounds in which learners show a high difficulty in articulating (as cited in Abu-Irmies).

Grammar is another area where learners face learning challenges. VanPatten & Benati (2010) stated that successful language learning requires two main components: the first is a meaningful communication practice in the classroom and the second is a pedagogical approach to grammar to overcome its learning complexity. That's because "grammar is learning the rules of language structure not for the sake of form, but for a basic understanding of how the language works in order to use it" (as cited in Kataw, 2016, p.10). As she called in her article for applying the Communicative Language Teaching Approach (CLT) in foreign language teaching, Kataw (2016) added that such an approach requires a knowledge in grammar that supports communication. That is since this approach while focusing on communication, it does not neglect grammar.

Al-Shalakh (2010) reported that 74.4% of learners face problems in learning Modern Standard Arabic Grammar. Abu-Irmies' (2014) finding in this regard goes in line with Al-Shalakh as she found that thirty- four out of forty- three foreign learners, which is the whole sample of the study, reported that they have problems related to Modern Standard Language grammar.

Diacritics is another attribute of Arabic that is responsible for part of learning challenges. Ryding (2013) remarked that "the absence of short vowels [diacritics] is immediately and consistently problematic for developing word-knowledge and literacy" (p.151). In the same context, talking from her own experience, Kataw (2016) talked about the opacity that diacritics cause for the learners saying that:

[m]any students when reading deep texts feel anxious because they do not know how exactly to pronounce the word and are unsure of the meaning. For example, a word my students get confused with is "شعر" 'shaa'r' meaning 'hair' or 'poetic\verse' depending on the short vowels, which is determined by on [sic] context and meaning. Some students recognize the correct pronunciation and meaning of the word from context and some do not (p.113).

Previous literature divulged that beside the Diglossic nature of Arabic and the Arabic language system there are a number of factors such as the teacher, the learner, the program, the textbook material and the classroom activities which all play a role in this equation of learning a foreign language.

The Teacher Role

"[T]he idea that every speaker of a language is able to teach it," is meaningless as well as pointless. That's "since to speak a language is totally different from teaching it, especially when students are speakers of other languages" (Dajani et.al., 2014, p.920). This saying holds the notion that human elements in this system, language learning, is not of a less influence than the language system itself. Starting with the teacher, a considerable amount of previous studies have tackled the teacher role in the process of learning a second language (Mall, 2002; Abu-Irmies, 2014). The teacher role in the learning process can never be "underestimated" (Dunkel, 1948, p.142). Since the whole process of learning is designed and conducted by the teacher, learners' achievement is highly correlated with their teachers. In this context, Kataw (2016) talked from her experience as a practitioner teacher about the process of planning for and conducting a lesson, which is the

responsibility of a teacher. "Making use of the class time, ... briefing the students at the beginning of the class on the lesson's objective, ... and stating the objectives of what they will be able to do by the end of the lesson" (p.20) are ways through which the teacher can either improve or even ruin the whole process of learning. Doing so, a teacher assists students to effectively make use of the class time to learn, keep their learning goals fresh in their minds and hold their eyes on the progress they are making throughout the course (Genesee, 2008 as cited in Kataw, 2016).

Likewise, aiming at determining the factors that preclude effective learning of Arabic language skills, Dajani et.al (2014) alluded to the centralized role the teacher plays in enhancing second language learning. They remarked that the teacher role is not only determined through how the teacher is smart, intelligent and knowledgeable, but it is all about the extent to which the teacher is well qualified and prepared with teaching methods that enable him\her to design activities that energize and excite students. This statement is not in agreement with Abu-Irmies finding. She revealed, based on the point of view of the respondents in her study, that the teacher is not one of the factors that cause learning obstacles for students. To put this conclusion in a more specific way, her study revealed that:

the majority of learners do not believe that teachers are not motivated to teach Arabic .. Similarly, ... forty learners do not think that teachers are not academically qualified to teach Arabic to speakers of other languages... [while] thirty-four of the learners completely disagree with the idea that teachers are unable to solve individual problems (pp.62-63).

In the same regard, to visualize the momentous effect a teacher practice over learners in term of the variety selection, Palmer (2007) reported that only 28% of the study total participants (n=680), reported that their teachers encourage them to use colloquial Arabic in informal conversations in class. That's because those teachers hold in mind the faith that "spoken Arabic is often stigmatized as less prestigious variety of Arabic, even though it is the language of choice for day-to-day communication for native Arabic speakers" (p.111).

In relation to the same point, Kataw (2016), as an in-service teacher, reported that she defines herself as the best foreign language teacher only if she is able to prepare students for the real Arabic speaking world. Such objective seems to be impossible to accomplish without having the best knowledge about students' learning needs, interests and objectives. Regarding the same matter, Pine and Boy (1993) overemphasized the affective factors in the students-instructor relationship declaring that "[p]upils feel the personal emotional construction of the teacher long before they feel the impact of the intellectual content offered by that teacher" (as cited in Kataw, 2016, p.117).

A teacher, as well, can indirectly affect the learning process by the teaching approach s\he uses. In this regard, Mall (2002) conducted a study on students at a private school in South Africa and Bostawana. He concluded that teachers were highly dependent on using the grammar translation approach. They emphasized grammar rules and vocabulary memorization. This is because Arabic teachers who participated in the study did not have the confidence in their Arabic language proficiency and ability. Such lack of confidence in their abilities in the language negatively impacted students' language practice.

Regarding the same issue, Dajani et.al (2014) placed the greatest bulk of responsibility on teachers in helping their students to learn the language skills creatively. Teaching students such new language learning skills and how to utilize them in real life situations, form Dajani et. al point of view, wouldn't be achieved without adopting novel, nontraditional teaching approaches and techniques. Adding to that, since the teacher is the designer, executer and the supervisor of the learning process as a whole, s\he might track the wrong way in teaching the language, causing learners to start with the "wrong end" (p.921). Chen and Chang (2004), likewise, talked about the

link between the state of anxiety students experience and the teacher's teaching approach and style.

One other issue affects learning and is related to the teacher and the classroom environment as well is whether the classroom is student-based or teacher-based. In this regard, Lunt (1992) observed a number of Arabic language teaching classrooms in five institutions in Tunisia. She concluded that:

[i]n most classes observed at the various institutions, the interchanges were almost entirely controlled by the teacher and initiated by the teacher directed at students, except when students were reciting or acting out the memorized or partly memorized dialogue material. Rarely there was a situation in which students were interacting together in a creative way (pp. 120-121).

Lunt (1992) continued describing the effect of such a finding on learning in terms of the general goals of the program. She remarked that in some of the institutions the teacher is the one who directs questions, gives instructions to students and feedback on students' works. She commented on that saying "[i]f the goal of instruction is to make students capable of independent, creative language production, then it is necessary to get away from a completely teacher-centered classroom" (p.121).

The Learner Role

A. Affective Factors

Ganschow (1991) focused on the role played by the learner in the learning process. In this regard, he remarked that "linguistic coding difficulties, in particular phonological and syntactic aspects of native language, are the primary causes of foreign language learning problems and that these give rise to affective factors, such as low motivation and high anxiety" (as cited in Chen and Chang, 2004, p.280). A great deal of the previous literature talked about the link, both positive and negative, between anxiety and second language learning (Chustain, 1975; Kleinmann, 1977; Backman, 1976).

Several decades ago, believing that "students learn better in a supportive, non- threatening environment" (p.140), Scovel (1978) in his article "*The Effect of Affect on Foreign Language Learning: a Review of the Anxiety Research*" has given insight into the affective factors, both the intrinsic and extrinsic ones, that leave their marks on the process of learning as well as on the learner. Anxiety has been reported to be one of the highly apparent factors in the kind of effect it leaves on the learner and learning process. Previous literature offered a distinctive evidence on the correlation between anxiety and learning. In this regard, Kleinmann (1977) summarized the possible effect of anxiety on second language learning by stating that:

[the study] findings suggest avoidance operating as a group phenomenon, but within the particular avoiding group, use of the generally avoided structure is a function of facilitating anxiety levels of the group's members. This finding is not inconsistent with a study conducted by Chastain (1975), who found a significant negative correlation between test anxiety and final course grade in a university audio-lingual French-as-a-foreign-language class. Obviously, the anxiety there had a debilitating influence. But Chastain also implied a facilitating influence of anxiety based on his findings that anxiety was a significant predictor of success in learning Spanish as a foreign language. The evidence, therefore, seems to support the notion that certain affective measures influence learner behavior in a foreign language (p.105).

Chen and Chang (2004), in a study conducted on Chinese students learning English as a second language in Taiwan, found a positive correlation between anxiety and six learner- related predictors. Those predictors are: anxiety testing scale (FLSI-C), Chinese learning history, academic learning history, test characteristics, classroom learning characteristics and English learning history. Chen and Chang remarked that "English learning history, classroom learning characteristics, and developmental learning difficulties" (p.284) are the best predictors of foreign language learning anxiety.

Talking about the effect of anxiety on learning in general, Chen and Chang (2004) concluded their study saying that "anxiety is positively related to foreign language learning difficulties. A student who has a history of foreign language learning problems and of slow

development, and has difficulties with classroom learning skills will develop anxiety in learning a foreign language" (p.185). Trying to simplify the impact of anxiety on the process of learning a foreign/second language, Chen and Chang, in the light of their study's findings, depicted the relation among the investigated variables in the study as:

learning difficulties are related to linguistic coding problems, which point to state anxiety, which in turn indicates frustrated expectations. In other words, negative anxiety experiences are linked to low grades in foreign language, perceptions of difficulties in foreign language learning, difficulties in classroom learning, and deficiencies in developmental skills. In this conceptual framework, the anxious learner seems to be predisposed by learning difficulties to exhibit linguistic processing problems. Therefore, it is these cognitive difficulty factors, rather than the distractions caused by self-related cognition, that may explain why some anxious students have problems in acquiring and retrieving vocabulary items (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1989, p.284).

Anxiety, as well, is related to other variables like achievement and language proficiency.

Many researches proved the existence of a negative correlation between anxiety and achievement (Aida, 1994; Saito & Samimy, 1996; Coulomce, 2000 as cited in Horwitz, 2001). In this context, Horwitz, (1986) reported that there is a:

significant moderate negative correlation between foreign language anxiety and the grades students expected in their first semester language class as well as their actual final grade, including that students with higher levels of foreign language anxiety both expected and received lower grades than their less anxious counterparts (p.115).

Regarding the same topic, in a study they conducted on more than 1000 students (7- 11 grade), Gardner, Smythe, Clement & Glikzman (1976) reported that there is a strong correlation between anxiety and students proficiency (as cited in MacIntyre & Gardner, 1989).

B. First Language (L1) Interference in Second Language (L2) Learning

Another pervasive learner-related factor that affects a second language learning is language interference. Generally speaking, Brooks summarized the problems resulting from first language influence as: speaking the mother tongue, studying double- language lists of words that contain a word and its translation and translate from second language to first language(as cited in Dajani). Towell and Hawking's (1994) stated that "when we hear non-native speakers using

English we are frequently able to make good guess about the native language of those speakers" (p.7). This shows the great effect of the learner's mother tongue on the target language.

According to the specialists in the field, the process of interference influences all the language linguistic levels: phonetics/ phonology, syntax, morphology, lexicon and even discourse. In this regard, Al-Shalakh (2010) revealed that the student's mother tongue influence is one of the key sources of Arabic learning challenges facing learners as they respond in Arabic once they can't respond using the target language.

Ganschow, Sparks and Javorsky (1998) estimated that "both native and FL learning depend on basic language mechanisms and that problems with one language skill (e.g., phonology/orthography) are likely to have a negative effect on both the native language and the FL system" (p.249). Based on this assumption, Ganschow et.al have developed a hypothesis they called it "Linguistic Coding Differences Hypothesis (LCDH)" in an attempt for identifying and understanding foreign language learning problems. Their series of studies reached the conclusion that:

good FL learners have been found to exhibit significantly stronger native oral and written language skills and FL aptitude (as measured by the Modern Language Aptitude Test or MLAT; Carroll & Sapon, 1959) than poor FL learners. These differences have been demonstrated at both the secondary and the postsecondary levels of education (p.249).

Dweik and Abu Al Hommos (2007) agreed with Ganschow et.al (1998). They reported in their study which is titled "*The Effect of Arabic Proficiency on the English Writing of Bilingual-Jordanian Students*" that "students who got high marks and were proficient in Arabic writing performed well in the counter skill (English)". Sorace's (1993) findings, as well, go in line with Ganschow et. al's as he pointed that "L1 Italian learners of L2 French have more trouble acquiring the distribution of the [French] auxiliary verb *avoir/ etre*, 'have' /'be', than L1 French learners of L2 Italian do in acquiring the Italian equivalents *avere/ essere*" (as cited in Towell and

Hawking,1994, p.19). In relation to the case of Arabic native speakers learning a foreign language, Bani-Khaled (2014) reported one of the most surprising outcomes regarding the use of L1 in foreign language classrooms. He stated that "Arabic as a mother tongue should and cannot be neglected in the process of learning a foreign language" (p.187).

C. Myths About Arabic Language and its Learning Process

Based on Ferguson's (1959) overview of attitudes and beliefs about Arabic language learning, Bergman (2009) in her article "Introducing Arabic: Meeting the Challenges" introduced another source of difficulties related to learners mainly and has an effect on the process of language learning she called "Myths." In this regard, Grigore & Bituna (2015) remarked that "Arabic has received a reputation for being difficult because of the “medieval” conceptions of Arabic language learning/teaching that have not changed much over the 1400 years" (p.220).

In such a case, foreigners learning Arabic as a second language will be ceased, blocked and hindered as long as they are deceived by the myths about difficulty of Arabic. Learners with no previous experience in learning Arabic are occupied with several myths like; Arabic is impossible to be learned, most of the Arabic sounds are familiar to speakers of American English, yet, non-Arabs cannot produce some Arabic guttural sounds, vocabulary is hard to learn since Arabic does not has cognate terminologies with English as it is not an Indo-European language and Arabic grammar is difficult because of the inflected nature of Arabic morpho-syntax (Bergman, 2009). Assuming that such myths and claims are not at all completely untrue, Bergman still believes in the role they play in causing learning challenges.

The Textbook Role

A large number of previous studies revealed the role played by the textbook in enhancing as well as hindering second language learning process (Al-Shalakh, 2010; Al-Anati, 2003; and

Kaleefa & Al-Hrout, 2007 as cited in Al-Shalakh, 2010). Al-Shalakh's (2010) investigation about the suitability of the textbook bring to light the fact that poor preparation of the textbook material is a salient factor that highly influences the continuity of learning flow. Al-Shalakh suggested number of solutions for adjusting the textbook like; textbook should focus on learning speaking correctly, textbook should relate content to the learner's culture and environment, textbook should present vocabulary in appropriate contexts and situations, textbook should relate reading passages to the student's background, textbook should select passages within the vocabulary range of the pupils and textbook should relate written work to students' age, interests and environment. The percentages represent teachers and students agreed on those suggested solutions were (77.8% of students, 84.4% of teachers), (70.2% , 91.2%), (79.6%, 82.2%), (74.0%, 82.2%), (75.0%, 86.6%) and (74.4%, 82.2%) respectively (Al-Shalakh, 2010).

In a similar study, both Dweik and Al-Shalakh (2015), assessed Arabic textbooks in a certain program from students' points of view. They reported that students' responses with their percentages were; 57.0% agreed that the assigned Arabic student's textbook does not focus on learning speaking correctly, 64.6% consented that student's textbook does not relate content to the learner's culture and environment, 62.6% asserted that student's textbook does not select structures with regard to differences between L1 & L2 cultures, 61.2% believed that student's textbook does not present vocabulary in appropriate contexts and situations, 64.6% did not agree that student's textbook does relate reading passages to the student background, 57.8% consented that the student's textbook do not select passages within the vocabulary range of the pupils and 69.8% agreed that the student's textbook does not relate written work to students' age, interests and environment.

In the same context, Amayreh's (1984) analysis of the textbook used for teaching Arabic as a second language revealed that "the difficulties which the students faced while learning Arabic resulted from the poor textbooks that did not have clear goals and efficient methods" (as cited in Dweik and Al-Shalakh, 2015, p. 53). Similarly, one of the interviewed foreign learners in Al-Shalakh's (2010) study pointed that the textbook and mainly the shortage in the used teaching aids is one of the major problems that cause him/her to lose interest in learning. Regarding the same issue, Dajani et. al (2014) stated that:

students do not believe that the current book used in the program meets their needs. They think that it is necessary to provide them with more resources and specialized books in teaching Arabic for non-native speakers and to focus on both the intermediate and advanced levels. [Besides, s]ome of the students complained about the textbook which they use because it gives them little support in learning the language and it does not support them during their interaction with native speakers (p.924).

Trying to tap on the learning difficulties related to the textbook, Alesh (1992) in his article which is titled "*Designing Proficiency-oriented Syllabus for Modern Standard Arabic As a Foreign Language*" suggested a solution focuses mainly on shifting the attention toward developing a syllabus for foreign language courses that concentrates mainly on the learner and not the test. And since Alesh seems to support the communicative teaching of a foreign language, from his own point of view, designing a new syllabus that goes in line with this approach turns out to be a must and succeeding in learning a foreign language without such a change is impossible.

Since the teaching approach used in the textbook is mostly applied in the classroom, Alesh (1992) discussed three reasons stand behind learning challenges related to grammar translation teaching approach as:

[f]irst, instructional materials organized around grammatical points reflect a theory of language and learning that holds that the sum of the parts equals the whole Second, such materials tend to teach about the language ,assuming that the learners would automatically transfer knowledge about grammatical relations to actual use .This is seldom, if ever ,achieved by students, particularly transferring language abilities across skills. For instance, the ability to read doesn't mean the ability to speak. Third, grammar-based textbooks suffer from lack of context. This is a direct result of

organizing the syllabus around structural aspects and focusing on form rather than on meaning (p.253).

Believing that "the book is the main source in the process of teaching especially for speakers of other languages (P.882)," Al-Ali and Olaimat (2012) in their study which is titled "*Teaching Arabic for Speakers of Other Languages from the Perspective of Instructors and Students*" analyzed and evaluated the third level book for teaching Arabic to speakers of other languages at (IITASOL) at the University of Jordan from the perspective of instructors and students. The result of their study showed that "the averages of the instructors and students were in the medium level, which implies that the standards in writing educational books were taken care of in a medium way[, hence,] this book needs to be improved and modified" (p.882).

The Classroom Activities Role

The textbook influence on the process of learning cannot be measured without taking into account the context where the book is taught which is the foreign language classroom. Dweik and Al-Shalakh's (2015) findings revealed that the classroom activities is the second factor after the existence of different varieties of Arabic in terms of the severity of its impact on learning. In this regard, they reported that the classroom activities don't consider the students cultural background, don't take into account the students' mother tongue, don't encourage students to participate, do not include games in teaching, don't help students transfer learning into outside of the classroom, don't employ teaching aids like visual, auditory, ..etc, don't encourage students to practice the language and don't encourage transferring abstract knowledge into sensible knowledge. Chen and Chang's (2004) finding supports Dweik and Al-Shalakh's. They found that classroom learning characteristics is the second most influential variable in relation to Chinese college students' feeling of anxiety in learning English as a second language.

The Program Role

Few studies have highlighted the role played by the Arabic teaching programs regarding learning Arabic. In this concern, Djani et al (2014) remarked that the program itself which students attend to learn a foreign language is one of the causes of learning challenges. Besides, they found that the majority of students reported that they face learning problems of which the program is the main cause. They continued that "[h]alf of the students believe that the program takes into account students' individual differences while the other half totally disagree" (p. 924).

Studying five institutions for teaching Arabic as a second Language in Tunisia, Lunt (1992) alluded to the learning challenges confronting a foreign learner due to the approaches, methods and techniques adopted by the program. Lunt revealed that the programs highly adopt methodologies that focus mainly on "memorization of dialogues and repetition of mechanical pattern drills" (p.120). As a result of this, "one student at FSI [a foreign language teaching program] reported to have rebelled after a certain point and refused to memorize any more dialogues" (p.120). Lunt commented on this incident saying that "a proficiency-oriented approach calls for moving as quickly as possible from memorized material and mechanical drills to meaningful exercises in which participants communicate something real about themselves.

Summary

Reviewing literature related to learning Arabic as a second and foreign language, it is proved that Arabic diglossia side by side with the Arabic language system, the teacher, the learner, the textbook, the Arabic teaching program and the classroom are key motives and sources of the learning challenges confronting a foreign learner in learning Arabic. Additionally, searching the learners' learning intentions of learning Arabic as this study assumes that there is a link between learners' learning intentions and the kind of learning challenges confronting them,

literature showed that learning Arabic either as a second or a foreign language stems from various purposes.

Conclusion

This chapter shed light on the previous literature that have tackled the issue of learning Arabic as a second or foreign language. It presented the purposes of learning Arabic as a second or foreign language, challenges confronting a foreign learner in learning Arabic as a second or foreign language and the possible causes and sources of such challenges as it is presented in the previous literature done on this issue.

Chapter Three

Methodology

As every final conclusion follows a thorough examination, this chapter sheds light on the methodology followed in conducting this research; it set clear the research design including the study sample, instruments and procedures, and the data analysis approach.

Research Design

This study followed a qualitative research methodology. Data about the learning challenges facing non-native Arabic speakers in learning Arabic and their learning intentions were qualitatively collected through semi-structured interviews and focus-group discussions both from foreign learners and Arabic instructors standpoints.

Participants

The overall population of the study consists of all foreign students who are learning Arabic in the PAS Program and their instructors. The number of foreign students enrolled in the program fluctuates from year to year ranging between 40-60 students. During the academic year (2017-2018), when the research was conducted, the number of the students was (60) while the number of the Arabic instructors in the program was (5). In order to answer the study research questions, the researcher used two distinct samples. The first sample consists of (24) non-native Arabic speakers who were enrolled in the Palestine and Arab Studies (PAS) Program. This sample was selected using the simple random sample strategy; all students who were studying in the PAS during the second semester (Fall 2017-2018) and the summer semester (2017-2018) were asked to participate in the study. Among them (24) learners were selected randomly. The other sample consists of all the Arabic instructors (5) who were available to teach in the program at that time.

The Study Instruments

Investigating the learning challenges that foreign learners encounter in learning Arabic as a foreign language, the researcher used two main instruments; focus-group discussions and semi-structured interviews.

A. Focus-Group Discussions

As the sample of the study consisted of (24) participants, five focus-group discussions were planned to be held. The meetings with each group were arranged to be conducted at times that suit all participants in each group. Nonetheless, due to the difficulty of meeting participants in each group at the same time, four focus-groups were conducted and the rest of students were interviewed individually. Each group discussion lasted approximately for an hour and a half to two hours. As participants varied in their characteristics (age, gender, nationality, mother tongue, number of years studying Arabic), level of education (BA, MA, ...), level of Arabic...etc., they were chosen for each group in a way that facilitates active and effective discussion. Arabic instructors participated in the process of selecting the participants in each group. At the beginning of each meeting, the researcher introduced herself and presented the research topic, study objectives and the privacy standards will be followed while conducting the research, and assured data security and confidentiality for participants.

During each meeting, a number of questions were discussed in an attempt to identify the major challenges facing non-native Arabic speakers in learning Arabic as a foreign language (Please See Appendix 1 for the list of the questions. It shows the major questions around which the discussion was centered). Yet, during discussion, the researcher raised new question based on respondents' answers for more information and clarifications. Further, during all the focus-group discussion sessions, an assistant was present to take notes. In order to be more reliable in

collecting data, with permission from the participants, all discussions sessions were recorded and videotaped.

B. The Semi-Structured Interviews

As the study's second sample consisted of five Arabic instructors, five individual semi-structured interviews were conducted with them. The interviews aimed at identifying the kind of learning challenges learners faced from the Arabic instructors' point of view. The researcher met each instructor individually for an hour to hour and a half to discuss a number of questions concerning the perceived challenges their students faced in learning Arabic inside and outside the classroom.

During each meeting, a number of questions were discussed in an attempt to identify the major challenges facing non-native Arabic speakers in learning Arabic as a foreign language as well as the learners' learning intentions from Arabic instructors perspective (Please see appendix 1 for the list of the questions. It shows the major questions around which the discussion was centered). Yet, during discussion, the researcher raised new questions based on respondents' answers for more information and clarifications.

Instruments' Validity and Reliability

Validity and reliability of the study instruments were verified through several ways. To check the instruments validity, on the first hand, after conducting the focus-group discussions with the participants and the interviews with instructors, the researcher provided all participants with their responses to double check and make sure that the transcribed data accurately represent their opinions regarding the questions raised during the discussions and interviews. For more credibility, the instruments were given to a specialist in the field to be judged in terms of their

validity in measuring the challenges facing non-native Arabic speakers in learning Arabic as a foreign language.

For double checking both the reliability and validity of the study instruments, the researcher relied on another way while conducting the study. When the researcher started receiving close and identical responses from participants on the majority of the main issues that the study questions addressed, which means that the study reached the saturation stage, the researcher was assured that the study instruments were valid as well as reliable.

The Study Procedure

In order to collect enough and accurate data to answer the study research questions, the researcher followed a specific procedure. After securing the university permission for conducting the study, the researcher met all participants (teachers and students) for the first time, each at their class with their teacher, introduced herself and presented the research topic and objectives of the study. During the meetings, the researcher explained all the privacy standards that will be followed while conducting the research and assured the participants the confidentiality and security of the data collected.

Data Analysis

The researcher analyzed the collected data thematically to find connections or repeated patterns that form meanings. These patterns that are closely related to the study research questions were classified as themes (See Braun & Clarke, 2006). The researcher analyzed the data using Braun & Clarke's six-phase model. That is, after finishing data collection, she started familiarizing herself with the data while transcribing the data by looking thoroughly and deeply into the data and reading it several times. The purpose during this phase was to make herself familiar with all the aspects of the data. During the reviewing process, the researcher took some

notes and highlighted some concepts throughout the reading and rereading process to help her in the coding phase. After that, the researcher began to organize and code the data. Then, the researcher began searching for themes through grouping close codes with each other. Having a number of groups of codes, the researcher defined and named each group of codes with a title which is the theme. Following that, the researcher reviewed and finalized all the themes making the necessary changes. Finally, the meaningful themes were presented in the study results chapter and supported with evidence.

Summary

As this study is qualitative research, data related to the learning challenges confronting foreign learners in learning Arabic were qualitatively collected using two instruments; focus group discussion and semi-structured interview. Data were collected from two groups of participants; (24) foreign learners and (5) Arabic instructors. Before applying these instruments, they were given to a specialist for checking their reliability and validity. After transcribing the videotaped interviews and discussions, transcribed data validity was checked by giving the transcribed data for participants to confirm that it represented their viewpoints. As a final step, data was analyzed thematically following Braun & Clarke's (2006) six-phase model. That is, data was grouped into codes. Then, similar and close codes were grouped into themes which were later grouped into headings that represented the study main results.

Conclusion

This chapter thoroughly presented the research methodology followed in conducting the study. It described the study instruments used in collecting data, discussed the study instruments' validity and reliability and explained the qualitative thematic analysis approach used in analyzing the collected data.

Chapter Four

Study Results

As this study explores the learning challenges facing foreign learners in learning Arabic as a foreign language from foreign learners as well as Arabic instructors perspectives, this chapter puts forward the results of this investigation. Specifically, it states the learning challenges reported by learners as well as Arabic instructors in the program.

Part I. Foreign Learners Interviews

This section sets forth the challenges that confront foreign learners in learning Arabic as a foreign language from their own perspective. Analyzing data thematically, results are categorized under six main headings based on the research questions as it is shown below:

Learning Arabic in the Palestinian Context

When Arabic language learning takes place in an Arabic-speaking environment, the learning context becomes a controversial issue. Consequently, the Palestinian context was examined as an effectual factor in the learning process. Examination of this dimension resulted in a number of conclusions.

Theme 1. *"Extensive immersion within Arabic language in an Arabic speaking milieu"*

In spite of the fact that not all participants were exposed to Arabic before Palestine, all of them, except two, asserted that when Arabic learning process takes place in a context that speaks the language, it becomes less challenging. In this respect, one participant noted that being in Palestine is a good enough reason to learn the language even without the need for regular instruction. She demonstrated:

it is definitely harder there [the previous context], because here [Palestine] it is like I am learning it and I am exposed to it ... Like lots of things I don't pick up easily over there, it seems that it is easier to be around everybody here. Moreover, here, if I don't

have to wake up at seven, I would have the potential to go and communicate with people so that would help me, and would be enough.

This finding is a true fact only in case of learning the colloquial Arabic variety and not the Modern Standard Arabic (MSA). In this regard, (3) participants asserted that the context, either Arabic speaking or non-Arabic speaking, does not matter in learning the MSA variety while it extremely does in learning the colloquial one. Justifying this restricted, weak impact of the context on MSA learning, a participant related that to the variety fixed structure. He argued that *"Fusha is pretty similar everywhere depending on the method of the professor and what they teach you."*

Going back to the main result, participants attributed the finding that learning Arabic language in an Arabic speaking context is easier than learning it in any other context to a variety of reasons which are illustrated as it follows:

Firstly, *the Arabic speaking context grants the learner the advantage of being fully immersed within Arabic language.* Participants divulged that full exposure forces a learner to practice Arabic language constantly and intensively since it is the sole means of communication. One participant stressed this idea saying *"being here, since it is intensive, every day, you can hear Arabic and communicate with people so you have the potential to practice what you learned or even try to read the signs on the street."*

Secondly, *the amount of Arabic that a learner grasps in the Arabic speaking context is considerably greater than the Arabic learned in any other context.* Moreover, the learned language is the proper kind of Arabic. Comparing the amount and kind of Arabic he learned in Palestine to that learned in the previous learning context, a participant described the learned Arabic in the Palestinian context as a huge amount of contextualized Arabic. He stated that *"we are learning very specialized Ammya here relating to this context whereas in Edinburgh it is*

general Levantine Ammya. So, I guess that's the main difference. Also, it is about how much we learn Ammya here."

Pointing to the extra advantage provided by the Arabic context in terms of the kind of Arabic a learner is exposed to, a participant remarked that being in Arabic speaking context exposes the learner to various Arabic dialects "Ammyas". She expressed this saying:

basically, I think the difference between Edinburgh and here would be Ammya, because here it is not just one type of Ammya, you come across "falahy", and different varieties and there is no way you can pick that unless you have to be in that context and interacting with people.

Thirdly, *learning Arabic in an Arabic speaking context increases the potential of learning the language in an easy and interesting way.* Speaking about the level of easiness she experienced in learning Arabic in the Palestinian context, a participant related that to the full immersion within the language which makes the learned material more contextualized. She stressed this point saying *"it is much easier to learn Arabic here in Palestine because Arabic is everywhere, it is the main language here."*

Pointing to the level of excitement a learner experiences in learning within an Arabic context, another participant described her own experience as exciting. Believing that excitement in learning is restricted to the colloquial variety learning only, she specifically described it saying *"Ammya is very interesting because now ... we learn ... the difference between different layers of Ammya, like in the city, in the countryside and like the different regions ... so, that's very interesting."*

As it is mentioned earlier, (2) participants viewed immersion within an Arabic speaking context as a negative factor. They related their claim to the fact that extensive exposure makes Arabic even harder. Describing the level of challenge added by exposure to Arabic, she justified:

I used to hear Arabic from my parents but I could not understand anything. I used to understand a little. But, when I came here to Palestine, Arabic became even more

challenging since all people speak it. Besides, there are Fusha and Ammya. And people speak fast. Moreover, I find it difficult to understand as there are many words I don't know. There are lots of meanings; the words can have multiple meanings. [Translated from Arabic]

Theme 2. *"Uniqueness of the Palestinian context\ the Palestinian general atmosphere"*

Examining the impact of the learning context on the learning process, it was perceived that all participants, except one, viewed learning Arabic in Palestine as a distinguished experience that differs than learning in any other context, either Arabic or non-Arabic speaking. Although participants varied in their previous learning contexts; some have been exposed to Arabic in Arabic speaking contexts while others learned it in non-Arabic speaking ones, they reported a substantial number of features that distinguish the Palestinian context. Some of these features were viewed as positive factors that make Arabic learning a distinguished and easy process while others were viewed as negative factors that make Arabic learning hard and challenging. Those features are summarized in the following points:

First, *the Palestinian context has a variety of situations that create various learning resources.* Palestine, as an Arabic speaking context, offers a learner the opportunity to live the language under diverse circumstances. The fact that helps a learner to pick Arabic naturally, just like a native speaker, even without the need for instruction. One participant described this exceptional situation in Palestine saying:

you don't get to rest. Here, you don't really get to take a break. I think that's good. There is the specifics of the Palestinian culture of talking to everybody, there are a lot of kids on the street, they can talk to you for hours. What helps in Palestine, I think, also that there are people who don't speak English at all because it is foreign, so, you have to communicate in Arabic. At the same time, you have a lot of people speak English very well, that will help you to translate. I have some friends who set me up with certain vocab so I have to practice with those people.

Participants asserted that the degree of exposure considerably varies from one context to another, which stresses the value added to the learning process in Palestine. That is as being bordered by Arabic forced them to constantly and heavily practice the language, both the

Palestinian colloquial and MSA varieties, in different circumstances. One of the participants stressed this finding saying:

When you are here, you are constantly taking what you learn and applying it in your everyday life. Every single day is like Arabic class never ends, so you are constantly speaking Arabic, and this is what I do. I come and want to speak Arabic the whole time with my family and with everyone. But when you are in the US, once the class ends you no longer speak Arabic. Here, there is a wider exposure to learning Arabic and I am all the time forcing myself to speak the language.

Second, *learning Arabic language in the Palestinian context includes gaining cultural knowledge related to that context.* Participants asserted that learning Arabic language is not only restricted to learning a bunch of words. Instead as a nation's culture and language can never be set apart, Arabic learning entails learning culture related to the Palestinian context. In connection to this finding, one participant stressed the solid link between the language learned in Palestine and the Palestinian culture saying:

part of learning Arabic in Palestine is the context, you cannot really separate the language from the context and culture, there are obvious advantages to learning Arabic in a context in which the language and culture are all sorts of supporting each other.

Third, *learning Arabic in the Palestinian context helps the learner to gain the proper Palestinian colloquial variety 'proper Ammya' as it is naturally spoken among Palestinian people.* All participants asserted that the context is a cornerstone variable in attaining the proper Palestinian dialect, dialect functions and differences across Palestinian dialects. Raising this issue, one participant commented:

I think learning here is more relevant, it is not necessarily easier. It is a better Arabic actually because when you speak Arabic in a specific accent, you speak it and hear it as well. The direct exposure is kind of has, like receptacle, you can hear it more, so you can speak it more.

This finding was mainly stressed by the Palestinian learners who were born and grown outside Palestine. They viewed learning Arabic in Palestine as a way for bringing back their identity which was lost in diaspora. Those Palestinians confirmed that learning their genuine

native language is a prerequisite for achieving such an objective. The thing that can only be done through being immersed in the Palestinian context. Because her intention is to learn the Palestinian colloquial Arabic for the sake of restoring her lost identity, one participant considered being in Palestine as the first step to do so. She stated:

a language is not just a bunch of words and grammar structures. Languages have different personalities. I think even with Arabic, Arabic in different countries takes different personalities; it takes the personality of people of the country, of the culture, ... it is not a uniform everywhere. So, being here helps us learn the personality of Palestinian Arabic because for me learning Arabic isn't just about learning another language for my degree [Masters in Middle East Studies with Arabic], it's personal. I want to be fluent in Arabic and the Palestinian dialect because that's my language and I lost it through displacement and migration.

Fourth, *learning Arabic in the Palestinian context is unstructured, broaden, less-academic, flexible and automatic kind of learning.* Exploring the features distinguishing the Palestinian context from other learning contexts, some participants remarked that, unlike the previous learning contexts in which Arabic learning is structured, Arabic learning in Palestine is unstructured and broaden. This changes the learning process into a less academic one as the class seems to be less like a real class with a fixed structure. This in its turn, makes learning less like teaching and more like acquisition of Arabic through involvement within the context. Comparing her learning experience in Edinburg to learning in Palestine, one participant argued:

In Edinburgh, it is a very structured grammar and very structured vocabulary units. We learned like a hundred vocabularies related to this topic, and the next week another topic. So, it is very compartmentalized, it is very categorized and lessons are very structured. We had two semesters of studying Arabic[but,] here they placed us in a level where it is more of practicing what you know. Actually, they are not teaching us ... it is not like a structured lesson every time, but it is an opportunity to practice what you should know. Besides, using Arabic here makes it less academic like how it was in Edinburgh. Here, you are like hear it, speak it and use it ... I don't actually use it in Edinburgh, no one spoke to me outside the classroom.

Participants demonstrated that this, in its turn, makes the learning process more flexible. That is as learners automatically pick all the nuances of the language without even being stick to a

fixed teaching pattern. One participant related this flexibility to the naturalness of learning.

Bringing an illustrative example, she argued:

I think there is also the difference between learning in one way of saying something and learning that there are many more ways to say the same thing. For example, when we speak to people, you meet someone you know and come to say " كيفك؟ شو أخبارك؟ شو سويت " "اليوم". So, you got different ways for the same thing just with a little different emphasis, and at the end we learn that they all have the same meaning and function but they are used in different contexts. You start to understand the nuances, you know these are the same question but there is a little bit of a difference, you should learn in which context you can use them ... and no one explains it for you, you just pick it up by being here and by people addressing you... you learn it from the context.

Relating such differences to how challenging is the learning process, participants' responses insisted that difference does not necessarily mean being challenging. However, some of their responses reflected that the Palestinian context with all these differences makes learning even harder.

Fifth, *Arabic-speaking context allows a learner to transfer the learned material into the ground through constant practice.* Participants agreed that the surrounding environment in Palestine creates an excellent milieu that allows for daily use of the language. In spite of his short experience in learning Arabic in Palestine, a participant revealed that being immersed within the language context for the sake of learning is exceedingly helpful. He pointed out this issue saying:

it is a thing that's more helpful to speak Arabic on a daily basis. Before I started learning Arabic, my minor in school was French, so I started from nothing and I went through French because lots of my work is in French. And from that experience, I knew the difference when I came to a society that speaks the language. In learning Arabic it helps a lot. So it makes it different from learning at school especially.

Sixth, *Arabic-speaking context offers the opportunity to make healthy mistakes. Practicing Arabic in its context makes mistakes potential.* In relation to this fact, a participant whose knowledge of Arabic is very primitive asserted that a learner's presence in the context helps him to make lots of healthy mistakes that he would not be able to make outside the context. He explained:

helpful, because you can use it and make mistakes. It is, sometimes, intimidating to use it for someone like me, because I have such a small vocabulary, but I still get very clumsy when I use the language. So, you have to be prepared to make mistakes. Some of us don't like to look like a five-year-old child ... and actually a five-year-old is more advanced. The issue is that you have to be willing to use it and to make mistakes, this is how one learns.

Some participants took a different track and demonstrated that existing in the Palestinian context for the sake of learning Arabic, although is enhancive, it is not free from learning challenges. One participant remarked that being fully exposed to Arabic puts a learner under the language pressure. He plainly explained:

before I came here, I used to hear Arabic from my parents, but I did not understand anything. When I came here, I started understanding a little bit Arabic when people talk to me. But, because all people speak Arabic, it became harder. That's because there are lots of vocabularies and different meanings for the same word, and the word is spelled in a different way than how it is pronounced.

As a last point in this regard, participants argued that that being challenging does not necessarily mean that it hinders the learning process. She said:

I think it is more challenging, but I think this does not mean it is not right, I think, genuinely, it is the right way to learn it and also the only way ... so the challenges are not challenges. You can learn the language and these challenges aid you and the learning process.

To sum up, learning Arabic in the Palestinian context is challenging although it still helpful. That is as the distinctiveness of the Palestinian general atmosphere aids the Arabic learning process though it create pressure over the learner.

Challenges of Learning Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) Variety

Besides the learning context, Arabic language, including its two varieties; the MSA and the colloquial, was surveyed as a potent variable in the learning process. Starting by the MSA variety, investigation revealed about some results as follows:

Theme 1. *"Compared to the Palestinian colloquial, the MSA variety is less preferred to be learned."*

Discussing the preferred variety from foreign learners views, their answers revealed the greater portion of them; (14) participants, had a tendency to learn the Palestinian colloquial Arabic over MSA variety. In this regard, one participant firmly responded to the question about the preferred variety saying *"definitely Ammya, because a lot of Arabic I will be doing will be like talking, that I would not be writing anything."* On the opposite, (4) participants preferred learning MSA variety. In relation to this respect, one of those participants expressed his preference of MSA variety saying *"I think I prefer Fusha. Fusha, I think, is the thing I really love."* The last (6) participants revealed that they prefer learning both varieties. In this regard, a participant expressed her interest in learning both varieties equally saying *"I see both varieties are important, so, I prefer learning both of them although it is hard for me to do that simultaneously. [Translated from Arabic]"*

Participants related their great tendency towards learning the Palestinian colloquial Arabic variety over MSA to four main reasons as it is stated below:

Firstly, the Palestinian colloquial Arabic variety is nice and gratifying.

Participants claimed that the fact that the vernacular Palestinian is a nice variety makes it easy to be learned. This, in its turn, boosts the extent of excitement a learner experiences in learning as a learner can sense the language. A participant expressed this point saying *"I prefer Ammya, it is much more natural, it feels nicer, it is easier to speak to people. It is more interesting, you get into the depth of the language."*

Secondly, learning the colloquial Arabic variety is easier than MSA learning

Comparing the colloquial Arabic variety learning to MSA variety's in terms of easiness, one participant, who admitted that both varieties learning is hard, argued that learning the vernacular variety is generally easier than the standard one, especially if it is done in an Arabic-speaking context. This participant remarked that, in addition to his intention of learning Arabic, which is to communicate in Arabic, the ease of Ammya learning was the chief reason for learning it. He plainly spoke of this as:

With Ammya I am progressing faster. I prefer to be fluent in both, but for the purpose of being here is to learn Ammya. When I go back I can continue Ammya but I can also start Fusha. And Fusha for me is very difficult, it is related to news, documents not daily life conversations.

Thirdly, the colloquial Arabic is a functional and rewarding variety

Some participants related their preference of the Palestinian colloquial Arabic to the fact that the colloquial variety is more useful than MSA in terms of everyday interactions. That is, according to one participant, "Ammya" can be used wherever it is found, unlike Fusha that is limited to specific contexts. He stated this finding saying:

I prefer Ammya because I can use it. There are no many opportunities for me to use Fusha. When I try to read, I use websites in Fusha, I cannot really understand everything. I cannot understand a lot of words. It is just too difficult, it is not inspiring. I learn it for the sake of learning. But, Ammya, is just more rewarding; everywhere I find it, I can use it. For me, I found it difficult that the middle east is getting more in the news in the UK. I did not like it that a lot of people are giving opinions on who Arabs are. And now I am a journalist specialized in Eastern Mediterranean from Greece to Egypt, and it is essential for my work to speak to people instead of translation.

Lastly, the colloquial Arabic variety is the communication tool for Arabic native speakers

There were a considerable number of participants whose responses reflected that their real intention of learning Arabic is to communicate and discuss deep issues in Arabic. Thus, they showed a great interest in learning the colloquial Arabic variety. In this context, one participant declared:

I prefer Ammya more because I want to speak to people here but also I want to learn Fusha. So, because I want to communicate at this stage, I prefer Ammya but later I can learn Fusha. Now, I am living in Palestine and in daily life I use Ammya, so, if I know some words, more expressions, useful ones, I can communicate with them. So, I prefer Ammya just to communicate and to talk deeply about different topics.

As for the participants who preferred learning the MSA variety, they related that to a variety of reasons. First, *the learner's intention of learning Arabic language*. In this respect, one participant, who is originally Palestinian but grew up hearing and speaking Arabic, revealed that her intention of learning Arabic is to be able to read and write. In this case, her intention pushed her to decline learning Ammya and focus on Fusha basically. She declared "*I think I prefer Fusha just because I really want to challenge myself to be able to like read because before this I can read kind of newspaper stuff and have no clue what they are saying.*" Second, *learning the MSA variety is delightful compared to learning the colloquial Arabic which is boring*. Some participants remarked that learning the MSA variety is very much enjoyable and fascinating in comparison to Ammya. In this regard, one participant stressed this point saying:

I think I prefer Fusha because ... I feel if I am in Ammya class I would be pretty bored. I can speak pretty well and carry on a conversation ... but learning Fusha is basically learning another language, or it would be just the same word but you pronounce it a tiny bit differently, so it is just knowing that and knowing grammar and learning all that stuff will be really helpful.

Third, *MSA variety learning is easier and more stimulating because of its fixed structure*. There was a small group of participants related their preference of MSA variety to its structure. One of those participants revealed that the fixed structure of Fusha makes its learning less challenging, especially for participants who like following rules in learning. This participant put this finding in a simplified way as: "*I think I prefer Fusha just because I love grammar, I love rules, I love perfect grammar. And sort of being able to read a text, understand it and vocalize it.*" Finally, *MSA is a beautiful variety*. Following their intuition and taste in answering the question about the preferred variety, some participants remarked that they prefer learning MSA variety as they found

it more beautiful than the vernacular. In this regard, a participant expressed how she is impressed by Fusha saying *"I prefer Fusha. Well, to my ear it is more beautiful, has beauty ... it comes to everyone that I cannot speak it on a daily basis but I love listening to it and I love speaking it."*

As for the third group of participants who preferred learning both varieties, they reported one major reason for that. They remarked that both varieties are indispensable for learning Arabic. In relation to this finding, a participant chose to learn both varieties simultaneously in spite of the fact that she was a total beginner learner. She related that to her need for both varieties. She stated this finding saying *"I think Ammya is more playful and useful in everyday, but you cannot learn a language if you don't know how to write it, so this is why, At my stage of learning, I think both are necessary."* Similarly, as a Palestinian grown up in the diaspora and has the intention for bringing back her native language, one participant realized that achieving such an objective can never be achieved through learning one variety of Arabic without the other. She explained this finding saying:

both, I guess. Ammya, because the more you talk face to face, the more you understand them here and be able to learn better. But, I think it is also important to read and write. For example, you want to be able to read the Qur'an, so I also prefer Fusha.

Theme 2. "The extent of challenge of learning MSA variety "

Participants' opinions regarding the degree of challenge they experienced in learning the MSA variety were diverse. The greater bulk of participants, precisely (16) learners, revealed that learning MSA is tremendously challenging. Only (4) participants remarked that learning MSA is easy whereas the other (2) participants stayed neutral as they had no previous experience in learning Fusha.

Justifying their opinion, participants who remarked that learning the MSA variety is challenging presented some good explanations. As a first explanation, *Arabic grammar* was the

foremost aspect participants related to. They highlighted some controversial grammar aspects that cause MSA to be challenging. Some of these aspects are illustrated below:

First, participants confirmed that *the huge number of grammar rules of MSA variety hinders the learning process*. That is as the number of rules exceeds a learner's ability to memorize all of them. Stressing this finding, a participant declared:

learning MSA is difficult. That is because there are a lot of grammatical rules, the number of rules put me in a lot of stress one time, and there are a lot of specific rules. So, it is difficult because we need to remember rules about the language. I have learned grammar in my country, and what I learned here is very new for me, so, in my memory, it is so difficult for me, I have to remember letters, how to pronounce it and also the rule. It is insane, it is a lot to memorize.

In the same respect, another participant remarked that the huge number of rules impact appears in writing in Fusha which requires a learner to follow rules strictly. That is as the immense number of grammar rules makes writing correctly incredibly hard. She stated this point as *"there are rules about the dual, masculine,... etc. And there are "harakat" \ diacritics. When one writes, s\he has to follow rules but this is not easy. If the learner made a mistake, the whole writing will be wrong."* [Translated from Arabic]

Second, *learning grammar needs time*. Participants related the finding that Fusha learning is challenging to grammar whose learning consumes a lot of time. He spoke of this explicitly saying *"the challenge, I guess, it is just that it takes time to learn rules of numbers, proper verbs,... etc. It is just time, If you have time, it is not a problem."*

Third, *grammar learning requires a mediator, which is English mostly*. In relation to this finding, a participant claimed that learning MSA depends on mastering Arabic grammar in the first place. However, a foreign learner needs a mediator to learn grammar rules which is, mostly, English language which would be even more challenging for foreigners who do not know English grammar. She explained:

Fusha learning is very challenging because grammar and vocabulary are in English. I really hate grammar, I really don't understand English grammar because I am not used to it, so to learn grammar in Arabic is hard. for example, I have been taking the grammar term "genitive" and I don't know what that means! So, it sounds like you are learning English grammar and Arabic grammar at the same time from scratch.

As a second explanation for why learning the MSA variety is challenging, participants pointed out that *there are vast differences between linguistic systems of Arabic language and a learner's native language*. In this respect, participants mentioned some variations between Arabic and Latin languages basically that makes of Arabic a difficult language to learn. Four key variations are illustrated underneath:

First, *pronunciation*. Among the various features that distinguish Arabic language, participants concentrated on Arabic pronunciation "sounds vocalization" as a key motive for learning challenges. In relation to this, a participant stressed the state of confusion she experienced in learning Arabic because of sound pronunciation. She claimed:

I would not say it [MSA learning] is easy. I guess the main challenge I struggle with in Fusha learning is that the textbook does not tell the vocalization of the words. So, it will be a real challenge unless you know that word, and you are trying to read up on yourself and figuring out the vocalization because it could be vocalized in a variety of ways.

Second, *Arabic script*. In this context, a participant remarked that Arabic writing system is completely different than the English system. Focusing on the script of each language specifically, this participant highlighted the difference between both languages scripts as the key motive for MSA learning to be challenging saying that *"it [Arabic language] is a different written language. The script is very difficult, with very different sounds ... I still struggle with "خ" and "ط" which does not exist in English."*

Third, *variations between Arabic language varieties; MSA and the colloquial varieties*. Participants referred to pronunciation as a central distinction between both varieties. Regarding this finding, a participant remarked that such a distinction hinders Arabic learning process. Bringing some specific examples, he explained:

the pronunciation of words varies from Fusha to Ammya, I pronounce "بنت" "benton" \ "ولده" \ "waladon" \ "رجل" \ "rajolon" in Fusha. So, when I come to say it to people, they just say "بنت" \ bent, "رجل" \ rajol, "ولد" \ walad ... it is very confusing. In Ammya, it is more flexible and at the end, you will be understood, unlike Fusha.

In the same respect, another participant revealed that since Ammya and Fusha do not share lots of similarities, it was hard for him to make use of Ammya knowledge attained at early stages of his life in learning MSA.

Fourth, *the fixed pattern of MSA variety*. Participants revealed that the MSA fixed structure makes its learning challenging. One of those participants referred to this point saying:

Ammya makes a lot more sense than Fusha. That's because you need grammar structure in Fusha. If you are not used to the grammar structure, like if you come from Latin-based languages, and you are trying to imagine that the grammar structure is just fed up along those lines with other Latin-based languages, it is just confusing.

As a last finding in this respect, among participants who stated that MSA variety learning is challenging, there was a participant who viewed the variety learning difficulty in a positive way. Highlighting vocalization as the utmost challenge, she remarked that this challenge still has a positive impact as overcoming a challenging issue means you learned it.

Theme 3. "A great challenge in communicating using MSA variety"

Discussing the level of challenge experienced in communicating using MSA variety, participants confirmed that it is completely challenging. Nonetheless, most of their points of view were just an estimation built based on their learning experiences. That is because all of them, except two, reported that they did not try to actually communicate using MSA variety.

Deeply speaking about this issue, participants' responses were varied and specific. The first group of participants, which represented approximately the majority of the sample, firmly reported that communicating using MSA is highly challenging. They related such a finding to three reasons. First, some participants claimed that *MSA is a very precise variety*, which leaves no room for mistakes. One of the participants who had a real experience in communicating using

Fusha remarked that the fixed structure of MSA makes using it for communication unusual and weird. He clarified:

I think, when we learn Fusha we learn very structured, very heavy grammatical sentences and not how people speak., umm well, I don't really use Fusha when I communicate with Arabic native speakers because it sounds weird if you do. But, I think when I talk to my dad at home and use Fusha to practice for my classes, it just feels weird just because it sounds very much like robotic. So, it is a little challenging.

In relation to this finding, another participant demonstrated that the real challenge is in being misunderstood by Arabic native speakers. He explained:

the first time for me in Palestine I did not know any Ammya. I was speaking to people in Fusha, and they had no idea what I am talking about. It sounds weird to speak in Fusha here like "أريد طعام من فضلك". Fusha is a lot more specific, and it is like you have to think better about what you are actually saying because the language itself is more specific and precise also. It is a lot easier to make mistakes in Ammya. Ammya allows for a lot of kind of right stuff to say. In Fusha, when we make mistakes, it is wrong.

Second, participants revealed that *Arabic-native speakers use a modern form of MSA variety for communication*. In this respect, a participant claimed that although MSA variety has a precise structure, the context still has its implications on its usage. To put it specifically, knowing Fusha does not necessarily mean being able to speak and understand it like a native speaker. Hence, a learner might fail in speaking to or understanding other native speakers. He illustrated this point saying *"All people here understand Fusha but it might be a little bit difficult because people might use phrases that you are not familiar with, or the grammar structure might be difficult for you to master."*

Third, most of the participants' answers stressed the finding that *the colloquial Arabic variety is still more familiar and easier than MSA*. In this regard, a participant remarked that she communicates using the colloquial variety although she prefers MSA. That is as the colloquial is the spoken variety in the context. She clarified; *"I like both Ammya and Fusha but Ammya is more useful with people, that you look less "أجنبي" \foreign. In Ammya, you know what's right and then say it, it is just less structured and more comfortable in speaking it."*

Moving to the second group of participants, they did not firmly agree that communicating using MSA variety is challenging. Nevertheless, they asserted that the extent of challenge a learner experiences in communicating using Arabic depends on the topic; the more the topic is deep, the more it requires profound thinking and rich knowledge, hence, the more it becomes harder for the learner to use Arabic to talk about it. In this respect, a participant reported that they have a lack of knowledge about some profound topics like politics which makes it hard to talk about them using MSA variety.

As for the third group, participants reported that communicating using MSA variety is challenging, yet, useful. Concerning this finding, one participant claimed that knowledge learners attain about MSA allows them to understand other people's speech, especially when people speak a colloquial dialect that differs from the dialect they learned. This participant explained this point as: *"I couldn't carry a conversation in Fusha, it is definitely challenging. However, I think it would certainly help if I know a person speaks another Arabic dialect, knowledge of Fusha allows me to understand them better."* Raising another advantage, another participant reported that using the MSA variety helps learners in acquiring the best kind of Fusha as being in Arabic speaking context forces them to communicate using the standard variety. This participant stressed this point saying:

it is challenging, yet helpful because it forces you to learn the variety. Like if everybody speaks English, it is very easy to speak to them in English. When you have no choice, you start communicating with the class in the language they speak, which is good because it pushes you. For instance, in Al-Nasrah where we travelled last week, it was easy for us to communicate in Arabic even if people are native in Hebrew because they knew Arabic more than English, so it was much easier.

Theme 4. *"Challenges of learning MSA variety"*

Talking about the kind of learning challenges facing a learner in learning MSA variety, participants brought to the scene a variety of challenges. These challenges are related to key aspects of Arabic language. Grammar was reported as the most challenging aspect in learning MSA. Thus, this section starts by discussing the grammar-related challenges.

First: Arabic Grammar.

Most of the participants' opinions regarding the learning challenges facing them in learning the MSA variety put Arabic grammar in first place. In this respect, speaking of the grand negative impact of grammar on learning MSA, one participant stated that *"if there is no grammar, learning Arabic would be so smooth."*

Focusing on the type of the learning challenges related to Arabic grammar, participants mentioned some grammatical issues as examples. Some of the key grammar-related challenges are explained below:

Firstly, *case ending*. Arabic language has a grammatical feature called case ending, which requires a learner to put diacritics at the end of a word based on its function in the sentence. A substantial number of participants claimed that case endings is the most challenging aspect of Arabic grammar. One participant stated this challenge saying *"case endings "إعراب" was very difficult at first because that entire system does not exist in English, it does not exist in any language. I think that is a big challenge for me."*

Secondly, *agreement*. Learners referred to two kinds of agreement; the adjective- noun agreement and the number agreement. In this respect, a participant reported that making correct agreement between the adjective and the noun it describes and between the number and the counted noun that follows is immensely challenging. He explained saying:

switching between adjectives, like keeping the gender and number issues correct, is like the agreement between the adjective and the noun it describes is super challenging. Also, number issue, that's definitely hard at first and still hard actually. To make the agreement between the number and the counted noun correctly is difficult for me.

Thirdly, *conjugation*. Participants agreed that all the noun, verb and gerund conjugation rules are challenging. Talking about noun conjugation, one participant overtly explained the kind of challenge it caused for her saying:

the noun conjugate, ... It's like when we say "Talebon\ طالب", "Taleban\ طالبان", "Talebaton\ طالبات", ... it is about when we put two words together and we have to put the endings. Do you see this [pointing at an example in the book about genitive\ "المضاف\ الإضافة".

In relation to the other kind of conjugations, verb conjugation, a participant described the great challenge she used to experience in learning conjugating Arabic verbs in an early stage of learning. She expressed this issue saying that *"it is about how to conjugate the verbs like there are ten types of verbs. I have to remember all of them and how to conjugate them."* The last type of conjugation mentioned by participants is gerund conjugation. Speaking about how challenging the gerund conjugation is, a participant gave some illustrative examples. She declared:

gerund conjugation is hard because there is no one way for conjugating all words. For instance, we form the gerund of the verb "اخرج"/get out" based on the word itself. It becomes "اخرج\ exit". Thus, not all words have the same rule for deriving the gerund form of it. [Translated from Arabic]

Fourthly, *the huge number of specific grammar rules*. In this respect, a participant claimed that the grand number of grammar rules hinders the learning process. That is as the immense number of grammar rules puts the learner under stress.

Second: Writing

Speaking about grammar-related challenges derived learners to talk about writing in Arabic and the challenges linked to it. In this respect, when asked about the kind of learning challenges facing her in learning Arabic, one participant directly related to writing saying:

"definitely, writing, just like the structure and sentences and this stuff, this is a little bit challenging."

In this respect, participants highlighted the sentence structure as the utmost challenge. Participants remarked that a sentence in Arabic can be structured in a variety of ways. They related such a challenge to the variations between Arabic and English syntax. In relation to this, one participant illustrated:

the grammar structure of English and Arabic are incredibly different. In English you start with the subject, "I went", so it is a more subject-oriented language. And then you come to Fusha and it is not only backwards where you write from right to left, but also there are sentences in which you can put the verb first. It is different, you have to reorient your brain.

Talking about sentence formulation, participants revealed that forming Arabic complex and conditional sentences is extremely challenging. Giving an example, one participant explained:

forming complex sentences was difficult because the way complex sentences in Arabic are different from the way you form complex sentences in English. Like, umm, for example, "the girl who was from this city went to this place which blah blah tomorrow", this formula is different from the complex sentence formula in Arabic. Forming conditional sentences "جمل شرطي" is not easy as well.

Third: Vocabulary

Besides grammar and writing, Arabic vocabulary was highlighted as a crucial aspect that challenges MSA learning. Participants mentioned some reasons that made vocabulary learning challenging. As a first cause, some participants remarked that *vocabulary of MSA variety is huge*, the fact that makes its learning uneasy. In this regard, although he has a long and thorough exposure to Arabic language in Arabic speaking contexts, a participant revealed that Fusha vocabulary is hard to learn. He expressed this point saying *"I think it is the vocabulary. I think Fusha has a lot of words and I still don't know lots of words"*. Another cause for such a finding is

the fact that *the learner's ability to recall the needed terminology into the context is limited and imperfect*. A participant provided an illustrative example on this point. She explained:

another challenging issue is the political vocabulary related to the political situation in Palestine, for example. All the words are new and difficult. I mean that there are lots of meanings of a word and there are lots of words. Like "bag". I know it is "سنتة" but when I see the word, I ask myself what is "سنتة"? and later I realize that it is as same as "حقيبة" bag.

As a third cause, participants remarked that *the context adds to the meaning of a terminology*. A participant demonstrated that a word's meaning is defined based on its context.

Bringing a real example from her own experience, she explained:

For instance, when the teacher gives us new words and assigns us an assignment to use these words in a paragraph, I came to realize that not all words can combine with each other. In other words, there are some meanings I don't know how to combine with each other and when I join words, the teacher says these words can never combine or the meaning is incorrect in this context.

Fourth: Arabic Reading Comprehension

Among the whole study sample, one participant remarked that reading and comprehending Arabic is a challenging aspect. She demonstrated her weak ability to comprehend both written and audible texts. She stated this issue saying that *“what is really challenging is trying to read paragraphs. Also, when the teacher reads paragraphs, I cannot understand anything.”*

Fifth: MSA Variety Pronunciation

Sounds vocalization is another variable to which a great portion of participants referred as a cause for the learning challenges facing participants. A participant stated this finding saying *“the most challenging is vocalization and how to speak properly.”*

Participants demonstrated that the big gap between Arabic spelling and pronunciation mainly is the reason for such a challenge. Comparing Arabic to her native language, Urdu, and second language, French, one participant stressed the great obstacles she faced in vocalizing Fusha. She illustrated:

I think pronouncing a word is different than the way you write it. So, when I speak Urdu or French, I know the only way to speak it and when I speak English, I only know, unless I am writing an academic paper, how I am trained to do it at the university, speak the way how people speak it normally. The academic writing is just to challenge yourself because you cannot learn it unless you practice it. And when you read it, you can sense the rule. You don't need to know the rule to understand the sentence [, which is the case in Arabic]. You can form a way of understanding without it, you get the meaning without knowing the rule [in English].

Sixth: Variation Between Arabic Language and Other Languages on One Hand and Arabic Varieties on the Other.

As most participants are native speakers of Latin languages, they claimed that Arabic language differs from other non-Semitic languages and varieties of Arabic vastly vary, as well. And this kind of variation produces lots of learning challenges.

Speaking about the difference between Arabic and other languages, participants classified Arabic as a language with a language system completely different from their native languages'. Therefore, they considered such a variation as the major cause of the learning challenges they experienced. In this context, one of those participants spoke of the impact of such a finding on the learning process saying *“if you are not used to the grammar structure like if you come from Latin-based languages and you are trying to imagine that the grammar structure just fed up along those lines with other Latin-based languages, it is just confusing.”*

Discussing the variations between Arabic varieties, some participants pointed at the gap between MSA and the colloquial Arabic varieties, mainly, as a chief reason for the challenges facing them in learning MSA variety. They claimed that MSA is completely different from the colloquial variety. They highlighted several aspects of difference between the two varieties. First, *unlike the colloquial Arabic, MSA is a very structured variety*. For some students, this fact makes MSA variety learning extremely challenging. In this context, a participant stated:

I think, generally, in Fusha you think and understand something and then there is a complicated way behind it actually. So, that everything could not be straightforward

most of the time as the language was set up strictly. There is not a lot you can create variations, you have to go with the rule. That's definitely challenging.

Second, *compared to the colloquial variety, MSA is specific and precise.* The fact that makes mistakes unacceptable. A participant spoke of this issue as:

because Fusha is a lot more specific, and it is a lot like you have to think better about what you are actually saying because the language itself is more specific. It is more precise also. It is a lot easier to make mistakes, Ammya allows for a lot of kind of right stuff to say.

Third, *MSA variety is not the means of communication among Arabic native speakers, which affects the learner's motivation towards learning.* Participants indicated that MSA variety is limited to the classroom only while outside the class there is no sense of it. Regarding this finding, a participant argued:

you only learn Fusha when you are in class. Out of the class you speak in your "falahy" accent. So, I don't use Fusha a lot. Like, when I took the Fusha class in PAS, to be honest with you, I forgot everything. I practice Arabic outside but not in Fusha, the way how we read and write. It is difficult to practice speaking MSA with people. MSA is not what people speak on the street and when you cannot speak to people it is difficult to feel inspired to continue studying.

Fourth, the MSA variety is not rewarding. Participants remarked that it takes a long time of intensive learning to start seeing the buds of learning. Moreover, its usage is limited to certain contexts. In this regard, one participant spoke of this point as:

you have to be determined because, like me, I was learning Arabic five years before and then two years focused and people and my friends asked me if I could speak Arabic and I said no because my brain was frustrated. So, you need to really want it, and you have to wait years to start seeing results. From my experience and the people I know, Arabic takes a lot longer to start speaking than other languages because it is hard.

Seventh: Learning Material\ Textbook

Unlike what was proven in the reviewed literature, a few participants linked some of the learning challenges facing them in learning MSA variety to the textbook. Discussing this issue, participants underscored some features of the PAS textbook that cause learning challenges. In the first place, they demonstrated that the lack of vocalization from the book makes learning the

variety challenging. One participant spoke of this point specifically saying *"the textbook does not tell the vocalization of the words. So, unless you know that word, you are trying to read up on yourself and figuring out the vocalization because it could be vocalized in different ways."* In the second place, participants revealed that finding the suitable material impedes learners from continuing learning on their own. One participant illustrated this point saying that *"it is about how to find a good textbook and give me enough examples to work on my own without the teacher to teach myself enough outside the class. So, this is a big challenge; how to get the material."*

Challenges of Learning the Palestinian Colloquial Arabic Variety.

This section explores the challenges that foreign learners face in learning as well as communicating using the Palestinian colloquial Arabic variety from foreign learners viewpoint. Results related to these two dimensions are displayed as the following:

Theme 1. "The extent of challenge of learning the Palestinian Colloquial Arabic variety"

Discussing their experiences in learning the Palestinian colloquial Arabic variety, participants varied in terms of the extent to which they found the variety learning challenging. As a general result, the majority of participants, (13) learners, reported that learning the Palestinian colloquial is challenging.

Participants who claimed that learning the Palestinian colloquial Arabic variety is challenging defended their claim with some good justifications. As a first defense, participants referred this finding to the fact that *Arabic is a difficult language*. One participant stressed this claim saying:

the Palestinian colloquial is challenging just not because it is different than the other kind of Arabic, it is just challenging. I mean we are talking about an English speaker learning a language that is vastly different and much more difficult and complicated than English. English is a very easy language, it is the structure, the grammar, ... it is easy. Arabic is a far more complex and difficult language, especially for English speakers.

The second defense is *the PAS program intensive focus on Arabic vocabulary*. Most participants indirectly pointed out that vocabulary teaching occupies the greatest share of the Arabic teaching process. This immense focus on teaching vocabulary has implications on the learning process; participants remarked that it minimizes a learner's ability to use the learned variety as the concentration is directed towards memorizing instead of exploiting terminologies in real-life situations. Moreover, it reduces the amount of time specified for teaching other linguistic aspects of the dialect. On this respect, a participant commented:

Learning the vernacular variety is hard, because of our teacher, he is focusing on giving us vocabulary, maybe because we ask about vocabulary a lot and we mostly learn vocabulary and if we want to speak to somebody we cannot. The teacher gives us grammar also but we don't have enough time in the class to write or speak. We are just asking about vocabulary and replying.

The third claim, participants added that *the colloquial Arabic variety requires constant and extensive practice*. In this regard, some participants' responses indicated that communicating using the Palestinian colloquial is a cornerstone factor for mastering the variety. However, they complained that practicing requires investment of time and effort. A participant summed this point saying: *"I learn better when I am surrounded by people, but also Ammya is spoken and you have to speak to people. So, I think it takes more time for me. So, I would not say easy, it is exhausting."*

The fourth defense is *the diglossic nature of Arabic language*. Participants claimed that Arabic diglossia complicates the learning process. That as the diglossic nature of Arabic could cause misunderstanding, which causes the communication to break. A participant plainly explained this finding as:

sometimes it is difficult ... I have friends who are from America, they are kind of knowing Arabic. Their parents are more "madany", so if I say words like more "Falahi", they are like "what are you saying?" So, yes, they have no clue what these words mean. And when I say the other word, they say "yea, I know what that means and that is just the only time that we cannot connect.

As exception for this general finding, some participants classified the Palestinian colloquial Arabic learning as both easy and challenging at the same time. They considered Arabic learning as challenging since it consumes a lot of time especially in case the learner is a speaker of a Latin language. They attached this finding to the lack of correlation between Arabic and Latin languages. Speaking of this point, one participant stated:

I think it is hard for people speaking European languages. That is because Arabic and Latin languages don't have any part of interaction; in Arabic you need to learn every word in itself because there is no interconnection that there are few words that come from the European background in Arabic.

Nonetheless, they still believe that learning the vernacular variety becomes less challenging through practice. The same participant indicated that the learner level and the time spent on learning the variety are vital factors in determining the extent of challenge of its learning.

As another exception, another participant revealed that learning the colloquial basics is easy. Nevertheless, it turns to be challenging when it is about learning the nuances of Arabic. She explained:

I think as a base you can learn it easily. You can learn verbs, how to form sentences. But what's harder is gathering the nuances of what they are saying like the sayings that are common that everyone says, how to sound like you are Arab, you can speak but everyone can know that you are not an Arab. So, it is like the tiny bits of language or the culture you stick to it and makes you Palestinian, like colloquial.

Theme 2. "Challenges of Learning the Palestinian Colloquial Arabic Variety"

Discussing the issue of learning the Palestinian colloquial Arabic variety, participants' asserted that learning the vernacular variety is not free from challenges. They highlighted a substantial number of challenges they faced in learning the variety as illustrated below:

Firstly, *the grammar of the Palestinian colloquial Arabic is a key source of most of the learning challenges.* For instance, one participant plainly expressed the difficulty of grammar learning saying that *"I am not comfortable with grammar, it is quite difficult."* Nevertheless,

grammar as a challenge is just a very broad, unspecific topic. Participants pointed that the colloquial Arabic grammar is unstructured. That is as there are no precise, written rules that control the variety learning process. One participant related the difficulty he experienced in learning the vernacular variety to the unstructured grammar of Ammya. He spoke of this aspect as: *"the challenges are specific to the fact that Ammya is not very structured, or it is structured but there are many rules and exceptions to rules. And rules are not hard-set rules, sometimes, especially with pronunciation, I think."*

Discussing the implication of such a finding on the Palestinian colloquial learning, participants mentioned some grammar related learning challenges as examples. First, *possession formulation*. A participant stressed that the lack of rules that organize formulating possession in the colloquial Arabic caused it to be challenging. He explained:

something I noticed that is different from learning other languages is the addition; when you add the possession into the beginning, if that makes sense. Like "my book" in English, it comes at the beginning, but in Arabic it is "كتابي، دفتر ي، دفترها" " it comes at the end. Sometimes when we say sentences fast, we add that last syllable, the possessive pronoun, that really confuses me. In English it comes isolated pronouns, unlike Arabic in which possessive pronouns are connected to the end of the word.

Second, *vowels*. The same participant related to Arabic vowels as another grammar-related challenge. He noted that vowels in the spoken variety blend in a way that causes a lot of frustration for a learner. Moreover, the lack of specific grammar rules that control the change in vowels hinders understanding. He expressed this finding saying: *"the biggest thing will be the vowels, how they blend! So when you say something, you might say it, but the blending of vowels makes it difficult for me to get the meaning of it."* And third, *verb conjugation*. One participant argued that the lack of specific rules that control the verb conjugation process in the colloquial variety makes conjugating verbs challenging. He stated this as:

for me, I cannot conjugate all of the verbs. I can say "بحكي، بتحكي" but I cannot "بنحكي", I need time to think and conjugate verbs. "أنا \ أنت"/ "I, you", it is easy, but "أنا \ هم"/ "we, they", it is hard even if you know the verb. It takes time to conjugate.

Secondly, remembering and recalling vocabulary of the Palestinian colloquial Arabic variety is a super challenging task for a foreign learner. Generally speaking, the colloquial Arabic learning is based on speaking it which depends on how much a learner grasps of what s\he hears. However, a substantial number of participants remarked that memorizing and recalling the vernacular vocabulary is a huge learning obstacle. That is as the foreign learner's memory is deficient. One participant illustrated this finding saying:

I think the challenge is definitely remembering vocabulary, it is kind of very challenging. I think, as people say things very quickly, so you don't get what they say. And you don't realize that they are referring to something. So you are not really making that connection because you are not studying that vocabulary word as it is in Fusha. Learning vocabulary requires different skills, I think. You need all the vocabulary in your mind. If I am writing an essay in Fusha, I could look up words and even find a table of words and how to write and vocalize them. In Ammya, you have to keep vocabulary ready to use in your mind, which is too hard.

Thirdly, the lack of the learning resources for both learning and practicing the Palestinian colloquial Arabic variety stops the learning process progress. There was an obvious agreement among participants that the resources available for a learner to learn the colloquial Arabic variety are so limited. The shortage in the learning resources includes the lack of written references about the colloquial Arabic. Thus, the only available resource is the native speakers themselves. One of participants who raised this issue argued that:

it is difficult because it is not written anywhere and you have to learn from what you hear. It is not in any book, there are no written rules. I just think that it can be challenging sometimes to find applications of Ammya outside of just talking to people because anything you find online, like if you watch a news broadcast, it is not going to be in Ammya. So, I think, for me, it is like if you don't have people to speak to, it could be very challenging to learn Ammya. It is even in all foreign languages, you have to practice it outside ... you have to study more after class. And for me, it is not easy to find movies or series or any kind of learning resources in Ammya. I have not found any of them.

Fourthly, *variations in pronunciation across the Palestinian colloquial dialects break, or at least, impede communication.* In this respect, a participant claimed that pronunciation variations across the Palestinian dialects can affect a learner's understanding. This, in its turn, put a learner in a state of confusion which can cause communication to stop. This participant illustrated this finding saying:

you meet a lot of people who maybe pronounce things a little bit different. Like for instance, meeting people from one area that they don't pronounce the "كاف". In Beit Safafa, a lot of my family says "اتش" \ "ch" instead of "ك"/ "k". I understand that but in general it can be weird because words just sound completely different especially if they are not using the "كاف" \ "ك" or they are using the "kaf" and then they just start using the "ch". So it is like a lot of weird changes. So, for me, I think, the different dialects in Palestine change a lot in terms of pronunciation of different words. For me, one thing I have a difficulty with the Palestinian dialect at the start is knowing when and where to change the "ق", I am still wondering when to use "ق" and when to use the other pronunciation "ق" \ "ء".

Participants spoke about different forms of variations in pronunciation and their impact on the Arabic learning process. Some of these variations are described below:

The first type, which is the most common, is the variation in *consonants articulation*. In this respect, some learners reported that they struggled with articulating some consonants. Comparing English consonants pronunciation to Arabic consonants pronunciation, one participant declared:

the challenge is that you can construct things in multiple ways. It is all about vowels and consonant changes. Arabic seems to be a language of consonants like "ط", "ض", "ص". I need to be careful when pronouncing Arabic consonants. However, in English, I can miss-emphasize a word, like instead of "that" I can say "dat", but people still get you because such pronunciation does not change the whole meaning of the word. It happened to people also, when they say something to you, you don't know if they are saying another word, and whether I am understanding what they are saying exactly. This is because in Arabic there are obvious distinctions between sounds, which do not exist in English. So, this makes things more difficult when communicating.

In connection to this finding, describing the confusion a learner experiences because of the variations in pronouncing the sound "Gaf \ ق", one participant pointed that misunderstanding and, consequently, communication breakdown take place when a learner interacts with Arabic native

speakers as a result of this variation. Stressing this finding, he differentiated between the sound "ق" articulation in the Palestinian rural and urban dialects saying:

in the Palestinian madany "urban", you say the "ق", you say "قهوة" "gahwa" not "Ahwa". So, it is sometimes hard when you communicate with someone who speaks the rural dialect. For instance, when I say "بل" \ "before" they don't understand but when I say "قبل" "gabl" they understand. It is a problem. If someone wants to say something, if I know that word in a different way like in a different pronunciation, we cannot understand each other. So, this might cause misunderstanding or the communication between us to break.

The second type is the variation in pronunciation resulting from diacritics, "long vowels", changes. In addition to the diacritics changes, participants mentioned that absence of diacritics, especially from the written language like in the street signs, makes reading and, consequently, understanding its content challenging. Describing the impact of diacritics on the learning process, one participant explained:

it differs from village to village and people say things in a different way. Like in Nablus, I learned the word "لِفْتٌ", but when I came to Ramallah when I heard it as "لِفْتٌ", I was saying what?!! Though it is the same word. It is the accent. So I ended up having two words but it is one actually. In the street, in signs, they don't put "harakat\ diacritics", so I don't know how to pronounce what is written on it correctly. So this is probably difficult for me.

The third type is the variation in speech speed. In this respect, a participant stated that people's speech speed varies from one person to another according to the dialect a person speaks. This participant spoke explicitly about such variation's effect on learning the colloquial variety saying that "people here speak at different speeds; you could have one person speaking incredibly fast and someone next to him talks slowly. So, definitely I think that part is challenging."

Providing a direct example on how such variations in speech speed affect a learner and the learning process, another participant explained:

inflections are more difficult, like "بعد" which means "after" and "مع بعض" which means "with each other", they are similar in pronunciation and change in a way that makes it hard to notice the difference. Also, another example is "مع" \ "with him" that for me when someone says it, it is like "did you say a completely different word?". That's as when you pronounce "مع" in Ammya, you are adding vowels, so I think for someone who

is not used to Arabic, it becomes hard to understand when s\he comes to conversate. It is these very small differences between consonant pronunciation, sometimes to a non-native speaker they just sound the same and one cannot notice the difference.

As a last point in relation to pronunciation, participants pointed out that all of the previously mentioned kinds of variations in pronunciation create a unique way of speech for every native speaker. This, in its turn, creates a challenge in itself.

Fifthly, *the diglossic nature of the Palestinian colloquial Arabic variety is a motive for many learning challenges.* In a previous part of this chapter, it was mentioned that the diglossic Arabic means the existence of two main varieties of Arabic, the MSA variety and the colloquial one. Yet, it was proved that Arabic diglossia means, as well, the existence of various dialects of every colloquial variety. Participants agreed that the diglossic nature of the colloquial Arabic variety is a source of lots of learning challenges. In relation to this, a participant spoke about the effect of the colloquial Arabic diglossia saying:

I would say that in Palestine dialects, the "lahjat", are just strong, which means you have to learn most different ways to say things. How it changes to Jordan or Lubnan "Lebanon", I don't know, one thing I think is nice is that there are a lot of new words I only learn here, which are from Aramaic like "كفر" like "مالك كفر"، "نعمة كفر". These words are originally Aramaic, it is nice to learn. I don't know if it makes it more difficult, but I like it. It varies between different cities and villages, so it is difficult to know whether to keep this pronunciation or not.

Sixthly, *communication breakdown.* Through all interviews, participants extensively referred to communication breakdown as a learning challenge. Participants highlighted a number of motives for conversation breakdown. The first reason is *the amount of time offered by Arabic native speakers for a foreign learner to take part in a conversation which is relatively short.* In this regard, a participant spoke of this issue as:

sometimes because you want to speak about specific things, in the pharmacy maybe, or in the bookstore, you need time to think and say what you want. So, sometimes when I have a conversation, if I need time to think about what to say, I go slower and they think that my Arabic is not good, then they switch to English even though I know what I want to say and they could answer me in Arabic, so, sometimes the conversation stops.

Besides time, misunderstanding between conversation parties causes the conversation to stop. In this respect, a participant commented that when misunderstanding takes place, regardless of the reason, communication breaks. This in its turn does not support the learning process. This participant expressed this point saying:

I have been in situations where I say something and I think that it is correct and they are like they did not get it especially if their dialect is a little bit different. So, we cannot communicate.

The third reason for conversation breakdown is *the variations between conversation parties*. Regarding this fact, a participant claimed that variations in communicators' communication skills and abilities can cause the conversation to collapse. This participant plainly spoke about this finding as:

when I speak in Arabic, I have to go very slowly, so that I can get all the verbs correctly and pronounce them correctly. So that's just difficult, for someone to wait for my sentence to end can be difficult. So he/she would be like "just say it in English" but I am not here to speak English, I want to practice Arabic.

Seventhly, *writing in the Palestinian colloquial Arabic is challenging because writing in Arabic, in general, is hard*. A few participants related to writing the colloquial variety as a challenging aspect. That is, spelling people's speech is perplexing. One participant summed this finding as:

it is writing. I struggle a lot in writing. For me, the most difficult thing is spelling because I don't know whether it is a long "a" or a short one and if it is a "صاد" or a "سين". Yea, for me it is spelling, the hardest thing and writing it because I don't know what letter it is.

Such challenges has their implications on communication using the Palestinian colloquial with Palestinian native speakers, which will be discussed in the following section

Theme 3. "Challenges of communicating using the Palestinian colloquial Arabic"

Assuming that learning Arabic in the Palestinian context, in a way or another, forces a learner to communicate using Arabic, that is as Arabic is the key means of communication in the

context, the researcher examined the degree of challenge participants experienced in communicating using the Palestinian colloquial Arabic variety. As a general finding, the greatest bulk of participants, approximately (15) participants, reported that communicating using the Palestinian colloquial Arabic variety is challenging.

Participants who claimed that communicating using the Palestinian colloquial is challenging justified this finding through bringing a number of explanations up to the scene. These justifications are categorized in points as the following:

First, *Arabic native speakers' wrong assumption about a foreign learner's ability to communicate using the colloquial Arabic hinders communication.* Participants remarked that most people assume that a foreign learner must be learning the MSA variety which causes them to interact with foreigners mostly using MSA. Additionally, people may mistakenly assume that a foreigner does not know Arabic at all which makes English the only and last option for interaction. This, in its turn, can greatly weaken a learner's willing, ability and motivation to communicate with native speakers. In this regard, one participant specifically described this kind of situation saying:

I think there is one aspect that is challenging, that when I talk to people, they assume that I have learned Fusha as I am foreign. So, they speak to me in Fusha. Then I say "I don't speak Fusha", and they become confused that I know very little Ammya. So, this is one challenge. Even when I am talking to kids or something, they teach me things in Fusha, so it is a little bit confusing.

Second, *the colloquial Arabic variety has no fixed, specific, written body of grammar that governs communication.* Some participants related the challenges facing them while communicating using the Palestinian colloquial to the fact that the variety has no written grammar rules. Trying to illuminate this finding, a participant pointed at possession as an example. He remarked that the fact that there is no explicit rule for forming possession in the colloquial Arabic

obstructs communication. Furthermore, he referred that to the big gap between Arabic and English in terms of adding the possession pronoun. He explicitly stated this finding saying:

I think communicating using Ammya is also difficult, maybe because of something I noticed that is different from learning other languages which are the possessive pronouns. In English, it comes as isolated pronouns, unlike Arabic in which possessive pronouns are connected to the end of the word. Like "My book" in English it comes at the beginning, but in Arabic, it is "دفتري، دفترها" it comes at the end. Sometimes when we say sentences fast, they add that last syllable which really confuses me.

Third, *a foreign learner lacks the ability to speak Arabic like a native speaker.* Participants complained that they suffered from conversation breakdowns, especially at early stages of learning. They revealed that such breaks result from being unable to speak at a fast pace and in a native-like pronunciation. In this respect, as a novice learner, one participant claimed that being unable to speak at a fast pace with the correct pronunciation used to stop her from communicating freely using the colloquial variety. She plainly clarified this finding saying:

generally, it is easy. But, right now, when I speak in Arabic, I have to go very slowly, so that I can get all the verbs and pronounce them correctly. So that's just difficult, for someone to wait for my sentence to end can be difficult. So, s\he would be like "just say it in English", but I am not here to speak English, I want to practice Arabic.

Fourth, *in communicating with Arabic native speakers, misunderstanding is unavoidable.* Regarding this finding, a participant mentioned that she experienced a hard time in conveying her message to Arabic native speakers. She attached that to the fact that a native speaker can hardly understand the foreign learner's intended message. She reported this challenge saying:

there is a difference in speaking Arabic to native speakers and speaking Arabic to non-native speakers even if you are using a dialect. So, I could probably talk in fairly long sentences that don't necessarily make sense to a native speaker but a non-native speaker would understand better what I want to say as the non-native speaker would obviously know what I should be saying.

In relation to the same point, another participant related to the variations between the colloquial dialects, either in the Palestinian context or across the Arab world, as another source of misunderstanding. He explained this point saying: *"I have been in situations where I say*

something and I think that it is correct and they are like they did not get it, especially if their dialect is a little bit different like if there is someone from Egypt.”

As every rule has exceptions, participants remarked that the extent of challenge experienced in communicating using the colloquial variety can be cut down depending on some variables. Firstly, one participant indicated that *the extent of challenge depends on the topic*. He explained this finding saying:

it depends; if I am talking one-on-one to someone, it is very much easy. It is easy if someone is talking to me, it is not too bad. But I am not good in it if it is about a topic from daily life. Ammya is easy but it depends on the topic.

Secondly, a number of participants, who are originally Palestinians and have been exposed to Arabic before learning it, claimed that *exposure to Arabic at an early stage of life makes its learning at a later stage less challenging*. In this regard, one participant argued:

my Arabic accent is pretty good because I grew up hearing Arabic and I know how it is supposed to be spoken. This has helped me a lot. Generally, it is very easy for me to understand, I understand pretty much everything. I would say speaking is harder just because I don't feel comfortable with it, and it is hard for me to materialize the words in my head and say them. But, I think in actual physical communication, it is pretty straightforward and easy for me.

Nevertheless, participants asserted that early stage communication-challenges are unavoidable. In this regard, a participant revealed that in spite of the extensive exposure he had since a long time before learning Arabic, communicating using the colloquial language is not free from challenges. He stated this finding saying: *"I knew from the first I learned it, it was challenging, especially that everyone has his own variety, everybody speaks in a different way, there are no fixed rules, that would always cause confusion."*

Thirdly, participants remarked that *the Palestinian context offers rich opportunities for communication*. They pointed that the Palestinian context is characterized by openness and Palestinian people are generous. The fact that urges communication among people. Regarding this finding, a participant confidently confirmed that communicating using the colloquial Arabic

variety within the Palestinian context becomes less challenging in spite of the fact that he is a total novice learner.

Challenges Facing Foreign Learners in Communicating with Palestinian Native Speakers Using Arabic.

Assuming that once learning Arabic is done in a context speaks the language, communicating using Arabic becomes un-doubtlessly a necessity. Thus, this part explores the learning challenges that foreign learners face in communicating in Arabic. Outcomes of this inquiry are presented underneath the following themes

Theme 1. "The preferred variety for communication."

Investigating about the variety participants use in communicating with Arabic native speakers, all participants, except for (4), remarked that they used the colloquial Arabic variety. Those few participants who deviated in their experience from others indicated that the kind of variety they use in communication is neither Ammya nor Fusha. But instead it is a very primitive form of Arabic since they are novice learners. One of those participants described this variety saying:

we can characterize it as a primitive form of Arabic. I am barely able to make a few senses that a two-year old can make. I am just using very primitive simple senses, not even full senses, for example, "kilo patenjan/ 'a kilo of eggplant'" It is just a limited vocab.

As for the majority of participants who preferred the Palestinian colloquial Arabic variety for interaction, they revealed that it is due to a variety of reasons. First, they claimed that *the colloquial Arabic variety is the natural means of communication*. A participant who is originally Palestinian indicated that being exposed to Ammya helped her in getting used to it as a natural way of interaction with Arabic speakers. She expressed this finding saying: *"I use Palestinian Ammya because that's the most natural way for me to communicate in Arabic and because I*

usually speak with Palestinians." Second, they demonstrated that *compared to MSA, the Palestinian colloquial variety is easier.* In relation to this finding, one participant remarked that easiness of the Palestinian colloquial variety help him to be understood by other native speakers. Third, some participants confidently argued that *a learner's capabilities allow him/her to communicate using the colloquial but not MSA variety.* Indicating that he has the best fluency in the Palestinian colloquial variety, one participant showed a great preference for using this variety over the other.

Theme 2. *"The easier variety for communication."*

When discussed the easier variety for communication, participants who reported in the previous part that they communicate using the colloquial remarked that it is easier than MSA. Participants offered some good justifications for this finding as presented below:

Firstly, *the colloquial Arabic is more functional than the MSA variety.* Participants underscored the countless functions of and situations in which they can utilize the Palestinian colloquial variety. In this regard, a participant expressed this finding saying: *"we use it for everything, to talk to people in stores or on the phone, and many other uses. I have never used Fusha, it is still too hard."*

Secondly, *the colloquial Arabic variety structure is more flexible than MSA variety's.* A participant remarked that regardless how a learner structures a sentence in Ammya, s\he will be understood. He related to that saying: *"if I speak with Fusha, I have to make a context; what is the subject, object, ... etc. In Ammya, if I say only one word or even if the structure is incorrect, they can understand me. Ammya is flexible."*

Thirdly, *a learner's preferences and learning abilities.* A considerable number of participants related easiness of communicating using the colloquial Arabic learning to their

preferences and learning abilities. Having a better ability in and a learning preference for Ammya, one participant stressed that communicating using Ammya is less challenging than Fusha. He declared:

I like to communicate using Ammya. I don't like using Fusha for communication. I use Ammya because it is easier, people understand what I am saying and now I am better in it. My goal is to communicate with people, so I found Ammya easier. If I found Fusha easier I still want to use it.

Compared to MSA variety, participants showed a great preference for communicating using the colloquial and remarked that it is easier for communication. This indicates that communicating in Arabic is a task accompanied with challenges. This is what the next section discusses.

Theme 3. "Challenges of Communicating in Arabic"

Participants were questioned about the level of challenge and the kind of learning challenges they face in communicating with Arabic native speakers using Arabic. According to their responses, the largest proportion of participants remarked that communicating using Arabic is extremely challenging. Nonetheless, some participants revealed that interacting in Arabic is easy while another participant un-veiled that such a task is both challenging and easy at the same time. Speaking about the extent of challenge a learner experiences in communicating with Arabic native speakers, participants brought some examples of challenges to support their opinion as it is set out below:

The first challenge is *the Arabic native speaker's expectations about a learner's communication ability*. A number of participants who are originally Palestinians emphasized this finding as people put high expectations on them regarding their communication capabilities. One participant claimed that people's prospects impact her communication with native speakers in a variety of ways. For instance, she asserted that such predictions put her under pressure, which hampers any communication attempt. She declared:

for me, the challenge is that people think I'm either more advanced than I am, because I speak with a very good accent, or they think that I know less than I do. But either way, it can be challenging because there's a little bit of a mental pressure to speak well. Because I am Palestinian, it feels really important to me to master this language and I get very shy to mess up and say something incorrectly.

The second challenge is *the limited time available for a learner to express his/her thoughts in a conversation*. One participant revealed that she struggled in communicating because of the limited time offered for her to take part in conversations. She stated this finding saying:

I found it challenging because I need a bit of time to put together what I want to say, which is not something I can do in a spoken conversation in Arabic. I think it's a combination of culture, speed, vocabulary. I can know how to get a simple point across in Arabic, but a native speaker will likely use different phrasing to get the same point across, which can make understanding difficult depending on my level of Arabic.

The third challenge is *the literal translation*. Meaning thinking in a learner's native language, English mostly, and speaking in Arabic. A participant remarked that translating her thoughts literally from her mother tongue into Arabic caused lots of senseless structures to appear in her speech. She spoke of this as:

sometimes I would translate from English into Arabic and then in Arabic it does not make sense. Like I don't know the difference between "عندك" and "معك". I mean the difference between which words do you use with "معك" and which words do you use with "عندك". But there are some phrases that I really cannot say in Arabic. For example, when you say "to wear makeup" like when I translated it into Arabic, it became "تلبسي مكياج". And people just started staring at me that I cannot say "تلبسي مكياج".

The fourth challenge is *the variations across the Palestinian colloquial dialects*. Participants remarked that the differences between the Palestinian dialects caused a lot of frustration for a learner. One participant raised this finding saying:

but what's hard is that they will speak quickly and if I catch a few words I can base a question on them. So, I have to guess the question and give it a context. Also, I have to speak slower. Differences between dialects are challenging. My family is from "AL-ḥods" [Jerusalem in the city dialect]. They don't say the "Gaf\ قاف" and speak lighter, you know! My partner is from a village nearby and her accent is harder, so, sometimes it is just hard to understand the difference.

On the contrary, participants indicated that communicating in the Palestinian context becomes less challenging as a result of two chief factors. Firstly, they divulged that *heavy*

exposure to Arabic forces a learner to communicate using the language. The Arabic speaking context creates a rich environment for constant and intensive practice of Arabic. In this regard, a participant related to this saying:

the context forces you to speak the language. Like if everybody speaks Arabic, it is very easy to speak to them in Arabic. When you have no choice, you start communicating with the class in the language they speak, which is good because it pushes your learning.

Secondly, participants demonstrated that *Palestinian people encourage a learner to take part in interactions.* One participant pointed out that Palestinians are friendly and ready to offer help for foreign learners which urges a learner to communicate. He illustrated:

here it is easy to communicate in Arabic because people encourage you to speak Arabic. They pick up when you speak Arabic very quickly. Like, even when you use English and you speak an Arabic word and know you speak Arabic they would switch to speak Arabic. Also, if you look for a word and try to explain it, people enjoy explaining Arabic to foreigners. This is the perfect country to learn the language, people all around talk to each other.

Challenges Facing Non-Native Arabic Speakers in Learning Arabic Orthography, Syntax, Semantics, Phonetics, Phonology and Morphology

This sections highlights the learning challenges related to Arabic language system; Arabic writing system "Orthography", Arabic sound system "Phonetics, Phonology and Morphology", Arabic grammar "Syntax" and Arabic vocabulary "Semantics" that learners confront in learning Arab from their own standpoint. These challenges are presented under the following subtitles:

Arabic Writing System "Orthography"

A cornerstone step in learning a language is to write it. Thus, it was necessary to examine the kind of challenges related to Arabic writing. This part highlights both the effect of Arabic writing system and Arabic letters, compared to Latin script, on the learning of Arabic. Results of investigation in these aspects are presented below under the following themes:

Theme 1. "Arabic writing system impact on Arabic learning"

Examining the influence of Arabic orthography on Arabic learning process, the majority of participants affirmed that writing strongly influences the learning process. Furthermore, they indicated that such an influence is mostly a negative one. In this regard, a participant remarked that writing in Arabic slows down the learning process. She expressed this saying: *"at first, it might slow down a learner, since they have to take extra time with the alphabet."* However, few participants confirmed that knowing the Arabic writing system still has a positive influence on Arabic learning. In relation to this, a participant commented: *"I think it helps a lot because if I did not understand the writing system, I would like to hear it only, which is good but it is nice to see it written down."*

Proponents of the finding that writing has a negative impact presented a number of learning challenges related to writing system as justifications as it is clarified below:

First: Arabic Alphabet.

As a first challenging issue, participants mentioned Arabic alphabet. They related to a variety of challenging issues they faced in learning the Arabic alphabet. Firstly, participants remarked that *differentiating between letters that connect and that do not as a top challenging issue*. One participant stressed this aspect saying: *"what I found most challenging in writing was what letters exactly to be attached to each other and what is separated. For example, I know "ج" can be connected and "س" cannot be connected, so this is challenging."*

Secondly, participants referred to *the different shapes of a letter* as another challenging aspect. They remarked that some Arabic letters have different shapes depending on the letter position in a word. In relation to this aspect, one participant declared: *"you have to learn the different letters and how they look in different places. So sometimes it takes longer because 'oh, I*

thought the "ك" is just like this, but oh no, in the middle it takes a different shape." In connection to the same finding, another participant reported that the letter shape variations from one font type to another is another challenging issue. She spoke of this saying:

I remember in the book that the "ط" was like this [she wrote it on the air like "ط"]. But when I was practicing it, I saw it written in another place. I said this is not how it is in the book. I was not able to recognize that it is "ط".

Second: Case Ending

Case ending is another challenging issue that caused learning writing to be hard. Regarding this finding, a participant remarked that placing diacritics appropriately at the end of a word according to its position in a sentence is a big challenge. She stressed this finding saying:

when we put the "fat7a, damma, kasra" is challenging as well because when you pronounce a word, you pronounce it and can already be obvious that there is a "fat7a, damma, or kasra", and there are other times that you don't know. For example, when you take a test and you just don't put these details, little points will be taken off. So, knowing when to connect letters and when to put "fat7a" depends on the position of the words in the sentence, these are the most challenging.

Third: Similar Sounds

The last challenge mentioned by participants is *the difficulty in differentiating between sounds that have a close and similar pronunciation*. In this regard, participants pointed at their weak ability to differentiate between some Arabic sounds that have close articulation. They related this challenge to the differences between Arabic and the learners' native languages. One participant stressed this finding saying:

it is difficult for me to hear the difference between "س" and "ط", "ص" and "ت" and also "د" and "ض". It is very difficult because we don't have such pronunciations in Japanese or even English. It is also, for me, I cannot pronounce it, and I cannot hear the difference. It is the first time I am learning Arabic ... and maybe it is hard for me because of the differences between English and Arabic languages.

Theme 2. "Transliteration: a double-edged factor in Arabic learning process"

When asked about the impact of transliteration, writing Arabic using Latin script, on the learning process, (17) learners confirmed that using Arabic alphabet is way more useful than the

Latin script. Participants mentioned some advantages of using Arabic alphabet as reasonable explanations for their standpoint. As a first advantage, a participant indicated that writing in Arabic alphabet makes the learning process more structured and learning more meaningful, which reduces the extent of challenge in all levels. She clarified that saying:

Using Arabic letters is definitely helpful because you will know how to read Arabic and how to understand it when you know the letters, especially the basics, "... ثت، به". Once you start there, everything becomes easy. When I first studied Arabic, I started with the basics like "... ا، ب، ت". And how to pronounce them like "aa, ba, ta, tha..." and with harakat /diacritics like "aa, aw, ei..." Then, from there took it to connect words and how to pronounce them when to pause and from there we took paragraphs. So, I think it is important to know the letters.

Raising another advantage, another participant remarked that learning Arabic while knowing the Arabic letters aids a learner's comprehension of the language. That is, reading a word written in Arabic alphabet makes understanding its meaning effortless. Referring to Arabic alphabet, she declared:

I think it is helpful, when I hear a word that I don't understand I ask someone to spell it, so that I can form it in my mind, I can see the word in my mind, So, I really like using the letters system, I think it is impossible to learn Arabic if you don't know how to write. Arabic letters actually give you how to pronounce it ... I think also if they use the Arabic letters, it will help them to capture the shape of the word, so they can easily memorize it. Every time they see it, they quickly recognize it.

As a third advantage, a participant mentioned that using Arabic alphabet helps a learner to get engaged in the learning process. She stated this as: *it's definitely best to learn the alphabet early on in the language so that you're actually engaging with the language itself when you learn it, and not just an "Anglicized" version of it, even though it might be more difficult."*

As a fourth advantage, one participant declared that learning using Arabic alphabet helps a learner read stuff in Arabic as a learner can identify pronunciation, especially if s\he knows all accents.

In spite of the many advantages of learning Arabic writing using Arabic alphabet, participants stressed that using transliteration technique is damaging for the learning process. One participant stressed this finding saying:

Using Latin script can damage the learning process. I think it could affect learning in a bad way. Sometimes I read something and have no idea what it says... and I ask my mom and she tells me but I am like "I know how to read this if it is in Arabic letters." I think it damages your learning because you read it in some way and hear it in your mind but you see something different.

Nevertheless, participants excluded from this general finding the early stage of learning. They revealed that using Latin script at an early stage of learning is essential. On one hand, it helps a learner to identify Arabic sounds. That is because of the big gap between sounds of Arabic and Latin languages and the variation in pronouncing Arabic sounds across dialects. One participant expressed this point saying:

when I learned Ammya I wrote in Arabic script and next to it I wrote the Latin script because it is difficult for me to communicate the sounds just from the Arabic letters because I can see a word written down but people say it differently, so I have to learn those specifics, so, I have to use my own script to do so.

On the other hand, one participant remarked that there are certain issues in writing in Arabic letters like unwritten vowels, short and long, that are invisible can be challenging. He stressed this finding saying:

when the material is written, it becomes even more challenging, as there are some vowels left unwritten. So, sometimes they are written in a way that is unfamiliar for English speakers. So, it becomes hard for me to identify what "haraka" diacritic is on this letter, how to pronounce it, and whether it is "alf" or "fatha", "damma" or "waw" that must be here and this is why I am encouraged to transliterate it.

Arabic Sound System "Phonetics, Phonology and Morphology"

In addition to Arabic orthography, the sound system of Arabic was investigated as a potential source of the learning challenges. The results of this investigation are displayed as the following:

Theme 1. *"Arabic sound system: a strong motive of learning challenges"*

Speaking about the impact of the Arabic sound system on the learning process, the largest percentage of participants indicated that the sound system of Arabic is a source of lots of learning challenges. Defending their opinions, participants delivered some practical justifications.

Firstly, *Arabic sound system is different from the sound system of Latin languages.* Arabic belongs to Semitic languages, which is a group whose sound system is completely different from the sound system of Latin languages. As most participants are native speakers of Latin languages, they were able to touch the difference between the sound systems of the two groups of languages. One of those participants compared how easy to pronounce sounds of a Latin language to how tough to pronounce Arabic sounds. Speaking about the variation between English and Arabic sound systems, in particular, another participant brought up an illustrative example that highlights the direct effect of such a difference on Arabic learning. He explained:

there was a Palestinian friend who was trying to explain for me the difference between "ح" and "خ" and all these similar letters and she just pronounced them quickly and they sound just the same for me. I was not able to hear the difference. All sounds just sound the same. I think it is a big challenge. There are some letters that are quite different from the sounds of English. Like "خ", this does not exist in English. In the present tense also a "b" followed by a "t" there is no such a thing in English. Like "بتروح" and "بتيجي" the "b" and the "t", there is no vowel between the two letters. It is the letter cluster that is Arabic has clusters of 3 or 4 letters. Yes, this is very challenging, you can do it, but it is very challenging for me to make these sounds.

Secondly, *some Arabic sounds are so close in pronunciation.* As a consequence of the difference between English and Arabic sound systems, learners reported that Arabic sounds that have close pronunciation cause learning challenges like misunderstanding. Such misunderstanding, as participants confirmed, slows down the learning process. One participant stressed this point saying:

the sound system is challenging of course. If you are saying "ح" like saying "حمار" you have to say "حمار" not "همار". Sometimes we ask the teacher and he does not understand us because we

say "ذ" instead of "ح" or "ت" instead of "ط". So, the Arabic sound system affects learning in a bad way as it definitely hinders learning but absolutely it is not too damaging.

Thirdly, *any subtle change in Arabic sounds and pronunciation changes the whole meaning.* As a consequence of the dissimilarity between the linguistic systems of the Semiotic and Latin languages, learners revealed that they struggled a lot in getting Arabic sounds pronounced properly. Accordingly, any change in pronouncing a sound can change the whole meaning. This, on the first hand, slows the learning process. One participant emphasized this finding saying:

when I learned French in the past, I just can say it without thinking about how to say it and people would understand what I mean, But, in Arabic, I have to be exact in pronunciation because it can change meaning. So, my learning of words would be slower.

On the other hand, participants remarked that pronouncing sounds incorrectly can impede communication. That is as mispronouncing sounds causes misunderstanding, the thing that cuts communication flows. One participant plainly stated this outcome saying:

at some level, if you do not make the sound properly, even if you know vocabulary, you cannot interact with people, you will sound like you don't know anything. And also if you don't know the sound you will not be able to know the word the person is saying.

Fourthly, *a learner's background determines the extent of challenge a learner experiences in learning Arabic sounds.* Participants highlighted their background as a strong factor that affects the level of challenge they experienced in learning the Arabic sounds. As a Palestinian grown up hearing Arabic, one participant demonstrated that his background made him experience fewer challenges compared to other foreign learners. He related that to the fact that learning Arabic goes naturally with learners who have a background in Arabic. He explained:

because I have grown up listening to how to pronounce sounds, it wasn't that big challenge for me. It is a challenge, however, to those who grew up speaking only English in their household, especially those whose parents know how to speak Arabic but choose not to teach them. To compare, once I was in the PAS class, we were practicing those sounds. Me compared to the Europeans there, it was easy for me to pronounce them, I was saying "ع" and they were saying it "غ", so you can tell the difference between those who are familiar with those sounds and those who are not, and between foreigners learning Arabic and those Native speakers learning Arabic. It would come naturally to those who are Arabs, but for foreigners it is not.

Fifthly, *Arabic language structure provides a limited domain for making mistakes in pronunciation.* In connection to this, one participant provided a lengthy explanation saying:

there is a very small window for making mistakes. There is an example, "ذكي" and "زكي" [pronounced them as "زكي"], they look the same but have different meanings; the first means intelligent and the latter is tasty. So in English it is very forgiving. You can have people with a heavy accent saying things and they would be understood. If you deviate in pronunciation in Arabic, you will not be understood and people will look at you like WHAT! So you have to do it exactly ... There is a very small window for mistakes.

Participants, mostly Palestinians, who had an early exposure before starting learning Arabic officially, asserted that challenges resulting from the Arabic sound system would be less and its impact on the learning process could be reduced through constant exposure to Arabic. One of those participants stated that in spite of the challenges that still, like differentiating between soft and hard sounds, being exposed to Arabic within the family since a young age helped her to get used to sounds. The fact that smoothed the learning process at a later phase.

Arabic Grammar "Syntax"

Besides Arabic writing and sound system, Arabic syntax was investigated as a potential source of the learning challenges. Participants were inquired about the extent to which they consider Arabic grammar challenging. Results of this investigation came as the following:

Theme 1. "Arabic grammar: a supper challenging aspect of Arabic"

It was noticed that grammar was present as a number one-challenge in most of the participants' answers. Many participants classified grammar as a top challenging aspect of Arabic. In this context, one participant frankly commented: *"probably, I think it is my number one challenge. I think it is definitely easier than English grammar, but it's still hard, like it does not come naturally."* Participants related this finding to the fact that grammar is considered as the language cipher. Hence, knowing this cipher guides the learning process. Using some examples from Arabic grammar, a participant explained this finding saying:

grammar is the cipher for learning a language. I think that the grammar is the best way that people get learning the language, it aids and accelerates learning because once you understand grammar and hear a sentence and you understand the grammatical structure of the sentence, then you will learn the individual parts of the sentence more easily and also understand words structure. Like if you know this is a verb and this a pronoun at the end of the word, even if you don't know what this verb or pronoun is, you can break the word down and figure it out. I think also, the concept of "جذر" and "وزن", for me, is very cool, once you get that stuff down, it helps a lot. I think Grammar aids a lot and it could not be challenging.

Discussing the effect of grammar on the Arabic learning process, (18) participants confirmed that Arabic syntax is a source of the learning challenges they experienced in learning Arabic. Participants delivered four main explanations for their claim as it is presented below:

Firstly, *Arabic grammar is difficult to learn.* Some participants who have experienced learning Arabic with and without focusing on grammar came up with the conclusion that Arabic grammar, compared to other aspects of Arabic, is difficult. One of those participants conducted a comparison between his learning experiences of Arabic with and without learning grammar. He said:

when I learned grammar, it was very difficult. It is very long and it is not very rewarding because you can learn a very difficult rule but never use, or see but you have to learn. I have actually found a few months when I stopped learning grammar, I enjoyed learning Arabic more. Grammar is boring and is really difficult.

Secondly, *the difference between Arabic and English languages.* Participants related to variations between Arabic and English as the key motive for the grammar-related learning challenges. For instance, a participant remarked that the difference between Arabic and English makes it hard for a learner to understand certain structures that do not exist in English. She stated that saying:

I think grammar is a big challenge. You can get the basics. But when you put them all together in communication. Like this last thing we learned that you put "اللي" for "which" or "what". But in English, we don't use "which" or "what". Like "مين اللي؟" like "who is that?" In English, you cannot even translate ... so, that was difficult for me using extra words and knowing how they fit in case I cannot translate directly from English.

Thirdly, *Arabic grammar has an endless number of rules*. Such a huge amount of rules, that learners described as not straightforward rules, requires an excellent memory for learning, retaining and recalling them. In relation to this finding, a participant related to her memory that cannot handle the great number of rules as a key motive for many learning challenges. She briefly stated this saying:

there are many rules, and there are many exceptions to these rules that I cannot remember even. For instance, the difference between the way you form plural can be challenging like "جمع المذكر السالم، جمع المؤنث السالم وجمع التكسير". And I think, it is hard for a lot of people and me too because there is no straightforward rule for forming the plural form as it is the case in "جمع المذكر السالم وجمع المؤنث السالم".

Fourthly, *literal translation*. One participant indicated that her inability to separate learning Arabic from thinking in her native language, which is English, caused her to literally translate while speaking Arabic. She explained this point saying:

what's really challenging sometimes that I say something in Arabic but in English pattern, like to say "Carla went" in Arabic, I say "كارلا راحت" instead of saying "راحت كارلا". Yes, in certain cases, it damages the structure. I think this would be a terrible challenge that I would translate the way to say it in English into Arabic.

In the same respect, another participant spoke of the side effect of literal translation on Arabic learning. He revealed that literally translating from a learner's native language into Arabic causes misunderstanding. He illustrated this finding saying:

you produce something and it might be understood, but it won't be the way most people speak. But this is true in all languages, they have idiomatic ways of expressing certain things. For instance, in English you say "I am hungry" but in German, you say "I have hunger" and in Arabic, it is "أنا جعان". So you don't have the verb to be. So, there are different syntax between the languages. But when you literally translate from a language to the other one, the listener actually will understand you. But in Arabic if you make these kinds of mistakes, it seems to me that the level of precision on pronunciation in Arabic is so great that if you deviate just a little, people will seem not to understand you.

Participants who claimed that grammar is the number one challenging aspect proffered a variety of examples of grammar-related challenges to support their view. These grammatical learning challenges are listed below:

First, *agreement*. Since agreement rules are exclusive to some languages, including Arabic, participants classified it as one of the utmost challenging grammar aspects. They mentioned two types of agreement. The first is *the gender agreement*. Talking about the complexity of gender agreement in Arabic in comparison to English, one participant delivered an example illustrating the difficulty in learning gender agreement rules. She stated:

the gender rules are still a huge headache for me. I have to think and remember how to use them every time. English is a very gender-neutral language, it has masculine and feminine but it is not like Arabic, in Arabic you need to think constantly about gender agreement.

The other type is *the number agreement*. Offering an example about dual formulation, one participant stressed the effect of number agreement on learning. He explained saying:

for me, what was always very confusing is the dual "المتنى" because it is not present in any language I know. When it is in a sentence, it is hard to match the dual with the other parts of the sentence. But, I had to get used to that.

Second, *verb conjugation*. Conjugating verbs is among the top challenging grammatical issues. That is, conjugating verbs consumes time. Present tense conjugation was reported as the most challenging tense. In this regard, conducting a comparison between present tense conjugation in Arabic and in some Latin languages, a participant stressed how it is challenging in Arabic saying:

verb conjugations; in French, when you conjugate a verb to the past tense, you add something to the beginning of the verb. The verb "to go", past tense is "je suis allé, tu es allé" or "to cook", past tense, "J'ai cuisiné, Tu as cuisiné". However, in Arabic the verb as a whole conjugates. For example, how do you say "I wrote"? it is "كتبت". In Arabic, the past tense has a similar pattern somehow like "كتبنا، كتبت، كتبت، كتبت، كتبت، كتبت... " but the present tense becomes even more difficult, the present tense is extremely challenging. In English it is easy, there is usually one change and it is in "she, he, it" form and you add an "s". However, in Arabic I have to memorize a hundred of verbs and they completely differ, there is a certain pattern but it is quite difficult.

Third, *adjective placement in the sentence*. Participants indicated that placing an adjective within the Arabic sentence structure is challenging which is related to the difference in adjective

placing between Arabic and English. One participant stressed the effect of such a finding on learning saying:

we learn about adjectives; where the adjective is placed. From my understanding, all adjectives are placed after the noun in Arabic, apart from "شوية كلمات", while in English it is before. So, I think these are some slight differences, although I guess in the purpose of Ammya which in communication it does not make a big difference and this is why we don't focus on grammatical issues a lot, because whether I say "غرفة جميلة" or "جميلة غرفة", people would know it is wrong but they would understand most likely, although they mostly ask me to repeat.

Arabic Vocabulary "Semantics"

Learning a language includes memorizing bunches of the most common terminologies of that language. Believing that memorization is not free from challenges, the researcher discusses in this part the extent to which Arabic vocabulary is challenging. Moreover, this part scrutinizes the challenges learners experience in learning Arabic vocabulary. Results are presented below:

Theme 1. "Arabic vocabulary: a key learning challenge."

Out of the (18) participants who took part in the debate on this issue, (14) participants confirmed that learning vocabulary is not free from challenges. They delivered some good reasons as validations for their viewpoint that are listed below:

First, *Arabic and English, as it is the mother tongue of most participants, have no cognates.* When questioned about whether Arabic vocabulary is challenging or not, a participant confirmed and related his approval to the lack of cognates between Arabic and English. He stated this finding as:

Arabic vocabulary is challenging because it seems that there are very few cognates; words that are similar in Arabic similar in English. You know when you learn Spanish as an English speaker, there are some words in Spanish, they look like counterpart English. In Arabic, the "eggplant" becomes "بادنجان" oh, no! Tomato "بندورة", cucumber "خيار". Between Hebrew and Arabic, there are many cognates. In Turkish also there are some. So, as an English speaker, the vocabulary is just tough and you have to work on it.

Second, *the heavy reliance on using memorizing instead of practicing techniques.* Participants pointed that the greater focus in teaching vocabulary is directed towards memorizing terminologies. Thus, very little attention and space are given to practice. Speaking about his learning experience in the PAS, a participant spoke about the negative impact of that on the learning process saying:

we can memorize vocabulary but it does not come into my mind when I come to communicate. And there is no direct practice of what we learn. When I look at the word, I can say the meaning of that word but when it comes to speaking, I cannot recall and use it.

Trying to validate this finding, another participant claimed that practice is a cornerstone component in memorization vocabulary. He demonstrated:

it's difficult to retain words that I don't use consistently. If I only hear something once, I struggle to remember it. I need to hear it and use it a few times. I need to practice wrapping my mouth around the word, but if that opportunity doesn't come up with words, then it's hard for me to include them permanently in my vocabulary.

Third, *vocabulary learning process is random and unstructured.* Some participants described the vocabulary learning process that takes place inside the classroom as random and unstructured. A participant described the lack of structure in the vocabulary learning process saying: *"vocabulary also is not taught in groups like colors, numbers, names ...etc. But instead, we learn one or two colors then move to learn some numbers, we learn vocabulary randomly."*

Another participant emphasized the impact of the lack of structure on vocabulary learning through underlining a missing learning technique from the class that using it would noticeably aid the learning process. He expressed this point saying:

without knowing the opposite of a word, it is very hard to learn it and speak also. For example, take "شبعان \ جوعان" /"I am full, I am hungry". If the teacher gives us only one word without the opposite, it is hard to use it because when you say "أنا جوعان" if you know the opposite, it will be more helpful to understand the meaning.

Fourth, *an Arabic terminology has a variety of synonyms.* Some participants pointed out that an Arabic word could have plenty of synonyms, which puts a learner in confusion especially

in case s\he knows one synonym but not the other\s. A participant stated this finding saying: "Arabic has many words for one thing, so, sometimes we know maybe one word to say one thing and then others tell us another word we don't know. It is confusing."

Fifth, *Arabic has similar words with different meanings*. Participants related this to the fact that Arabic has the feature of three letter- root system. A participant expressed how challenging it is to distinguish the meanings of words derived from the same root. She stated that saying:

because of the three-letter root system, vocabulary becomes hard because lots of words sound similar but they mean different things. Like, you have the word "مساعدة" that comes from the root "ساعد", but also you have many other words that branch from this root. It can be hard to distinguish the meaning of each.

Theme 2. "Challenges of learning Arabic Vocabulary."

Justifying their opinion that Arabic vocabulary is challenging, this group of participants brought some examples on challenges they faced in learning vocabulary. The first challenge is *the difficulty in recalling the Arabic counterpart of an English word*. Participants revealed that they used to translate an English word into a long sentence in Arabic when they communicate. That is as they fail to recall the Arabic word equivalent in English. A participant expressed this challenge saying: "it happens that one word in English means a whole phrase in Arabic. And It happens that I don't know what something is and then one gives me one word, and I am like "I gave you one whole sentence!"

The second challenge is that *forming plural in Arabic follows different, multiple rules*. When queried about the extent of challenge she experienced in learning Arabic vocabulary, a participant argued that forming plural in Arabic has no straightforward rules to follow. She declared: "*Plural; make singular to plural and plural to singular. Some things have plural while others do not and I have to memorize them. Besides, forming plural has different rules.*"

In the same regard, another participant remarked that the intensive focus of the PAS Program on teaching vocabulary more than grammar is the other reason for reporting forming plural as a challenge. The thing that results in memorizing random words without any rules that structure the learning process. This participant spoke of this finding as: *"In Arabic it is different, there is no rule. Also, in Arabic we learn how to say girl but not girls, "طالب، طلاب". So we are learning words. They don't teach us how to say the singular and the plural."*

Purposes of Learning Arabic as a Foreign Language.

Hypothesizing that a learner's intention\ of learning Arabic affects the kind of learning challenges facing them, participants were questioned about their intentions and the challenges they suffered from. That is in an attempt to figure if there are any links between the two variables. And that is helpful for teachers and program officials in tackling such challenges through identifying them at a time ahead of their occurrence by knowing a learner's intention. Results of this investigation are described below under the following main themes:

Theme 1. *"A learner's learning intention\ is strongly correlated to the kind of the learning challenges s\he confronts"*

Tracking each participant's experience in learning Arabic, experiences of the greater percentage of participants, approximately (22) learners, approved the hypothesis that the learner's intention is strongly linked to the kind of the learning challenges s\he experiences. In this regard, indicating that such a connection between a learner's intention and the learning challenge is absolute, one participant argued: *"your goal will absolutely affect what you prioritize and what sort of issues you end up struggling with."*

Among the (22) experiences that actualized the hypothesis, there was one experience that perfectly highlighted the correlation between a learner's intention and the learning challenges. As

a Palestinian grown up in America, this participant intention of learning Arabic is to bring back her language and culture. She stated: *“my intention is just to communicate with my family and Palestinians. My intention is to immerse myself in the culture as most of my life was mostly Americanized.”*

Speaking about the learning challenges she experienced in learning Arabic, she remarked that the greater challenge is in being able to communicate like a native speaker. She stated:

you can learn verbs, how to form sentences, but what's harder is gathering the nuances of what they are saying like the sayings that are common that everyone says, how to sound like you are Arab. You can speak but everyone can know that you are not an Arab. So, it is like the tiny bits of language or the culture you stick to it and makes you Palestinian, it is the colloquial.

As the last step, she tried to weave a connection between her intention and the challenges she experiences. Approving that there is a link, she simply demonstrated:

Yes, I agree with your hypothesis. I think there is definitely a link. My intention is to come here to study Arabic to communicate and to speak fluently and this is why I learn the colloquial. And my challenge is grammar, speaking fluently and producing correct structures. I have no challenges with hearing the sounds or writing, I have difficulty with grammar, so definitely there is a link.

Summary

According to non-native Arabic speakers, learning Arab in the Palestinian context is challenging and accompanied with various learning challenges. Some of these challenges are related to the language itself; including its system; orthography, syntax, semantics, and phonology, morphology and phonetics while others are related to the Arabic context including; the diglossic nature of Arabic language and variations across the Arabic language and Latin languages on one hand, and across the Arabic dialects, on the other hand. In a way of investigating the way to tackle these challenges, foreign learners confirmed that there is a solid relation that links a learner's learning intentions with the kind of learning challenges facing him\her.

Part II. Arabic Instructors Interviews

This study explores the learning challenges facing foreign learners in learning Arabic as a foreign language from learners as well as instructors perspectives. Consequently, this part completes the previous one and unveils the results of this investigation from Arabic instructors viewpoint. It states the challenges related to the Arabic speaking context and the different aspects of Arabic language in addition to learners' learning intentions from Arabic instructors' standpoint. Results of this investigation are as the following:

Learning Arabic in the Palestinian Context

This part presents the results of examination of the context-related learning challenges that face foreign learners in learning Arabic language in the Palestinian context from Arabic instructors perspective. The outcomes of this investigation are summarized under a number of themes as it follows:

Theme 1. *"The immense Immersion within Arabic language and the Palestinian context."*

Scrutinizing the Arabic speaking context as an influential factor in Arabic learning process, all instructors, except one, confirmed that learning Arabic while living in an Arabic speaking environment enhances the learning process. They supported their claim with two key explanations. Firstly, they asserted that *the Arabic speaking milieu offers the best kind of exposure to the language*. In this regard, a participant affirmed that learning a language is better when it takes place within a society speaks it. That is, it enables the learner to fully practice the language as it offers an immense exposure to Arabic under various situations. Explaining this philosophical view, this instructor said:

learning Arabic in an Arabic speaking context actually is very helpful because it helps the learner to live the language with its people. Meaning that the learner lives the language through practice. For instance, there are many students taking their Bachelor, MA or even Ph. D degrees in English from Arabic universities. It would have been

better if they took it from a foreign university. That is because in such universities students learn the language from its original sources and practice it with its people. [Translated from Arabic]

Secondly, Arabic instructors claimed that *the Arabic speaking context provides the learner the opportunity to be immersed within the culture*. In this regard, believing that a language learning is inseparable from the culture of the society speaking that language, one instructor demonstrated that the Arabic speaking context plays a controversial role in enhancing language learning through cultural immersion. This participant argued:

[b]asically, language learning theories say that if a person lives in an environment speaking a certain language, that is way better for learning this language than any other way. That is because language is not a bunch of letters and symbols, but instead it is about culture and immersion within the original community of that language, which is the best way for learning a language because a learner learns it naturally. .. Besides, language cannot be set apart from culture or the surrounding environment. [Translated from Arabic]

Theme 2. *"Palestinian general atmosphere impact on Arabic learning."*

Speaking about the correlation between the learning context and the learning process, the discussion were directed towards the Palestinian general atmosphere. All Arabic instructors showed a consensus that the general atmosphere affects everything in the context including foreign learners. One instructor stressed this issue saying:

the challenges that come with foreign students are the challenges in general that face Palestinians presenting their lives. Thus, the context is a large and vital source of the challenges. Actually, this is our condition and we focus on it. It affects everything going here. The different aspects of the Palestinian context, political, social and cultural are basic resources in teaching our students. So, the general atmosphere for sure affects Arabic learning. [Translated from Arabic]

In the same respect, while most participants indicated that the context impact is mostly negative, some instructors asserted that its positive influence cannot be denied or underestimated. Instructors claimed that the learner plays a controversial role in determining the nature of this effect. Namely, the atmosphere has a positive impact in case the learner is immersed within the

context. Otherwise, the context could affect the learner negatively. One instructor explained this finding as:

the general atmosphere can cause challenges for a learner in case the learner did not immerse within the context. ... The real context is important and supportive for what a learner learns. So, it is the learner who determines the nature of the impact of the context.[Translated from Arabic]

Instructors' responses indicated that the different aspects of the context; political, social and cultural aspects specifically, play a substantial role in learning Arabic. Although they attributed the learning challenges facing their students to the different aspects of the Palestinian context, the political condition was classified as number one aspect. For instance, describing the kind of the Palestinian context impact on learning, one participant directly mentioned the political condition saying:

the most challenging aspect actually is the political condition. Socially, through my experience with students, I used to find that they get involved within the Palestinian society. Moreover, they like the Palestinian life because of its simplicity and people's generosity and humanity. But, the most challenges are political. [Translated from Arabic]

Theme 3. *"The Palestinian political condition as number one challenging aspect of the Palestinian general atmosphere."*

The political condition in Palestine is classified as the first and utmost aspect of the Palestinian general atmosphere in terms of its impact on Arabic learning process. In this regard, one of the instructors stressed the obvious impact of the political situation on learners and the learning process saying:

In Palestine, everything is related to politics. When a learner watches a movie, goes on a picnic, ... it is all about politics. In the class we ask them to speak in Arabic about things that happened to them in a journey, visit to a family or whatever. And to express themselves, they need to use Arabic. The type of language; terminologies, a learner uses is a reflection of the political condition. Doing this, they think that we teach them politics. Actually, we don't. We teach them reality which is a product of the political condition. For instance, we take them to a wedding. Wedding itself is politics. Because when they listen to songs, it includes lots of politics as the song

itself is about Palestine, for instance. Everything in Palestine is political, even food and water. [Translated from Arabic]

In an attempt to elicit the general impact of the political condition, instructors underscored some challenges related to the Palestinian political situation. These challenges are listed and illustrated below:

First, *the three-month visa*. When questioned about the Palestinian political condition influence on their students learning, instructors directly pointed out the visa issue. In this respect, one of the instructors plainly spoke about the visa as the top challenging political aspect. He stated that *"as for the political aspect, learners are controlled by the visa that is limited to three months only."*[Translated from Arabic]

Talking broadly about the visa as a key challenging aspect, instructors highlighted some chief side effects of it. As a first side effect, instructors remarked that the visa limited span makes the teaching process in the program intensive which makes practicing the learned language unfeasible as learning becomes rigorous. The fact that hinders learning. He explained this finding saying:

learners are limited to a three-month visa. The course becomes intensive. The class that is supposed to be one hour or hour and a half becomes two or three hours. Three hours per day makes the learner unable to practice the language acquired daily or to prepare for the next day. Moreover, this puts the learner in stress especially if s/he takes two or more classes daily. And this is very exhausting for a learner.[Translated from Arabic]

As a second side effect, a participant remarked that the short-term visa blocks a learner's integration within the university community. She related that to the timing of the university regular semester that differs than the PAS semester's. That produces a gap in time during which foreign learners have to stay without real interaction inside the campus. This instructor explained:

the challenge is the following; there is a political challenge in the fact that their Visa is only for three months, meaning that their semester does not start and end like other Palestinian students following Birzeit University, that deprives them from integration into the environment of Arabic. Then they become locked. Sometimes their semester begins while students are doing their finals, so, they are here in an empty university for

two weeks before students start their regular classes again after the finals. So, in the period between the final and starting [the semester], that becomes a gap. So, that is a challenge.

In connection to this matter, the same instructor remarked that learners' inability to get involved within the university community causes them to flock together for the sake of socializing. She illustrated this by saying:

the challenge is the fact that it is not only the three months but the nature of the flocking together. It becomes that they don't see Palestinian students where they get invited for coffee and tea, and they have to try their effort to speak Arabic. The alternatives become that they have to socialize for three weeks with the rest of the PAS students. They flock together, like when birds are gathering, so they can interact with each other.

Second, instructors affirmed that the political condition in Palestine affects the kind of topics learners talk about and, consequently, the type of the learned language. That is, the learners' choice of topics is mainly defined by the political condition in Palestine, which, consequently, delimits the kind of vocabulary they learn. Concerning this finding, one instructor explained:

I am sure it affects their topics and choice of discussions and the vocabulary they get like. This is a feedback I got from different colleagues from different European universities. When the students went back to their programs, they said "wow, our students have their jargon and terminology in the political aspects. Because now, they can discuss higher levels, but while talking about singing and dancing, their vocabulary is still lacking, for instance.

Third, *the huge gap between the Palestinian context and the learners' homeland.* Instructors revealed that the Palestinian political condition makes of the Palestinian society a completely different environment compared to the previous one where the learner used to live. One of the instructors illustrated this finding saying:

the challenge lies in that a foreign learner used to live in, roughly, a perfect condition before coming to Palestine. Thus, when they come here, they find a completely different society politically. For example, they find barriers. Sometimes, there are martyrs, and the general condition is depressing, and that could affect them. When learners go to the camp or the Apartheid Wall, they come back depressed ... It is impossible to deny the impact of the political condition on everything. The general political condition significantly influences learners positively or negatively. [Translated from Arabic]

Fourth, *the Palestinian political condition causes troubles for learners while they are in the context*. One instructor brought two examples of troubles caused by the political condition. In the first place, she revealed that while a learner lacks knowledge about the context, the political condition puts him\her in a state of confusion, which results in an internal state of instability. She illustrated this by saying:

it happened that they go on a journey and face a border in which Israeli soldiers ask them questions like what are you doing here? Why do you come here? What are you doing with terrorists? Why don't you go to "Israel"? It is better for you!" [Translated from Arabic]

In the second place, this instructor revealed that the political condition imposes restrictions on the learner, like they cannot express themselves freely. The fact that causes confusion for a learner about his\her decision whether to complete studying or quitting. She stated:

actually, a learner experiences the same condition that the Palestinian person experiences. There are lots of our students who wrote articles describing the situation in Palestine and they were deprived of scholarships. All of this creates an internal conflict for a learner, whether to keep studying Arabic or going back home.[Translated from Arabic]

Theme 4. *"The Socio-Cultural aspect of the Palestinian context"*

The socio-cultural aspect of the Palestinian society was codified in a second place after the political condition with deference to its impact on Arabic learning process. In spite of the fact that this aspect received little intention by instructors, their views indicated that the socio-cultural aspect has negative as well as positive impact both on learners and learning.

Starting with the negative impact, instructors spotlighted the cultural misunderstanding resulting from the lack of cultural knowledge about the new learning context as the biggest challenge related to the socio-cultural aspect. They remarked that the lack of cultural understanding makes it hard for a learner to move from the literal meaning to the various social meanings of a term. One of the instructors stressed the consequences of such a finding saying:

the lack of cultural understanding, the assumption that you speak loudly because, for example, when we say "in sha' Allah", what does it mean? It is all religious because we say expressions like "in sha' Allah" and "Alhamdulillah" a lot. And then for someone who only understands literally what it means, you are saying what God wants most of the time. And if you don't understand the cultural use of these terminologies, you may think that people are invoking God everywhere, that we are religious. They don't understand, for example, that when you are saying "in sha' Allah" sometimes you are saying never. And when you are saying "Alhamdulillah" sometimes it is because you don't want to speak about it, it is not because you are thanking God. You are unhappy, but Alhamdulillah and I am not going over that subject anymore. So, to get them across the cultural representation means in the context that also needs time. To jump from the literal understanding to the social context, and when the media is not helping, it becomes a challenge. For example, the stereotype that religious conservative people come here and hear "in sha' Allah, in sha' Allah", you think that this is a confirmation of the stereotype that you are carrying.

Such a challenge, as instructors revealed, was attributed mainly to the cultural variation between a learner's original context and the new learning context, the Palestinian context.

Turning to the positive impact, instructors, firstly, stressed the great ease learners experience in integrating within the Palestinian society. One of the instructors stated this saying *"our students integrate naturally within the Palestinian society. When they go on holidays with Palestinian students, either in the city or the village, we don't feel that there are any barriers between those students and their integration within the society."* [Translated from Arabic]

Instructors attributed this finding to two major reasons. In a first place, they highlighted the nature of the Palestinian society that is characterized by simplicity and sympathy. To illustrate, one of the instructors spoke of this point as *"socially, from my own experience with students, I find that they easily integrate with the Palestinian society and love the Palestinian life a lot because of its simplicity and people kindness that is far away from exploitation."* [Translated from Arabic] In a second place, another instructor pointed that the PAS Program enhances learners' integration within the society through adopting some policies like the *"conversation partner"* policy which played a significant role in learners' integration within the context as s\he exchanges experiences with learners, which reduces the gap between a learner culture and the new context's.

Secondly, instructors revealed that the Palestinian context enriches the learning process. In this respect, one instructor claimed:

practically, if the learner contacts an Arabic student living in Dora[a village in Palestine]-Hebron, she will transfer the culture of this village to the learner. This makes both students integrate with each other's cultures. When the foreign learner visits the family of the partner, then it will be very easy to initiate a social communication in natural language contexts. This creates an enrichment for a foreign learner learning in a positive way. [Translated from Arabic]

Thirdly, instructors demonstrated that the context has a weighty role in changing the stereotypical image learners brought about the Arabs and Palestinians, in particular. Concerning this, one of the instructors stressed the role of the PAS, as a part of the learning context, in changing such stereotypical images saying:

for example, how CNN is presenting the Arabs in general, especially Palestinians, to Americans or to the world. When our students come to the PAS, they have some of that vision still. So, when they are meeting Arabs, meeting a Palestinian, the challenge is to tell them that media representation is not real. Now, students who get integrated into ... and have Palestinian friends and see Palestinian families ... you can see the changes in that, you can see that the PAS after a while has actually managed to make them see beyond what the media is representing.

Theme 5. "Arabic Diglossia; an early learning stage-related challenge"

Arabic Diglossic; the existence of different varieties of Arabic: the MSA and the colloquial variety\ies, was searched as a potential motive for the learning challenges facing learners from their instructors perspective. Surprisingly, all Arabic instructors refused to classify the diglossic nature of Arabic as a challenge. One of the instructors justified this finding as the learner is aware about this feature of Arabic as the program offers courses in "Fusha" and others in "Ammya". Some instructors excluded from this general finding the early learning stage. They demonstrated that apart from the early phase of the learning process, Diglossia is not a challenge. One instructor plainly illustrated this saying:

aside from the first level, Fusha and Ammya, in all the second, third and fourth, meaning intermediate and advanced levels, you already understand that there are

Fusha and Ammya. Once you pass the first threshold of learning; level 1, Ammya and Fusha, you already understand the differences.

In respect to the same point, explaining the type of challenges caused by Arabic diglossia, one instructor argued that diglossic Arabic causes frustration for a novice learner at an early stage of learning. He stated that *"at the beginning, the learner feels it is challenging. But after the first and second weeks, when they overcome the sounds and letters learning phase, they feel the great benefit of learning both varieties. Thus, anxiety and confusion disappear."* [Translated from Arabic]

Apart from the early stages of the learning process, participants cited some reasons that cause Arabic diglossia to be less challenging. First, they noted that *the program helps learners to bridge between the two varieties.* One of the instructors stated that the PAS does not mix the two varieties in teaching. In other words, there are Ammya classes that are isolated from Fusha classes and there are levels for each variety through which the learner undergoes. She explained:

we help them to bridge between Fusha to Ammya. We don't mix the two classes, so we have Ammya classes and Fusha classes. And at the same time, we tell them in the Fusha classes that this is Fusha and you cannot use it here and in Ammya classes this is Ammya you cannot use it here. At the same time, we help them bridge but we don't take it against them in a sense that "oh this is bad or a mistake" because we, Palestinians, are mixing both. I am speaking in between and what you want your students to reach at the end of the day. So, if they use Fusha in Ammya and Ammya in Fusha, as long as you explain the differences, that's fine.

Second, instructors argued that *the colloquial Arabic variety is the birth-child of the MSA variety.* Believing that Ammya is the flexible form of Fusha, one instructor claimed that the existence of both varieties reduces its negative impact on learning. Explaining this notion thoroughly, he illustrated:

Ammya is a flexible form of Fusha. If the learner asks for the meaning of a word, the teacher explains. In addition, there is no one in the Arabic world and Palestine does not understand Fusha. If learners want to communicate, they speak the MSA variety, which is the language of news that all people understand. If the learner goes to the supermarket and say "أعطني كيلو من الدقيق", immediately the salesman will give him/her. Fusha is not a complicated, old language with uncommon terminologies. Instead it is a familiar variety. It is the language of media that all

people understand and use. I have an experience with foreign learners in Jordan. There, students don't learn dialects. Hence, people can communicate with them using Fusha and they will understand. Even in case the learner learned the dialect and you spoke to him/her in Fusha, s/he will understand. [Translated from Arabic]

Third, as a consequence of the previous reason, instructors stated that learning one variety supports learning the other. Generally speaking, one instructor indicated that learning MSA variety aids the colloquial Arabic variety learning and versa vice. He briefly expressed this point saying *"diglossia, in my opinion, is not challenging. From others' perspective it could be a cause for reducing comprehension. But I see that Ammya enriches Fusha and Fusha enriches Ammya.*[Translated from Arabic]

Fourth, instructors argued that *the diglossic nature of Arabic creates a motive for learning Arabic.* They claimed that the diglossic nature of Arabic arouses the learners' curiosity about the language which promotes a learner's desire and excitement towards the language. One of the instructors explicitly and thoroughly explained this as:

the variety learned in the class is a certain variety which is the dialect spoken in the middle. So, when the learner goes to the south, s/he finds a different dialect. I see that this is a motive for a learner because this makes the learner ask about why this is the case. Mostly, if we go back to the origins of Ammya, we find that it is originally Fusha but the way of pronunciation is the difference. Students ask a lot yes. Even sometimes they compare between the Palestinian dialect and the other dialects like the Egyptian, Jordanian... this variation in the spoken varieties helps a learner in varying his/her linguistic abilities. The thing that makes his/her interaction with others better. I don't think that this is a challenge. It is a desire to learn more. [Translated from Arabic]

Challenges of Learning Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) variety

This part sets forth the challenges related to learning and teaching MSA variety from Arabic instructors' perception. Challenges are categorized under the following themes:

Theme 1. "Challenges of learning MSA variety"

Discussing learning MSA variety from Arabic instructors perception, they highlighted a substantial number of learning challenges facing their students. These challenges are presented as the following:

The first challenge: *case ending*. Participants classified placing diacritics at the end of a word as a top challenge. They related such a challenge to the fact that other languages like some Latin ones, English in particular, do not have such a feature. One instructor stated this finding saying:

case endings (الإعراب) like منصوب، مجرور، منصوب. Case ending, getting through them and using them correctly, is the challenge. Many languages have syntax but do not have case endings like English. For example, "the dog ate my meat". There is a case ending in Latin; e.g. German, and some European languages. So, German students, for example, have no problem understanding case ending. The rest of the students who don't come from that background face a challenge including Palestinian students because Ammya does not have case endings.

The second challenge: *memorizing vocabulary*. One instructor categorized vocabulary memorization as a demanding task not only in Arabic, but in any language. She claimed that a learner's capacity to remember and recall the learned terminologies is still the strongest variable in the vocabulary learning equation. Comparing learning Arabic vocabulary to grammar, she stated that “*memorizing vocabulary is challenging whether you are dealing with Ammya or Fusha and in any language. The challenge for any learner of any language is the amount of memorizing they do and that comes in the territory of vocabulary.*”

The third challenge: *making singular, dual and plural with a correct feminine- masculine agreement*. Instructors remarked that learners speaking Latin languages reported that they found forming singular, dual and plural highly challenging, especially in making feminine-masculine agreement. Concerning this finding, one instructor argued:

in Arabic, there are singular, dual and plural. Besides, there are feminine and masculine. Compared to English, it is harder in Arabic. That is because in each case there are different pronouns, demonstrative pronouns, ... etc. All of these rules are tiring for a foreign learner. But at the same time, they challenge themselves to master these issues. Actually, in the end, they learn but it is still challenging. [Translated from Arabic]

The fourth challenge: *close sounds pronunciation*. Instructors categorized differentiating between Arabic sounds, close sounds in articulation specifically, as a real learning challenge. They attributed that to the differences between Arabic language systems and Latin languages', English mainly. In this regard, one instructor highlighted this finding saying: *"I teach total beginners. On the level of sounds, there are some sounds that do not exist in their languages. Learners, for instance, have a difficulty in differentiating between "ح" and "غ", "خ" and "ح" and such stuff."* [Translated from Arabic]

The fifth challenge: *Arabic letters*. Instructors' responses revealed two main writing-related-challenges confronting their students. The first is discriminating between letters that connect and that do not while the other is discerning the different shapes of a letter. One instructor illustrated these challenging saying:

on the writing level, there are letters that connect with each other while others don't, there are six letters in Arabic that do not connect with other letters. Learners had a difficulty in connecting letters with each other. Moreover, some Arabic letters have four shapes. [Translated from Arabic]

The sixth challenge: *adjective placement*. Instructors noted that learners mostly experience a challenge in placing the adjective correctly within a sentence because of the difference between Arabic and English. That would be even more challenging in case the learner literally translated from his\her native language to Arabic. One of the instructors plainly spoke of this finding as: *"the adjective in English comes before the noun it describes. However, in Arabic, it comes after the noun. So, if the learner literally translates from his/her language into Arabic, the adjective placement would be a challenge"* [Translated from Arabic]

The seventh challenge: *lack of coherence between a learner's previous and new learning.*

Instructors claimed that students who have learned Arabic before coming to Palestine suffered from the lack, or even absence, of cohesion between previous learning done outside the Palestinian context and learning done in the PAS. The real challenge in that, as what one of the instructors demonstrated, is that some students start as total beginners regardless of the previous learning they received. That is especially in case the kind of Arabic a learner received differs than the Palestinian Arabic. This instructor overtly stated this finding saying:

based on my experience, under any circumstance, if the student is living in Tunisia, Libya, Morocco, ... then, his previous learning is not helpful as the learned accent is totally different than our Fusha. But, if he is in Jordan, Iraq, or any area in the Levantine including Egypt, it is helpful. That is because we understand the dialect he knows and speaks, so we just do some editing. In such a case, the teacher has a base on which s/he can build. [Translated from Arabic]

The eighth challenge: *L1 interference in L2 learning.* Meaning the interference of the learner's first language in learning the second one. One instructor described this kind of intervention and its impact on Arabic learning saying:

what is really challenging is that the learner is still thinking in his/her language and then translates into the learned one. If the learner adopted this as a way of learning, meaning intervention of the first language with the language intended to be learned, s/he will face real problems for sure. Whether the student is Arabic or not, s/he will suffer from the language structure problem. It is problematic because the learner tries to apply the syntax of his/her own language on the new\ second language, and this is a very big problem. Like, when we study English, we compose the English sentence following the Arabic sentence structure. The biggest challenge for a learner is that s/he applies the syntax of his/her native language on Arabic language. I have met French, Austrian, Norwegian students who composed the sentence in their language. So, when they say it in Arabic, it is full of mistakes. This is a huge challenge for the student and the teacher as well. [Translated from Arabic]

The ninth challenge: *transliteration.* Some instructors, especially those who teach the first level, reported that they tend to use the "key technique"; writing Arabic using Latin script or the learner's native language script, in teaching Arabic sounds mainly. However, they remarked that

total reliance on using the key throughout the whole learning process has a negative impact on it.

In this concern, one instructor discussed the effect of transliteration on learning saying:

I have noticed that my students try to write in Fusha during the first week. Actually, I don't stress or try to stop them. But I don't allow them to write the meaning of the terminology in English or write it in English letters because the learner will memorize the shape of the English word or the letters and not the Arabic one, and this is a problem, this always creates a challenge.[Translated from Arabic]

Highlighting challenges resulting from transliteration, one instructor claimed that using the "key" technique causes things to be learned as abstracts. He declared:

Learning through transliteration causes lots of challenges. That is because the learner learns things as abstracts and not through practice. Therefore, when the learner comes here, s/he gets surprised when discovering that the language learned here is all about practicing compared to the language learned outside Palestine, or in non-Arabic speaking context like his/her country, which is done through translating. This actually creates a very big dilemma.[translated from Arabic]

The tenth challenge: *individual differences*. Instructors stressed individual differences among learners as a challenge that can never be underestimated. They related such a challenge to the fact that having students with different learning approaches and, consequently, learning preferences, creates a challenge for the teacher in trying all the time to teach all students and meet their learning needs and preferences simultaneously. One of the instructors spoke of this saying:

in the beginning, all students appear to be at the same level. But, when the teacher starts the teaching process, s/he notices the gaps between learners. There would be a learner who learns quickly while another needs support to follow other learners in their learning. [Translated from Arabic]

Theme 2. "Justifications for challenges attached to MSA variety learning"

Instructors identified three main reasons for the challenges that their students face in learning MSA variety. Firstly, instructors referred to *the learner's capacity to learn and the teacher's methodology to teach as a first reason*. Discussing this finding, instructors stressed vocabulary as the area in which the impact of the learner's weak capacity to memorize

terminologies and the teacher approach appears dramatically. One of the instructors clarified this finding saying:

individual capacity to learn vocabulary and memorize things and a teacher's methodology can be a reason for all the challenges we talked about. A teacher can lack creativity and ways of recycling their vocabulary again and again so that students can see them in different forms and structures, so they are emphasized. Moreover, the dictionary can offer you like 60 thousand words, let's say if you want to memorize them, you can if your memory is good enough but if there are helping aids that helping material, teaching style, ... then the process will be faster because I am invoking other areas by different representations by using audio, asking other people to do it, so teaching methodology is a big part of helping the students memorize words. So between teacher style and students capacity to learn, this is the reason for all of the challenges.

Secondly, some instructors attributed the learning challenges facing their students to *the learner's preferences*. One instructor claimed that the learner's learning style and preferences, which are determined by a learner background, determines the kind of learning challenges s/he faces. He thoroughly explained this finding saying:

it depends on the school to which the learner belongs. If the learner belongs to the German school, which cares a lot about grammar, or to the English school, which focuses on communication, or if the learner is Korean who don't like to write, they believe that technology exists to take advantage of it and not to write using a pencil and paper. So, in the language, we have writing, reading, comprehension and conversation. The conversation is preferred by Americans. They might say that this teacher doesn't allow us to speak. They prefer to take the whole course as a conversation. However, Germans prefer grammar, so, when I give them a rule, they start questioning if this rule applies to everything, or what is the rule should be followed. The Koreans, for instance, like to listen and understand. They don't like to write or read. This makes Koreans weak in reading and writing.

Thirdly, *differences between Arabic language system and other languages systems.*

Instructors remarked that Arabic language system is completely different than the English system.

The fact that makes learning Fusha challenging.

Theme 3. “Challenges of teaching MSA variety”

Since Arabic learning process includes the learner as well as the teacher, this part tackles the kind of challenges facing Arabic instructors in teaching MSA variety. Instructors brought up to the scene three chief challenges as it is shown underneath:

The first challenge, *learners' individual differences*. Generally speaking, one instructor claimed that each student in the class is a unique case and thus, a challenge. Nonetheless, the real challenge for a teacher is to find a teaching style that suits every learner regardless of the tiny individual differences among them. He declared:

there is always a challenge, in each student, there is a challenge, if you have six students, you have six challenges ... people are different, we are not alike in the way we learn. For example, for me, I like to understand the theory behind it and I like to hear a lot before you tell me. Other students want to do grammar and they want to see it not to hear it. And for some, if you explain theory and grammar on the board, their shutters go down and they cannot learn. So it is a variety of individuals you are teaching as each has its own style of learning according to their capabilities in learning, so, the challenge becomes how to get a group like that in one class and have a style of teaching that suits everyone.

Instructors highlighted a number of individual differences that challenged them in teaching the variety. To begin, they related to *the learner's background*. Concerning this issue, one instructor claimed that students coming from various backgrounds increase the burden on the teacher. That is, the teacher needs to be flexible in teaching all students equally. As another individual difference, instructors highly stressed *the learner prior knowledge*. One instructor remarked that having a previous knowledge means having learners with different abilities and diverse learning needs. She plainly illustrated:

I have students that I have taught them Arabic or the first time, and the Arabic accent they have is the Egyptian. Meaning that they have some terminologies that we don't have or use it here. This imposes over the teacher the responsibility to edit the knowledge that a learner has. This is actually a challenge.[Translated from Arabic]

One other individual difference is *the learners' different learning abilities*. Instructors stated that this requires a teacher to be able to offer the needed help for each learner at certain

extent according to his/her abilities. This means that the teacher as well as the curriculum needs to be flexible. In relation to this matter, one of the instructors stated this finding saying:

I have seen students struggling with certain aspects of learning the language, like for example, I have one student who can hear very well and say the sentence once you explain it, and wants to learn through theoretical discussion and see how things are related to each other. And when you show him on paper, he is lost, so there are different difficulties students face when they are learning Arabic. This requires from the teacher to be flexible. There is nothing called "curriculum". I don't believe in curriculum. I don't teach exactly as it is in the book or I don't have to teach all what is in the book. We have to adapt the material to meet students need as much as possible. Let me give you example, when we study the variety, we might face a learner who wants to learn all the military terminologies or the scientific terminologies, which actually does not exist in the curriculum. So, the teacher have to be flexible and meet those needs and give those terminologies to those learners. This means adapting the curriculum in a way that fulfill learners' needs. However, to meet all the need 100% is impossible.

To conclude, *variation in age among learners* in the same class is another individual difference. One instructor stated that having students with varying ages is a real dilemma as it imposes additional burden on the teacher. He explained:

when there is a variation in age among students, meaning to have a learner at the age of 18 and another at the 60 of his/her age, I think this creates a great challenge for me. On the level of beginners, there might be a learner who masters letters and sounds in a perfect way because of his/her young age. This one actually belongs to no level in the PAS. That's because s/he is above the beginners' level and less than the intermediate one. Meaning we have level 1 and level 2 and there are some students who come in between. Thus, if we placed them in the first level they will be bored and in the second level they cannot continue. And the logistic and financial potentials don't allow to open a new level for this kind of learners. So, this imposes additional burden over the instructor inside the class and also in terms of office hours in attempt to fill the gap. [Translated from Arabic]

The second challenge, *finding the material that suites each learner's needs, learning preferences and styles*. As a consequence of the variation among learners, one instructor demonstrated that a teacher faces a real challenge in finding the suitable material that accommodates all learners needs. She explained:

how do you find a text that you want to teach that fits all patterns of learning you already have in the class, and of course the main challenge is finding out and mapping where your students are in terms of what they know and how they learn. The mapping process can take time, getting to know the students, and then getting to know the material that is easier for each one and help you teach them something.

The third challenge, *a word literal meaning vs. social meaning*. Instructors indicated that Arabic terminologies have more than one meaning; one is literal and the other\s is\are social. One instructor noted that such a fact becomes challenging for a learner when s\he tries to structure a sentence and for a teacher as s\he has to teach both types of meaning or, at least, the word's literal meaning and its most common social meaning to help learners communicate fluently.

Challenges of learning the Palestinian Colloquial Arabic variety

This section explores the challenges that the foreign learners face in learning the Palestinian colloquial Arabic variety and their causes from Arabic instructors viewpoint. Besides, it highlights the challenges that instructors face in teaching the variety and their causes. Investigation results are displayed as the following:

Theme 1. "Challenges of learning the Palestinian colloquial Arabic variety"

As a starting point, instructors asserted that challenges, either in learning or teaching the Palestinian colloquial variety, do exist. Furthermore, they revealed that learning challenges appear extensively in learning the colloquial Arabic in comparison to MSA variety learning. One of the instructors stated this finding as:

I see that challenges are more in Ammya, that's because there is communication, the learner has motivation. So, when s/he learns a term and go to the street, s/he can make use of it. On the contrary, Fusha is only for reading and writing and the learner cannot use it in everyday life.

Starting with the kind of challenges facing students in learning the Palestinian colloquial variety, instructors underlined a number of challenges which are illustrated as the following:

First, *bridging between MSA and the colloquial varieties and between the different dialects of the colloquial variety*. One instructor remarked that aside from learning in which the teacher makes his/her students conscious about the differences between varieties of Arabic by using a phonetics map that helps them understand the differences between varieties and bridge between

them, students face a challenge in differentiating and bridging between varieties of Arabic. She explained:

I think in bridging between Fusha and Ammya, they need help. And so is bridging between Ammyas, the different 'colloquials'. It is a big dilemma. If you give students a phonetic map to these changes, which we do, then it becomes less challenging. Students are smart enough to pick it up. Meaning what do you think is the difference between the city of Ramallah and the village of Birzeit? It is the "Gaf \ ق" and the "tha\ظ" and the "tha \ ð \ ّ". If you tell them the change; that the "Gaf" goes through the village and changes in the city, and when you tell them the original "Gaf" is what you have learned in your Fusha class because that's what you are writing, so, you are helping them in bridging Ammya to Fusha and bridging the different 'Ammyas'.

Nonetheless, instructors noted that this aspect still problematic as the teacher have to determine the suitable phonetic map for every learner. Otherwise, the map will not be useful for reducing the extent of challenge students experience in learning the colloquial.

Second, *mixing MSA and the Palestinian colloquial Arabic variety*. In relation to the previous point, one instructor revealed that, learners cannot separate MSA variety from the colloquial. He stated this as:

there is a very big challenge which is that the students mix Fusha with Ammya. That's because they know both varieties, so they mix them. So, the challenge is that the learner cannot control what s/he says to separate Fusha from Ammya. [Translated from Arabic]

Third, *variation across the colloquial Arabic dialects that obstructs learners from understanding native speakers*. Instructors demonstrated that learners face a difficulty in understanding Arabic native speakers. They predicted that is because of the huge variation in pronunciation. One instructor explained this finding saying:

the understandable dialect for most of people is the middle dialect. However, the learner needs to adapt him/herself to the new partner of context. Now, when you speak the dialect of the middle, people in the south will understand. Meaning that the learner speaks the dialect s/he knows and the other party speaks his/her dialect. Nevertheless, they understand each other. The learner knows that there is a variety of dialects but s/he is able to absorb such variation.[Translated from Arabic]

Fourth, *learners inability to read and write Arabic alphabet*. Instructors teaching the colloquial Arabic variety demonstrated that some learners face a difficulty in reading the written

Ammya and writing Ammya using Arabic letters since they do not know the Arabic alphabet. One of those instructors stated:

there are some students who don't want to learn the Arabic alphabet and they want to speak the language only. But, the book and Ammya are written in Arabic letters. Ten years ago, we wrote the book using the "transliteration" technique. However, students protested because there are some learners who know Fusha and came to study Ammya in the PAS, so, when they study Ammya using the key or the transliteration technique, they might forget the Arabic letters. Thus, we tried to write the curriculum using Arabic letters. Still, there are some students cannot read the Arabic letters. [Translated from Arabic]

Fifth, *insufficient time offered for learning the Arabic letters*. In this respect, one of the instructors noted that the PAS assigns the first two weeks for learning Arabic alphabet. However, he claimed that the two weeks are not enough to master the letters. He argued:

I think that learning Arabic letters during two weeks is not enough. That is as our language is not easy at all, I see that to be able to read and write Arabic requires more than two weeks, the two weeks are not enough, Arabic requires more time and training. So, if the student already knows Arabic letters, it would be easier and the two weeks would be enough. Otherwise, it is not. [Translated from Arabic]

Sixth, *the diglossic nature of the colloquial Arabic variety*. Instructors reported that, at certain situations, learners experience a state of confusion because of the variations between the different dialects of the Palestinian colloquial Arabic variety. One instructor explained:

in the PAS we teach the Jerusalem dialect. When students go out to the street, they come to the class asking why did you taught us "أهوة"/ "ʔhwa \ coffee" while people say it as "kahwa\ "كهوة"? You have to explain the reason for this. For instance, you have to say that is in the city we say "أهوة"/ "ʔhwa" and in the village we say "كهوة" "kahwa" or "قهوة" "gahwa". This is a challenge sometimes. However, sometimes I use it as enrichment for the learning. [Translated from Arabic]

Theme 2. "Teaching the Palestinian colloquial Arabic variety"

Believing that what is challenging for a learner is challenging for the teacher as well, instructors highlighted a considerable number of challenges facing them in teaching the Palestinian colloquial Arabic variety. These challenges are listed and described below:

The first challenge, *finding and modifying the suitable material in Ammya*. Instructors underlined the lack of material written in or about the colloquial Arabic as a key challenge.

Focusing on grammar teaching particularly, one of the instructors remarked that she experienced a great challenge in finding a written material about Ammya grammar, which imposes over the teacher the responsibility of personally constructing the material. She straightforwardly clarified this finding saying:

material; there are no books deal with the grammar of Ammya, I have to make the exercise sheets and the worksheets alone and for example, if I am teaching Fusha right now, I explain what is "اسم الفاعل". There are 70 books at least that I can reach and give them examples to help them cross over the language. I cannot teach them the movement verbs and significant of that in Ammya, even though it is a big issue, because nobody wrote about it. So, the grammar of the variety is not documented, very few words have been worked. Texts, there is a miserable amount of texts in Ammya. People who worked on Ammya, have worked on it from an archeology, sociology, ethnography ... which is not a linguistic perspective. So finding these texts and modifying them that's also a challenge.

The second challenge, *checking and reworking the available material in Ammya.*

Instructors demonstrated that in case the material is found, they have to check and rework it to see to which extent it is suitable for their students. Comparing the material available in Fusha to that in Ammya, one instructor stated:

Shareef Kana'ne, for example, has written some books in Ammya, if I am going to teach linguistics, I want to take these linguistics. Only he has done them the way the people say them, he does not do the filing language. So, if there is a missing verb, he does not put it, if there is a congregation that is missing, he does not congregate it. We have to rework linguistics. Material that covers the different varieties; city dialect, village dialect ... also, is a challenge. Hence, the teaching material that builds up, the scaffolding, ... I want to teach a material that helps me scaffold, you know to put basic steps; step 1, step 2, step 3, ... I have to make it my own and because it is a challenge to teach Ammya, for each student I have to put his own step 1, step 2 ... etc. In Fusha, all I know that I need to map the students. Once I map students, I spread the material to choose from. So, in Fusha, it becomes a work to choose from, no more no less.

The third challenge, *insufficient time available for checking and reworking the material and planning for teaching.* As a consequence of the previous two challenges, instructors revealed that finding the suitable material and reworking an existing one consume a huge portion of the teacher's time.

The fourth challenge, *reworking the existing material still needs lots of time, money and research*. Instructors demonstrated that making the available material suitable for students' needs requires a huge investment of time, money and effort, which does not exist. One instructor explained this finding saying:

still material needs lots of making. It is not only the teaching style. Another challenge is the time, I am not assigned the time by the university to do enough research on the material ... there is no money to do research. So, money, time and research become a question.

The fifth challenge, *selecting the phonetics map that supports each student in bridging between the MSA and the colloquial varieties in learning*. As a consequence of what is mentioned above, instructors depend on the available material in Fusha to teach Ammya. However, this imposes a burden over the teacher, which is to find a map that helps learners bridge between the two varieties. One instructor argued:

if you give them a map, you are helping them to bridge the challenges. The map, the ability to learn the map; when they need it, are you good enough as a teacher to recognize which students need it, then the map is ready in your portfolio. If a student goes to a class where they are teaching Ammya and the teacher is not giving him this map, he is going to be lost. So, I think the challenge here is do people understand! Now, to do all of these, I need a map, if your teacher who is teaching the Ammya knows this, it is not a problem.

The sixth challenge, *the wrong presupposition that a native speaker of Arabic can teach the colloquial variety*. One of the instructors claimed that the fact that there are teachers teaching the colloquial Arabic because they are native speaker of Arabic is a huge challenge. She justified her claim saying:

there are teachers who are teaching the Ammya because they think they can because they speak it and they have no clue that Ammya have grammar, has syntax and has a map of changes. Actually the village of Birzeit has an eco- village in Jordan, so when you are talking about rural villages, the map of dialects is bigger than Birzeit and Ramallah ... Why do we have a Moroccan dialects within that dialect,Then, the challenge is in teachers who don't know this and are not trained on this and this is beyond teaching styles. It is not only the motivation for learning that can be killed if you meet a teacher who thinks "oh I am speaking Ammya, produce to what I am saying to you and then you have it".

Teaching is to know the students, what do they need, be able to rise to the occasion, and have the knowledge to be able to do a good job.

The seventh challenge, *the teacher's lack for the means of teaching*. One of the instructors who teaches the total beginners level indicated that sometimes teaching Arabic using Arabic language without any intermediate language is a challenge for a foreign learner. That is because, as he indicated, sometimes other means like drama and drawing, for instance, make teaching certain aspects impossible without using an intermediary language as the class lacks for key means of teaching. He explained:

sometimes I face a difficulty with students who do not know English like Koreans, Japanese and Chinese. In general, I don't use any intermediate language unless I have no other choice. I teach using all the ways like acting, drawing, and other new strategies. However, if I was not able to convey the meaning using these techniques, I use English, through translation I mean. I teach Arabic using Arabic without any intermediate means. [Translated from Arabic]

The eighth challenge, *teaching the colloquial Arabic variety is about teaching how to communicate and not the language philosophy*. One of the instructors pointed that learning the colloquial Arabic variety is for the sake of communication and not for knowing the language secrets, e.g. how the language was formed. Believing in that, he revealed that some teachers get lost between teaching the function of the variety and its philosophy. This instructor clearly illustrated this finding as:

the challenge is that Ammya is a very huge field. Learners want to know and learn everything. You, as a teacher, cannot teach everything. Learners ask questions about the linguistic, vocal and lexical systems of the language that control the learning process. This confuses the teacher, that is because the student have to learn how to communicate and not the language philosophy. In Arabic, "امرأة" becomes "نساء", so what is the philosophy of that? Actually this is not important to know as a learner learning Ammya to communicate. The vital part is to know the plural of "امرأة" is "نساء". It is not that much important for me as a learner of the colloquial variety because I am learning Ammya to communicate.

The ninth challenge, *diglossic nature of the colloquial Arabic variety*. One of the participants remarked that the fact that there are various spoken dialects of the colloquial Arabic

variety makes its teaching challenging. That is, the learner have to rely on him\herself to deduce the dialect rules from the spoken variety as there are no written texts.

The tenth challenge, *lack of suitable and well-equipped classrooms*. Some instructors complained from the shortage in the equipped classrooms with the technological devices and teaching tools. One of those instructors depicted the real situation of the classrooms available in the program compared to the rooms that should be available saying:

we hope that each room has smart board, LCD screen and a computer. There is a huge difference between teaching in a room that has a smart board and a computer or an ordinary classroom with a blackboard. In the equipped classroom the teacher can display everything for students instead of bringing it written on papers. In this case, the learner can interact better than using the worksheet, for example.

Theme 3. "Learning both varieties of Arabic"

As instructors confirmed that there are challenges facing foreign learners in learning the colloquial and MSA varieties when learned separately, the majority of them confidently asserted that learning both varieties simultaneously is challenging as well. Supporting their claim, instructors pointed up some learning challenges facing their students in learning both varieties at once. To begin, they claimed that *the "partner" or the "conversation partner", who is an Arabic native speaker assigned by the program to help a foreign learner in learning the language, is a source of many learning challenges facing students*. One of the instructors highlighted the negative side effects of the partner on the learner and learning of Arabic. As a first side effect, he claimed that the partner mostly exploit the foreign learner for learning his\her mother tongue. He stated this as:

the partner could be a challenge. That is, in some cases the Arabic learner comes to learn a second language, the foreigner native language, and not to help the foreign learner. Therefore, the Arabic learner tries to speak English, or there are some learners who want to learn Spanish, German, Korean ... So, the partner takes the foreign learner as an intermediary to learn his/her language instead of helping him to learn Arabic language.

As a second side effect, this instructor noted that the kind of help provided by the partner is not necessarily a correct information. That is as, in some cases, the partner's knowledge is deficient. He explained this point saying:

[i]n addition, when the partner tries to help the foreign learner, s/he might give him/her wrong information. That is as the Arabic student does not know the MSA variety or everything about the language, in general. Even in Ammya, for example, the foreign learner studies proverbs and sayings. When the foreign learner asks about such proverbs, the Arabic student says that this proverb does not exist in Arabic, for example, although it does. So, this creates a challenge.[Translated from Arabic]

Furthermore, instructors revealed that learners, *who know neither Arabic nor English, experienced a difficulty in finding the suitable medium of communication within the class.* One instructor demonstrated that some students who are learning Arabic and do not know English, like Korans, Japanese, Chinese, ... face a huge challenge in learning compared to other foreign learners. She related that to the lack of means of communication inside the class. She comprehensively spoke of this as:

another difficulty is finding a common language that all students comprehend. We use English usually. However, I have a Korean student who does not speak Arabic but she is here to learn Arabic and she doesn't speak English as well, so this is a challenge. Once you get through to her, then it is ok. So, that's a different challenge. The difficulty becomes getting a text that is easy to translate ... and to find out if we have communicated modes of communication.

Finally, instructors reported that *learners experienced a difficulty in differentiating between some Arabic sounds.* The fact that imposes new responsibilities over the teacher to release such a dilemma. Describing it as a challenge for both the learner and the teacher, one of those instructors declared:

yes, a bluff side is that when the students ... for example, I had to do a class last week on the difference between "ض ط ت" in pronunciation because I have a student who could not hear the difference. So if it is "طابع" it becomes "تابع" and then you get a different type. It becomes a phonetics class.

As an exception for the general finding, among the five instructors, (2) of them considered learning both varieties simultaneously is helpful more than challenging. One of them related his

claim to the fact that learning one variety aids learning the other. He justified his viewpoint saying:

learning both varieties at the same time is not a challenge. But instead, it is very important and interesting. I am teaching Fusha (I) and Ammya (I) now. When I am in Ammya class, I speak only Ammya while I am in the Fusha class, I speak Fusha only. Then, when I teach them the word "حقيبة" in Fusha class, and I know that students have learned the word "شنتة", so I use translation technique. I tell them "حقيبة" is as same as "شنتة" in Ammya. Thus, Fusha supported Ammya learning in this case. Therefore, learning Fusha and Ammya simultaneously is very supportive. It supports, enriches and reduces the challenges facing the learner as well as the teacher. Moreover, it makes me dispense using some teaching tools sometimes. [Translated from Arabic]

Another instructor excluded from this finding the case when there is a gap between the levels of the colloquial and MSA varieties. He believed that learning both of them concurrently becomes even more challenging.

Challenges Facing Learners in Communicating with Palestinian Native Speakers Using Arabic

Estimating that when a learner learns Arabic in a context speaks the language, communicating using Arabic becomes out of question. Hence, this part examines the extent to which communicating using Arabic is challenging and the kind of learning challenges learners confront in communicating from Arabic instructors perspectives. Outcomes of this inquiry are presented as the following:

Theme 1. *"The extent of challenge a learner experiences in communicating with Arabic native speakers using Arabic"*

Out of the five instructors participated in this study, four teachers strongly confirmed that communicating using Arabic is challenging for their students. However, instructors reported four key exceptions for this general finding. As a first exclusion, one of them remarked that although communicating in Arabic is a challenging task, the extent of challenge a learner experiences in communicating is an individual issue. She plainly illustrated her view saying:

It is individual. For some students, it would be the utmost challenge, and for others it is the easiest. Some students prefer the classroom and don't say a word outside, they feel too scared, you have to push them and not to be cowered. Some students don't like to communicate even though they know Arabic, they feel afraid of the outside. Some students feel freer outside than they are in the classroom because if people understand, they will not stop and correct you unless you are making a huge mistake.

As a second exclusion is that the used variety in communication determines the extent of challenge a learner experiences. Two instructors revealed that communicating using MSA variety is challenging while using the colloquial one is mostly less challenging. One of them justified saying that in case of communicating using MSA variety, the gap between the used variety and the spoken one on the street is huge. He explained:

when students learn Fusha and go to the street they face the real challenge. That is because we don't use Fusha in our daily life. But, if they learn Ammya, the gap between what they learn in the class and what they hear in the street declines. The colloquial variety aids them in meeting their daily needs like buying food, going outside and many other things. [Translated from Arabic]

As a third exclusion, participants revealed that the PAS program adopts teaching approaches that enhances communication inside the class, which, in its turn, prepares learners for communication when they go outside. One participant explained:

Usually before the class starts every day we specify a time to speak about something happened to them or they heard. The purpose of such a task is to get them used to the conversation. Mostly, I notice that they go to restaurants or the market, and buy things, deal with people and watch plays and other art shows. They appear to be interested and happy and I am not sure if they have any challenges in reality. [Translated from Arabic]

As a last exclusion, one participant disclosed that the Palestinian society is a motivating milieu for communication, the fact that supports learners in overcoming communication challenges. She explained:

one thing is that, I don't know, maybe I am stereotyping Palestinians, but we like when someone speaks Arabic to us even if they are saying "مرحبا". The reaction students get is very positive, most of the time, even if they don't know anything more than "hello", they get a good feedback, then that encourages them to come to class and want to learn more.

Confirming that the extent of challenge foreign learners experience in learning Arabic is relatively high, instructors brought up some examples on the learning challenges confronted by their students.

Theme 2. *"Challenges encounter learners in communicating using Arabic"*

A substantial number of challenges were presented by instructors when they were asked to describe the level of challenge their students have experienced in communicating using Arabic. These challenges are listed and explained below:

First, *Palestinian people reluctance to communicate using MSA variety.* One of the instructors revealed that when learners try to communicate, in Fusha especially, Palestinians mostly do not feel comfortable to respond in Fusha. She stated this saying: *"if they are speaking Fusha, people would speak to them back in English. They report back that people in the street are not comfortable speaking Fusha to them. And instead of going to Ammya they switch to English."*

In this respect, another instructor noted that since MSA variety is limited to certain situations, using it by foreign learners for everyday communication seems weird for a native speaker. The thing that causes embarrassment for a learner and, consequently, impedes the learning process progress. He stated: *"if learners use some eloquent terminologies and phrases like " من فضلك، أين " موقف سيارات بيرزيت؟". Learners will feel shy because how Palestinians look at or treat the foreigner makes him/her feel shy, that is as they mock him/her.*

Second, *the learner's inadequate knowledge about Arabic language.* One of the instructors demonstrated that learners sometimes fail to express themselves with the limited linguistic repertoire they have. The thing that causes Arabic communication process to break down as they mostly switch to English. He summed this up saying: "sometimes they have a lot in their heart and

they cannot say it in Arabic, so they want to change the classroom to an English discussion, They have to try to communicate in Arabic, but sometimes they just can't."

Third, *the linguistic misunderstanding*. Instructors revealed that students used to report experiences in which they fell in the trap of misunderstanding. One of the instructors revealed that the lack of cultural knowledge, which results from the cultural variation, causes this misunderstanding. In this respect, one instructor quite fully described such a challenge saying:

understanding the culture. I have a segment called "كيف بنقول؟" The job of this segment is to tell me the challenges they met in the street. Most of the time it is a cultural issue. For example, "Mohammad who promised them to fix the internet said 'In sha' Allah I will come tomorrow and he never showed up' " Or "our friend is getting married and so, what should we do?" So, it is about understanding the culture and what to do and say linguistically to fit the culture.

Speaking about the same finding, this instructor related this challenge to the cultural variation mainly. She claimed that the Arabic culture shares no common features with any of the foreign learners' cultures. She illustrated:

the students' cultural background, sometimes, stops them from understanding the Arabic culture. For example, if I am a French person going to a wedding I don't go just like that, I need an invitation because we invite only a limited number, unlike here the weddings are open. So, this becomes a cultural question. And then, how do you say "Mabrook"? So it is a cultural issue not only a linguistic one.

Fourth, *the complex Arabic linguistic system*. Instructors claimed that the Arabic language system, compared to other languages' linguistic systems, is complicated. Pointing at one of the language complexity facets, one instructor remarked that an Arabic term has multiple synonyms. She illustrated:

when I taught a beginner's level I told them that I am going to tell you that this word is a "table" but if you learned a different one, don't hesitate to use it because it is correct. I give you one word, but the item can have twenty. Sometimes it becomes a problem like "oh, she is saying "طولة" but someone told me it is "مائدة" . So, it is a wrong word. So, as a teacher, you should set up your students to face such challenges and you should know that they are going to meet this. If you don't, then this is bad teaching.

Defending her viewpoint, she brought up some profound examples from the language. She added:

there is a big cultural-linguistic difference. And when it comes to love, how would you translate "جاي ع بالي" like, "جاي ع بالي أشوف محمد" or "جاي ع بالي كنافة". Love verbs in Arabic are more advanced than in English. In English we have love and like and that's it. And the same is for hate. For example "جاي ع بالي، بموت في، بهوى، بعشق، بحب،" all are translated into love in English. That's a challenge for the students as well as for the teacher. The challenge here is because of the linguistic nature because we have one or two verbs in English that matched like 70 words in Arabic.

Fifth, *literal translation*. Instructors revealed that as a consequence of the aforementioned challenge, learners fall in the trap of language when they communicate. One instructor remarked that when learners communicate, they think in their native language but speak in Arabic after applying the native language structure on Arabic. Because of the distinctiveness of Arabic language system, structure particularly, one of the instructors described the produced language as a deformed form of Arabic. This, in its turn, leads to more challenges like misunderstanding and conversation breaks, as it was mentioned earlier.

Sixth, *the diglossic nature of the Palestinian colloquial Arabic variety*. Instructors considered Arabic diglossia as a major reason for the challenges that their students used to experience in communicating in Arabic. One of the Instructors explained the impact of Arabic diglossia on learners communication saying:

Dialect variation is a challenge. When students visit other cities like Hebron, as they used to go as volunteers, they find the spoken dialect there is different especially regarding some letters and words and their pronunciation. The thing that causes the student to ask questions like "why don't we learn this? The teacher tries to illustrate saying that the PAS teaches the dialect of the middle mostly. [Translated from Arabic]

Seventh, *the difficulty of simulating reality*. Instructors revealed that reality outside the classroom has various situations that can hardly be simulated in the class. The fact that does not support learners in their communication. Moreover, it affects teachers as well as the teacher's

attempt to simulate reality of the Palestinian society in the class imposes extra work on him\her.

One instructor illustrated this double-edged finding saying:

the challenge for them as students and for me as a teacher, of course, is to take the build-up scenario of the classroom and try to imitate the reality outside. The more you create simulation, you try to simulate the environment you want to make your students produce, it becomes easier. But it is not always easy for a teacher to always find a situation to simulate because reality has many options and the classroom has limited options. So, that's a challenge.

Eighth, *students' inability to transfer*. As a result from the aforesaid challenge, instructors reported that some students fail in transferring the knowledge learned inside the classroom to the external environment. One instructor spoke of this as:

the challenge to help them to transfer what they learn in the classroom to the environment, that's also a challenge. Are the students able to transfer! Sometimes they are doing well in the classroom and horribly in the environment because they couldn't manage to transfer the skill they got in the classroom to the environment.

Ninth, *absence of homogeneity in the class*. It was reported that the class has a variety of students in various levels in Arabic and various personal qualities. The fact that hinders communication inside the class, mainly. One of the instructors described the impact of such a challenge on the learning process saying:

there is no homogeneous class. I have never been in a class in which I have one level, three or four levels of students even. And this creates a very big challenge for a teacher and a learner as well. Besides, challenges could be that ...learners who are good in the language or those in the highest level in the class might get bored. [Translated from Arabic]

This challenge has implications not only on the learner but also the teacher. The same instructor revealed that communicating inside a heterogeneous class imposes an extra burden on the teacher represented in the extra duties assigned for him\her. Regarding this matter, this instructor described the class heterogeneousness implication on him saying:

the challenge faced by the teacher is that s/he has to create a suitable atmosphere inside the class or outside even. Actually learners' communication inside the classroom mainly puts extra burden on the teacher. The teacher has to do extra work and try to attract learners of low level in Arabic to interact with learners with higher levels through, for instance, shows, writing, discussions, songs, and movies. We use lots of such means to

overcome challenges resulting from communication. Moreover, the teacher needs to assign individual meetings with learners. In this meeting the teacher talks to the student about his/her level and about other students levels. That is to make them aware about what is going in the class and why certain things are happening. This is super challenging as the teacher is the one responsible for the learning process. [Translated from Arabic]

Talking about challenges facing their students in communicating in Arabic, instructors pointed to the resources of such challenges. They highlighted the learner, teacher and program as the main resources. To begin, speaking about the teacher as a sources of challenges, one of the instructors stated:

it could be the fault of the teacher; I was not good enough in choosing the environment, in simulation, I chose wrong simulation. I did not anticipate, I taught them old material. For example, I have my own stereotypes as a teacher, so this is a teacher failure.

Moreover, the same instructor considered the learner, as well, a source of the challenges.

She illustrated:

it could also be a student failure because they could not do the homework, they did not do the work they have, they did not try to understand, they did not look up extra resources and material to see what the teacher is doing, they did not report back to the teacher asking for help. So, it is a complication; a challenge of the teacher is a challenge of the student.

Lastly, the university, in general, as it is the incubator of the learning process, and the program, in particular, were highlighted as the third resource. One of the instructors highlighted some aspects of the program and the university that stops all of the learner's and the teacher's attempts of simulating the classroom environment to reality in a way that supports communication. She declared:

My classroom is boring. For example, I have been asking the university for a classroom, the university says that we don't have enough rooms. It is also the environment, if I am teaching the students Arabic letters, I want the letters to be around the room. I want to show them a video so I need the material. So if I borrow a machine to use it, sometimes it does not work or takes 20 minutes to get it work. So these are material challenges that are preventing my classroom from being helpful for students. In the classroom, I want this type of setting, but I don't have it. I want a smart board but I cannot. We say we need this type of room, they say no we want big rooms. I need to put material and leave them on the board, they say we allow you as long as you teach but when you finish take it with you.

Challenges facing non-native Arabic speakers in learning Arabic orthography, syntax, semantics, phonetics, phonology and morphology.

This part investigates the learning challenges related to Arabic language system; Arabic writing "Orthography", Arabic sound system "Phonology, morphology and Phonetics", Arabic grammar "Syntax" and Arabic vocabulary "Semantics" namely, from Arabic instructors perception. Challenges are presented under the following subtitles:

Arabic Writing System "Orthography"

This part examines the Arabic writing system and its impact on the Arabic learning process. Results of this investigation are presented as follows:

Theme 1. "Learning challenges related to Arabic writing system"

Arabic writing was classified by all instructors as a challenging aspect that has a direct impact on Arabic learning. Participants highlighted a number of challenges resulting from the Arabic writing system. To start, they stressed L1 interference in L2 learning as the utmost challenge. This interference, as participants' responses indicated, appeared in a variety of aspects of Arabic language learning. In the first place, instructors pointed out the interference of their mother tongue in learning the Arabic sentence structure. One instructor illustrated this point saying:

the most important challenge is that a learner thinks in his/her native language when writing in Arabic. Writing, in any language, is based on knowing how to structure a sentence. When the German and French come to write an Arabic sentence, they actually write a sentence following the structure in their native language, which creates challenges. For instance, the English sentence usually starts with the subject. However, the Arabic language basically depends on the verb more than the noun. Therefore, the teacher has to explain the difference between the structures of the nominative and verbal sentences. And this creates a challenge for the teacher as well. [Translated from Arabic]

Furthermore, one of the instructors highlighted the nominative sentence structure as one of the learning challenges. She revealed that the fact that *the nominative sentence in Arabic has no*

verb causes confusion for a learner. Speaking about the challenge learners experience as a result of that, she explained:

I have a huge challenge in getting through to students that you can build a sentence without a verb as we have the nominative sentence "جملة اسمية". Because they are looking for "is" and "are" and because they have used "is" and "are" and "be" for a very long time in their life. So, they think that the sentence is lacking. So, getting through that sentence, that semantically this is a sentence, for example, "الباب الكبير", "باب كبير", and "الباب الكبير", which one is the sentence. "الباب الكبير" is not a sentence for them because it has no verb. Yes, but what I am trying to teach them is the structure of my language; the subject first and then predicate, مبتدأ، خبر.

Additionally, instructors revealed that in Arabic, unlike English, *a word's function is not fixed.* One of the instructors claimed that while the adjective can function as an adjective in one structure, it can function as a noun in another. Providing an example, she illustrated:

for example, if I say "الباب الكبير" and "باب كبير", that is an adjective functioning as a predicate, and the "خبر"/ "predicate" is an adjective here. Getting through to them that the adjective can function in two ways can be a challenging task. That's because in English the adjective is an adjective and does not function as a noun.

In the second place, instructors related to the interference of the learners' first language in Arabic alphabet learning. Instructors claimed this interference appears in two forms. First, a learner's L1 interference in the stage of identifying the Arabic letters that connect from others that do not. One of the instructors demonstrated that the alphabet of a learner's mother tongue mostly influences the learning of the alphabet of his\her second language. He illuminated this finding saying: *"at the beginning, they learn the letters that connect and other letters that don't. However, sometimes, their language takes over the learning process."* [Translated from Arabic] Second, a learner's L1 interference in identifying a letter shape and writing direction. One of the instructors reported this finding saying:

learners write letters from any direction and with a variety of shapes without taking into account the letter position in the word. In Arabic there is a certain direction from where to write and some letters have certain shapes in the beginning, middle and end of the word. [Translated from Arabic]

Moreover, one of the instructor's similar letters causes frustration for a learner especially at the early phase of learning. He demonstrated:

in the beginning, in the first level, learners will face a difficulty with the similar letters like "ث ت، به" and the dotted and undotted letters. Besides, the letter shape/s. For instance, when a learner writes "ح" and "م" connected, s/he might write it as "مح". Here the teacher needs to put extra effort into explaining every letter and its shapes. At the same time, we as teachers teach the different shapes of a letter based on the letter position in the word. For example, the letter "و" is a big challenge for learners. That is as, at the beginning, the letter has a different shape than when it comes in the middle or at the end. Learners face a difficulty in differentiating between the letters that connect and others that do not. For instance, the letter "ل" when it comes connected, learners think that it is "ل". [Translated from Arabic]

Lastly, instructors pointed at a semantics-related challenge. They indicated that *a word, phrase or sentence has multiple meanings; literal and social meanings specifically*. The fact that creates a challenge for foreign learners especially in expressing meaning through writing in Arabic. One instructor stressed this finding saying:

In terms of semantics, Arabic has many layers of meaning of a word, phrase, sentence ...etc. Like what we call it idioms, proverbs also. Besides, the emotional valuable texts. It is a challenge to get through, that is because the structural paradigm of the mother language, if they come from English or something similar, does not exist. So, I am trying to create a paradigm for that sentence to fit in.

Theme 2. "Transliteration: a two-edged sword"

Based on the investigation done by the researcher, most of the novice learners have no clue about writing using Arabic letters, particularly, at early phases of learning. Accordingly, instructors were questioned about the transliteration technique's impact on learning the Arabic writing. All of them confirmed that using transliteration affects Arabic writing learning. Nonetheless, they varied in how they view this impact. On the first hand, some instructors described the impact of using the key technique as a positive one. One of them pointed out that this technique helps in illustrating the structure of Arabic, especially the difference in structure between MSA and the colloquial varieties. He declared:

if you write it in Fusha, it becomes "في المدرسة", but when you pronounce it, it becomes "فيلمدرسة" without the letter "ا". So using the Latin script, the learner will understand the difference between vocalization of Ammya and Fusha. In writing, the teacher stresses the difference through transliteration in a way that shows what changes happened on the structure. But, the learner reaches a level where his/her need for using the key gradually decline. So, sometimes, vocalization is a challenge.[Translated from Arabic]

On the other hand, although there were not any instructors who agreed that using the Latin script has a negative impact on Arabic writing learning, there was one instructor who spoke of certain cases in which the positive impact can transform into a negative one. He remarked that writing using Latin script must be restricted only for learning the Arabic sounds vocalization and letters writing. He explicitly stated this as:

we use the international letters and Latin letters and it is in the book, the book is vocally translated. Using Latin letters in the first level is very helpful. It supports the learner in learning the Arabic alphabet. After that, the learner has to drop using it when s/he starts reading and writing Arabic letters.[Translated from Arabic]

Among the two groups, there were some instructors who believed that the nature of influence of "transliteration" technique depends on different factors. In the first place, one of the instructors revealed that the transliteration effect depends on a learner's learning level. He demonstrated that using the Latin script at early stages of the learning process has positive impact while at an advanced phase it turns to be of a negative impact. He justified his view by saying:

using the key is not necessarily good. It depends on me as a teacher to use it or not. That is because the "root" of an Arabic word differs from roots in other languages. Also the "stem". Sometimes, I am forced to use English letters in teaching this. That is as the "key" gives the learner the opportunity to pronounce it more properly. Like when I teach the letter "ك", which has two sounds; a consonant and a vowel, I use the key so that learners can read it correctly. But at an advanced stage, they have to stop using it. So, yes it is helpful at the beginners level. How does it help? In terms it reduces time consumption. Meaning the learner stops thinking about the image of the sound because it is displayed in front of him/her. Then, pronunciation will be easier. [Translated from Arabic]

In the second place, another instructor remarked that Latin-script impact depends on how learners use this technique. She explained her view saying:

it differs for different students, it makes them able to read within one day because they are written, they memorize and they come back able to read. For others, they use it as a translation tool and it slows their process of learning. If they want to read the word "باب",

they go back and look so this is "باب" and that takes time. So, I understand why some teaching styles say no key.

Arabic Sound System "Phonetics, Phonology and Morphology"

This part scrutinizes the impact of Arabic sound system on the Arabic learning process.

Results of this examination came as the following:

Theme 1. *"Arabic sound system it impact includes all of the learner, the teacher and the learning process"*

Investigating the impact of Arabic sound system on Arabic learning process, it was asserted by all instructors that learning Arabic sounds has an obvious impact on the learning process. One instructor remarked that because of the differences in Arabic sound systems between Arabic and other languages, there are some Arabic sounds that do not exist in a learner's native language and some sounds that exist in a learner's mother language do not exist in Arabic. He stated:

there are some Arabic sounds that do not exist in the learners' languages and there are some sounds that exist in their languages but not in Arabic. For instance, the sound "ج" is pronounced in German as "ي". So, when they see a "ج", they immediately pronounce it as "ي". Also, the same is for "ح" and "ع" for Americans. [Translated from Arabic]

Besides the learning process, instructors revealed that sound learning influence includes the learner and the teacher as cornerstone parts of the learning process. Starting by the learner, instructors pointed at a variety of challenges facing their students in learning Arabic sounds. They remarked that learners struggle in differentiating between sounds that have close articulation. The fact that requires from a learner a huge investment of time and effort to overcome such a challenge. She demonstrated:

for example, "س" and "ع" و "ء" و "ا" "ص", "ت" and "ط" is a challenge in Arabic for foreign learners. Also, "ح" is a challenge. These sounds were reported by students as challenging because of their close pronunciation. The learner has to practice on vocalizing the Arabic sounds. Otherwise, it will be highly challenging to master sounds.

And this process takes lots of time and effort especially in sounds that do not exist in a learner's native language.

Shifting to Arabic sound system effect on the teacher, one instructor claimed that teaching Arabic sounds requires the instructor to teach phonetics. Speaking about this finding's implication on the learning process, this instructor asserted that a teacher's failure in teaching phonetics means a learner's failure in overcoming the threshold of Arabic sound as well. He demonstrated:

the learners who had the "ت" and "ط" issues are Palestinians coming from the state. I have a friend who has now come to intermediate and keeps saying when I say "ت" or "ط", he keeps saying which "ت" or "ط" because he cannot tell the difference. If you ask him to write them, he writes them but keeps saying which is "ت" and "ط"? If you know how to describe it, and how it is produced then you know that "ت" your tongue is back and "ط" your tongue is a little bit further, your teeth are touching here and you are getting it aspirated and getting a little bit air. Then this will help students. If you have done your homework, by studying the phonetics difference between these sounds, you are a better teacher. So, the main challenge is to be a better teacher. For this reason, you need to do phonetics. If you don't do phonetics, students are lost. "ظ، ذ، ض." you might think that those sounds exist only in Fusha but they exist in Ammya and in different Ammyas and they exist in different Ammyas in Palestine, Syria, and Jordan. So you are bound to teach them. The students are bound to hear them and they need to learn them in Ammya and Fusha.

Theme 2. "Learning challenges related to Arabic sound system"

Participants remarked that the extent of the Arabic sound system impact and the kind of challenges a learner faces in learning Arabic sounds are determined by the learner's nationality, native language and background. One participant raised this finding saying:

it varies depending on the learner. For the Japanese, sounds are a great challenge. That's because the sound articulation differs from a Japanese to an Arabic speaker. French learners, as well, face a challenge in vocalizing "ح" and "ه" as they pronounce them as "ع". [Translated from Arabic]

Arabic Grammar "Syntax"

When a language structure represents the most integral aspect of it, it is necessary to investigate Arabic syntax learning's impact on Arabic language learning. Thus, this part presents the results of this examination.

Theme 1. "Challenges related to learning Arabic language syntax "

Inquiry about the extent of challenge resulted from learning Arabic grammar proved that it is a challenging aspect. Instructors presented a number of challenges that their students used to face in learning Arabic language structure. These challenges are illustrated below:

The first challenge, *addition*. One of the instructors remarked that in Arabic one can add a limitless number of words, nouns particularly, after each other. However, other Latin languages, English especially, lack this feature. She stated:

الإضافة , a string of words are put together. It is in Fusha and in Ammya. I am saying " مفتاح " بيت مرام", How would you say that in any language without any prepositions? and how would you translate that to any language. So, this is a challenge. I am just putting nouns after each other. I can still add more names. So, الإضافة is a challenge.

The second challenge, *agreement*. Instructor remarked that the Arabic sentence structure is a sensitive issue. One of the biggest challenges related to sentence structuring is agreement. Instructors spoke about three types of agreement. First, *subject-verb agreement* in number. One of the instructors indicated that any change in the sentence structure changes it from a verbal to nominative sentence and vice versa. Consequently, this requires a speaker to make agreement between the subject and the verb according to the number. He explained that saying:

verbal sentences; why do we say, for example, "الأولاد كتبوا" و "كتب الأولاد", Grammar is a result of word order, how language is structured. Because, for example, when you put the verb at the beginning, it doesn't matter the number in the verb. You say " كتب الأولاد", "كتبت " البنات as if they are one boy and one girl. But if you switch the subject in the beginning, you change " البنات كتبن" "الأولاد كتبوا", "Why does that happen? There is no reason. This is the language.

Second, *subject-verb agreement in masculinity and femininity*. Another instructor noted that making agreement in masculinity and femininity is another key issue. She spoke of this challenge as:

one of the biggest problems that face a learner is the subject-verb agreement. The learner still reflects his/her language structure on Arabic learning especially in the masculinity and femininity issue. Masculinity and femininity cause the learner to make mistakes in agreement and disagreement between the subject and the verb or between the subject and the predicate.

Third, *agreement in addition*. One instructor mentioned that learners most of the time produce fragmented structure-sentences when they make addition. He declared: *"there is another issue that creates a huge challenge for learners and the teacher also. For example, the genitive. It comes always as indefinite. However, learners make it definite. For example, the learner writes "طلاب الجامعة" instead of "الطلاب الجامعة"*.

The third challenge, *making plural*. Since forming plural in Arabic follows no single specific rule, instructors viewed it as a super challenging aspect. One instructor stressed this challenge saying:

how many plurals does a word have! And how a plural is formed? What's the rule of جمع التفسير? Take for example "وردة", how many plurals can you make? Why do we need that number of plural nouns? What is the difference between all of these? So, that' a challenge. Lots of challenges in one aspect actually.

The fourth challenge, *adjective placement*. Most instructors agreed on the fact that the learner faces a difficulty in placing the adjective within an Arabic sentence. One of them plainly referred to this challenge saying:

they know, according to their languages, that the adjective comes before the described noun like "green door". Hence, when learning Arabic, they say it as "أخضر باب". Here, the teacher has to illustrate for a learner that in Arabic, the adjective follows the noun and offers them illustrative examples.

The fifth challenge, *immense number of Arabic grammar rules*. Instructors remarked that Arabic is characterized by its huge number of grammar rules. The thing that, as one of the instructors pointed, exceeds a learner's ability to learn all of these rules. He explained:

there are lots of rules. The foreign learner mostly doesn't like rules. If the learner taught all rules, this will create a barrier for learning, not a challenge only for the learner. For example, the irregular and "الصرف من ممنوع". The name "جهاد" when it is a masculine genitive, we put a "كسرة" at the end of the word. However, when it is a feminine genitive, we put a "فتحة". This depends on the context. And this is a huge amount of rules that a learner needs to learn and distinguish between them. So, the challenge is in the learner's ability to absorb all of these rules.[Translated from Arabic]

The sixth challenge, *literal translation*. One of the instructors revealed that as a consequence of the learner's L1 interference in L2 learning, learners mostly face a challenge of literally translating from their native language to Arabic. Literal translation, although has negative impact on learning all of the language aspects, its impact becomes greater when we talk about learning a language structure. This instructor pointed at three common grammatical areas; subject position, adjective placement and addition specifically, in which the impact of literal translation mostly appears. He explained this finding saying:

the language structure is a challenge. That's because the learner usually translates speech according to his/her native language structure. The foreign learner mostly is subjective because the subject comes at the beginning of the sentence. When learning the verbal sentence in Arabic, s/he questions him/herself Why do we say "راح علي"? and how does it differ from "علي راح"? And in some cases the learner might place the adjective before the described noun. There is also the genitive, they mostly exchange the genitive place with the words following it. That's because this is the structure in his/her language. [Translated from Arabic]

The seventh challenge, *the learner's background*. One instructor demonstrated that the learner's background, especially the linguistic one, causes lots of challenges in learning Arabic grammar. She explained:

the major challenge is that if the student comes from a background with only one language. Or if they speak only English and it is their first experience in learning a foreign language. Also, if they don't know the grammar and structure of their language. Or if he does not know what it means that a subject takes an object in English, and I want to teach him about the verbs that take objects in Arabic, then it is a challenge to learn Arabic because sometimes I need to explain grammar in English. Whose problem is this? It is the Palestinian students' problem. They speak English without analyzing the language and when they come to learn Arabic, and because he cannot use intermediate language, he gets lost.

Investigating the reasons for such a challenge, another instructor related that to the literal translation. Trying to justify his argument, he declared:

this happens because learners usually literally translate what is in their minds into Arabic. They always think that regardless of the name-subject position in the sentence, it remains a subject. Actually, semantically, it is a subject. For instance, "أحمد درس" or "درس أحمد". "أحمد" is the agent; the one who performs the action. However, grammatically, when the agent "أحمد" precedes the verb, the predicate in this case, it becomes the agent. But, when "أحمد" comes after the verb, it becomes the subject. So, they start questioning why this

happens! the meaning is the same in both sentences actually, but grammatically it is different. [Translated from Arabic]

Arabic Language Vocabulary "Semantics"

Learning a language is about memorizing a substantial amount of terminologies that enables a person in conveying the meaning easily and accurately. This makes vocabulary valuable as much as other aspects in terms of its impact on language learning. Besides orthography, phonology and syntax, Arabic semantics learning is pursued in this part in terms of its impact on the Arabic learning process. Results of examination came as the following:

Theme 1. " Challenge of learning Arabic Vocabulary"

All instructors, without exception, stressed the strong impact of vocabulary of any language on its learning. One instructor stated this clearly as: *"yes, vocabulary is definitely challenging especially in learning terminologies and polysemy."* [Translated from Arabic] Speaking about Arabic vocabulary in particular, the greater bulk of instructors asserted that learning Arabic vocabulary is challenging. They brought up some challenges that their students confront in learning Arabic vocabulary. Such challenges are presented below:

The first challenge, *the learner's limited memory*. Surprisingly, instructors viewed Arabic vocabulary as challenging not only for their students, but also for anyone learning a language. They related that to a learner's weak ability to memorize the language vocabulary. She thoroughly clarified her view saying:

Learning vocabulary is difficult because it needs memory. I will give you 10 words, our ability to memorize is limited. If you are a diligent student, you want to work on these words, memorize them, work at home, read, write, and if your teacher is showing you those words in different contexts, it would still be a challenge. Vocabulary building with the students is a challenge.

The second challenge, *the teacher's approach in teaching vocabulary*. Besides the learner's memory, a teacher's teaching style is another challenge confronts learners in learning vocabulary.

One of the instructors spoke of this as:

the style of which you are supposed to give the 10 words is to be able to recall them and use them. That takes a lot of time as well. Also, the moment I give you the 10 words and say go home and memorize them and come back, that would be the most horrible teaching in the world.

The third challenge, *polysemy; a word with multiple meanings depending on the context*.

Instructors claimed that their learners found a difficulty in learning words that have a variety of different meanings. One of the instructors summed this point clearly saying:

it is possible to have the same word in two different contexts and with two different meanings. The learner, then, might know one of its meanings only. So, the context is what determines the meaning. For example, the word "والى" has more than 22 meanings. Or the word "روى" that means say or narrate. Then they get shocked when they know that it means also to water or irrigate.

The fourth challenge, *learners diversity and individual differences*. According to instructors, variations in characteristics across learners cause them to receive unequal teaching.

The fact that causes challenges for a learner which are reflected on the teacher. Speaking about his experience, one instructor described the diversity of learners in his class and its impact on learners, the learning process and himself saying:

learners diversity creates a challenge for learners themselves and the teacher. That's because the teacher has to teach all of the vocabularies that every student needs. In such a case, the teacher needs to, firstly, teach the course material, basics of the language, and, then, try to fill the gaps between learners through worksheets, portfolios and other extra works.

Purpose\ of Learning Arabic as a foreign Language

Presuming that a learner's intention of learning Arabic is related to the kind of learning challenges facing him/her, instructors were questioned about their students' real learning intentions. That is to

either approve or reject a hypothesis that says a learner's learning intention is correlated to the challenges facing him/her. This part presents the outcome of this inquiry.

Theme 1. *"Learners' learning intentions of learn Arabic "*

Instructors asserted that learners who come to learn Arabic in Palestine have a variety of learning purposes. Instructors' responses disclosed about some of the learners' major intentions of learning Arabic as it is illustrated below:

First, *educational purpose*. Instructors revealed that some learners study Arabic for educational purposes. One of them spoke of this point as: *"there are some learners who have to take an Arabic course or more as a requirement for their Master's or Ph.D. degrees. So, they come here to take a summer course, for instance, in Arabic."* [Translated from Arabic]

Second, *work-related purpose*. There are some other learners learning Arabic to get work opportunities in the Arabic area, mainly. One participant referred to this saying:

because there are some learners who want to work in an Arabic area, either as a politician, diplomat, or whatever. There are also some learners who studied political sciences and want to learn Arabic because they have a desire to work in Arabic countries like the Gulf countries. Or even there were some learners who work in the press or the middle east studies. Also, there are some learners who are specialized in the Arabic language. So they are interested in the Arabic language. For instance, we have a student who studies religions and Arabic language and came to the program to improve her Arabic. [Translated from Arabic]

Third, *communication purposes*. Instructors pointed out that there is a portion of learners who are originally Palestinians or tend to live in the country, thus, their intention of learning Arabic is to be able to communicate with their relatives and Arabic native speakers surrounding them. One instructor spoke of this point as: *"I have a French student married to a Palestinian guy and other Palestinian students their parent did not teach them Arabic, so they want to learn Arabic to communicate with their families and relatives and also to study at Birzeit."*

Fourth, *entertainment purposes*. Instructors indicated that some other learners learn Arabic because of their interest in the Arab world, Palestine in particular, and the Arabic language. In this regard, one instructor stated: *"some learners come to study Arabic to make tourism in the Arabic area as they are interested in the Arab world."* [Translated from Arabic]

Fifth, *affiliation feeling towards Palestine*. As most instructors noted, some foreign learners decided to study Arabic in Palestine among a wide range of options of Arab countries because they feel more affiliated towards the country. One instructor demonstrated: *"when learners come to the PAS, we try to talk to them to know their real intentions of coming to Palestine and learning Arabic. Many of them expressed their love to Palestine and desire to live in the country."* [Translated from Arabic]

Theme 2. *"A strong correlation between learner's learning intention and the kind of learning challenges facing him/her"*.

The researcher hypothesized that the learning challenges facing the learner are linked to his/her learning intention. Instructor's responses regarding this hypothesis reflected that all of them were able to spot the correlation between the two variables. Hence, the hypothesis was approved by all instructors. Trying to spot the connection between the two variables of the hypothesis, one of the instructors demonstrated:

the challenge for those who want to do the field work, they study both varieties because they think it is easier but it is not. So, that's a challenge, you need to let them down and in any way, they need a translator because the intermediate level is not enough. If you want to make a research you can produce a questionnaire and give it to people and they can fill it but if you want to make an interview, you need to interact with people. So you have to take the advanced level to be able to do so. Yes, there is a relation between the learner's purpose and the kind of challenges s/he faces. If s/he wants to work as a translator he needs to know all the aspects of the language which will be more challenging for him/her than for others with different purposes.

Nonetheless, while attempting to realize the link drawn by the hypothesis, one instructor invented a third variable, which is the teaching approach, that actualizes the hypothesis in a better

way. He claimed that a learner's intention must be compatible with the teacher approach in teaching and both of these variables are related to the learning outcomes including the learning challenges facing a learner. He illustrated:

variation in learning objectives across learners itself is a big challenge that might impede learning and teaching for both the learner and the teacher. That's as the teacher has to make accommodations to fulfill learners needs. So, I see there is a rational link between the learning objective, teaching approach and the learning challenges. In other words, there are students who prefer to learn through practice while others prefer to listen without saying a word. All of these are teaching styles. Consequently, there is a connection between the learner intention and the teaching approach. Then, both of these are correlated to the learning outcomes including the possible challenges facing a learner.

Similarly, another instructor invented a new variable, the learning motivation, to make the hypothesis more accurate and rational. He claimed that a learner with a clear learning intention has more motivation towards learning Arabic, the fact that affects the kind of learning challenges a learner faces and the extent of its impact. He explained this finding saying:

I agree with your hypothesis. But there is another important variable which is the learning motivation. There are some students who learn Arabic because they look for taking certain political or administrative positions in their country, so their motivation towards learning Arabic is bigger. However, there are other learners who learn Arabic as a requirement for their study. And there is a third group of learners that study Master's thesis done on the middle east studies, particularly the Palestinian issue. Those learners need to stay in Palestine for a year or more to make surveys and research, so they need the language. Therefore, they attend the PAS to learn Arabic instead of assigning a special translator. So, those who have clear objectives, tend to be highly motivated and, consequently, the kind of possible learning challenges will be less.[Translated from Arabic]

Summary

As for Arabic instructors teaching Arabic in the (PAS) program, learning Arab in the Palestinian context is challenging and accompanied with various learning challenges. Some of these challenges are related to the language itself; including its system; orthography, syntax, semantics, and phonology, morphology and phonetics while others are related to the Arabic context including; the diglossic nature of Arabic language and variations across the Arabic language and Latin languages on one hand, and across the Arabic dialects, on the other hand. In a

way of investigating the way to tackle these challenges, Arabic instructors confirmed that there is a concrete relation that links the learner's learning intentions with the kind of learning challenges facing him\her. Nonetheless, instructors viewed this relation as lacking and, accordingly, suggested two variables, teacher's teaching approach and learner's motivation, that make the hypothesis actualizes is a better way. In the first place, instructors agreed that whenever the learner intention of learning Arabic is compatible with the teacher teaching approach the potential learning challenges will be less, or at least, its impact on the learner will be less. In the second place, they remarked that the more the learner is intrinsically motivated towards learning Arabic, the more s\he will have a real intention, the more the challenges will be less, or even, their impact on the learner and the learning process will be less.

Part III: Arabic Learning Challenges from Arabic Instructors' versus Foreign Learners' Perspectives.

As this study tackles the learning challenges confronting non-native Arabic speakers in learning Arabic from foreign learners as well as Arabic instructors, this part sets forth a comparison between the two parties' viewpoints.

Learning Arabic in the Palestinian Context

While foreign learners viewed learning Arabic in the Palestinian context as helpful as well as challenging, Arabic instructors asserted that the context is much more helpful than challenging, especially for learning the Palestinian colloquial variety. That is, the Palestinian context offers the best kind of exposure to Arabic which, in its turn, aids a learner to be fully immersed within the Palestinian culture, and, consequently, learn a contextualized Arabic. While learners stressed the negative impact of the context on learning as extensive exposure to Arabic puts learners under language pressure, instructors restricted the context's negative impact to the situation when the learner does not immerse him\herself within the context.

Both learners and instructors agreed that the different aspects of the Palestinian context; political, social and cultural aspects namely, affect Arabic learning either positively or negatively. Although learners related obliquely to the different aspects of the Palestinian political condition and society, instructors thoroughly and explicitly talked about each aspect of the Palestinian atmosphere; the political, social and cultural, and the political condition; (e.g. visa, restrictions on movement and stay, ...etc.)

Both instructors and learners underscored Arabic diglossia; the existence of two varieties; Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) variety and the Palestinian colloquial Arabic variety, as a key context-related learning challenge. However, whilst learners considered diglossia challenging in

all learning situations, instructors consciously and specifically remarked that apart from the early phase of learning in which diglossic Arabic causes frustration for a learner, Arabic diglossia is not challenging.

Learning Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) variety.

Discussing the MSA variety learning, foreign learners expressed a low preference towards learning the MSA. Nevertheless, instructors did not talk about such a preference. Still, both instructors and learners agreed that learning "Fusha" is challenging. They both highlighted grammar rules number, vocabulary memorization, Arabic writing, sound pronunciation and variation between Arabic and other languages and between Arabic varieties as the utmost challenging aspects of Arabic. Nonetheless, learners added comprehension of the read or written text and the textbook; lack of vocalization in the book and find material that helps a learner to continue learning on his\her own as other challenges to which instructors did not relate.

Seeking for justifications, only instructors provided a number of specific and critical explanations for this finding. They underscored the teacher's methodology to teach, differences between Arabic language system and other languages systems including; pronunciation and Arab script mainly, and individual differences including; the learner's background, learner's capacity to learn, prior knowledge and learning styles and preferences.

Tackling the issue of communicating using MSA variety, instructors did not neglect the fact that communicating using MSA is challenging as they related to some learning challenges their students used to confront while they were communicating using "Fusha" in the context. Nonetheless, learners were more active when talking about the challenges. They highlighted misunderstanding as the top challenge they suffered from. Besides, they delivered some justifications for this finding as MSA is a very precise variety, which leaves no room for

mistakes, Arabic-native speakers use a modern form of MSA variety for communication which makes the colloquial Arabic variety more familiar and easier for communication than MSA.

Learning the Palestinian colloquial Arabic Variety

Participants confirmed that learning the Palestinian colloquial Arabic variety is challenging and highlighted a number of justifications for their claim. Although both foreign learners and instructors underscored the diglossic nature of Arabic as the key reason for this finding, each party still had its own explanations. On the first hand, learners highlighted the facts that Arabic is a difficult language, the PAS program intensive focus on Arabic vocabulary and the colloquial Arabic variety requires constant and extensive practice as main justifications. On the other hand, instructors related to the learners need to bridge between MSA and the colloquial varieties and between the different dialects of the colloquial variety to avoid mixing both varieties, variation across the colloquial Arabic dialects that obstructs learners from understanding native speakers, learners inability to read and write Arabic alphabet and insufficient time offered for learning the Arabic letters.

To enhance their claim, participants presented a number of challenges that confronted them in learning Arabic. While foreign learners related to grammar, remembering, recalling vocabulary of the Palestinian colloquial, the lack of the learning resources for both learning and practicing the Palestinian colloquial Arabic and variations in pronunciation across the Palestinian colloquial dialects and communication breakdown, instructors highlighted bridging between MSA and the colloquial varieties and between the different dialects of the colloquial variety, mixing MSA and the Palestinian colloquial Arabic variety, variation across the colloquial Arabic dialects that obstructs learners from understanding native speakers, learners inability to read and write

Arabic alphabet, insufficient time offered for learning the Arabic letters, and the diglossic nature of the colloquial Arabic variety as key challenges.

Communicating with Arabic native speakers using Arabic

Tackling the issue of communicating with Arabic native speakers using Arabic, both foreign learners and instructors viewed it as a challenging task. Nevertheless, instructors made some exceptions to this general finding. They remarked that first, the extent of challenge a learner experiences in communicating is an individual issue, second, the used variety in communication determines the extent of challenge a learner experiences, third, the PAS program adopts teaching approaches that enhances communication inside the class, and forth, the Palestinian society is a motivating milieu for communication, the fact that supports learners in overcoming communication challenges.

Foreign learners expressed their preference for using the Palestinian colloquial variety over MSA for communication. Accordingly, they viewed it as the easier, more functional and flexible variety. Still, both instructors and learners highlighted some key challenges for communicating in Arabic. All participants viewed literally translating from a learner's native language to Arabic and variations across the Palestinian colloquial dialects as the utmost challenges. Yet, both learners and instructors still have their own view about the challenges. Learners, in the first place, related to Arabic native speaker's expectations about a learner's communication ability, the limited time available for a learner to express his/her thoughts in a conversation. On the contrary, instructors highlighted Palestinian people reluctance to communicate using MSA variety, the learner's inadequate knowledge about Arabic language, the linguistic misunderstanding, the complex Arabic linguistic system and difficulty of simulating reality and the class heterogeneity.

Learning Arabic Orthography, Syntax, Semantics, Phonetics, Phonology and Morphology.

Arabic Orthography "Writing"

Research regarding the challenges related to learning Arabic orthography showed that both instructors and learners have a consensus in view as they agreed that learning writing is challenging. They underscored learning Alphabet, transliteration; writing Arabic using the learner's native language letters, which is mostly Latin letters, that slow down the learning process, case ending and similar sounds as challenging aspects of Arabic. Contrariwise, instructors provided a wider and more adequate visualization of the kind of learning challenges. They underscored a variety of variables related to different aspects of the language; e.g. a learner's first language "L1" interference in the second language "L2" learning, Arabic sentence structure, Arabic word functions, word, phrase and sentence multiple meanings, as key challenges related to writing learning that hampers Arabic learning process.

Since the program teaches Arabic writing using the "Key" or transliteration technique, both instructors and learners viewed using this technique as a positive as well as negative factor in learning Arabic. Both instructors and learners remarked that apart from the early phase of learning, transliteration is damaging for the learning process. That is as early in the learning process, writing Arabic in Latin script aids the learner in deeply understanding the language structure and sound system. Afterwards, it turns to be destructive as students have to learn Arabic writing using Arabic letters. Building on that, instructors recommended that at certain cases in which the transliteration positive impact can transform into a negative one, writing using Latin script must be restricted only for learning the Arabic sounds vocalization and letters writing.

Arabic Sound System "Phonetics, Phonology and Morphology"

Instructors and learners agreed to classify the sound system of Arabic as a source of various learning challenges. They remarked that variations across the Arabic sound system and the sound system of Latin languages, especially English, make Arabic sound system learning challenging. That is as some Arabic sounds are so close in pronunciation, which results in any subtle change in Arabic sounds pronunciation changes the whole meaning. Accordingly there is a limited domain for making mistakes in pronunciation. Besides, they both notified that the extent of challenge a learner experiences in learning Arabic sounds depends on two factors; first the learner background and second, the degree of a learner immersion within the learning context.

Arabic Grammar "Syntax"

Arabic grammar might be the only aspect in which both instructors' and learners' standpoints seemed compatible. Nevertheless, although both instructors and learners classified Arabic grammar as the number one challenging aspect of Arabic, instructors spoke about the challenges related to grammar more precisely and critically. All participants considered adjective placement, agreement, conjugation, addition, plural, immense number of grammar rules and literal translation as the top challenges of grammar. However, compared to foreign learners, instructors were more specific as they talked about each of these challenges in details and about its impact on learners' learning. Besides, instructors talked about the learner's background, the linguistic one especially, as a grammar-related challenge while learners did not tackle this point.

On the contrary, learners were able to provide comprehensive justifications for these challenges. They remarked that the difficulty of Arabic grammar, the difference between Arabic and English languages, Arabic grammar, endless number of rules and literal translation are the reasons why Arabic grammar learning is highly challenging.

Arabic Vocabulary "Semantics"

Speaking about Arabic vocabulary, participants focused on the huge Arabic vocabulary which has the feature of various words for the same item "synonyms" and the learner's limited memory to recall the needed vocabularies to the context as chef challenges. Yet, instructors related to the teacher's teaching style and the learners diversity and individual differences as challenging aspects in learning vocabulary.

Surprisingly, although instructors justified their viewpoint, learners as well were able to provide a number of explanations for these challenges. They mentioned that vocabulary learning challenges stem from the facts that Arabic and English, as it is the mother tongue of most participants, have no cognates, the heavy reliance on using memorizing instead of practicing techniques, vocabulary learning process is random and unstructured, an Arabic terminology has a variety of synonyms and Arabic has similar words with different meanings.

Purpose\|s of Learning Arabic as a foreign Language

While foreign learners did not talk frankly about their intentions of learning Arabic; some have clearly explained their tendency to learn Arabic, while others did not, instructors revealed a number of the learners' learning intentions. They remarked that learners either come with educational purposes, work-related purposes, communication purposes, entertainment purposes or affiliation feeling towards Palestine purpose whether they divulged about their real intention or not. This classification of purposes offered by instructors goes in line with purposes delivered by learners as all learner's intentions come underneath one of these general classifications.

As it is mentioned earlier, this study hypothesizes that a learner's intention\|s is\|are linked to the kind of learning challenges confronting him\|her. Although most learners and all instructors were able to approve the hypothesis, they viewed this link differently. Learners, on the first hand,

remarked that a learner's intention totally and strongly affects the kind of learning challenges confronting him\her. Instructors, on the other hand, while agreed on this hypothesis, they viewed it as lacking. They noted that two variables should be added on two sides of the equation between a learner's attention and learning challenges to make it actualize in a better way. The first variable is the teacher teaching approach. Instructors remarked that the teacher teaching style\ methodology has to be compatible with the learner's intention and both of them affect and even determine the type of learning challenges a learner confronts. The other variable is the learner's motivation. Instructors remarked that whether having clear and specific learning intentions or not is always related to being motivated or not, which affects the kind of learning challenges facing a learner. Simply, a learner with specific learning intentions is usually more motivated towards learning. more motivated towards learning. The fact that soothes down the learning challenges and the extent of their impact as well.

Summary

Scrutinizing the learning challenges facing foreign learners in learning Arabic in Palestine from foreign learners and Arabic instructors perspectives, investigation revealed that learning Arabic language within an Arabic speaking context; the Palestinian context in this case, is challenging and accompanied with learning challenges. Both instructors and learners confirmed that learning challenges facing foreigners in learning Arabic in the Palestinian context stems from two fundamental resources. Firstly, the Palestinian learning context including all the aspects of the Palestinian context, society; the socio-cultural and political aspects specifically. Secondly, Arabic language, including the two varieties; MSA and the Palestinian colloquial Arabic variety, and the different aspects of the language; Arabic writing “orthography”, Arabic grammar “syntax”, Arabic sound system “Phonology, Morphology and Phonetics” and Arabic vocabulary “Semantics”. In a

way for overcoming the learning challenges facing learners even in a time ahead to its occurrence, the researcher, based on the reviewed literature, hypothesized that there is a link between a learner intention of learning Arabic and the kind of learning challenges facing him\her. Examination proved the correlation between the two variables. However, some instructors suggested other variables, e.g. a learner's motivation and teacher teaching approach, that make the hypothesis stronger and more rational.

Conclusion

This chapter presented the challenges facing non-native Arabic speakers learning Arabic in Palestine from foreign learners and Arabic instructors perspectives. Besides, it presented a short comparison between the results presented by two groups; the learners and instructors.

Chapter Five

Results Discussion

After stating the study findings, this chapter generally summarizes the study major findings. Further, it discusses these findings in light of the theoretical framework adopted in this research and the previous literature done on the same topic.

Learning Arabic in an Arabic-Speaking Context

The first research question focuses on the challenges facing foreign learners in learning Arabic in Palestine, as an Arabic speaking context. Results disclosed that learning Arabic in an Arabic-speaking context is both challenging and helpful at the same time. In the first place, the greater portion of the study sample confirmed that the Arabic-speaking context is more helpful than challenging for learning Arabic. This finding was justified by a variety of explanations all of which are grouped under one umbrella which is the full and wide exposure to Arabic. Research revealed that immersion within the Palestinian context aids the learner in grasping a huge amount of contextualized and proper kind of Arabic. Moreover, learning Arabic in the Palestinian context includes gaining cultural knowledge related to that context. This is because the Arabic context has a variety of situations that themselves represent various learning resources. Adding to that, learning Arabic in the Palestinian context is unstructured, broad, less-academic, flexible and automatic kind of learning, which increases the potential of learning the language in a stimulating and interesting way. This is because the Palestine and Arab Study (PAS) Program, as a fundamental part of the learning context, enhances learners' integration within the learning milieu through adopting some policies.

Linking this finding to theory, constructivists argues that "[t]ruth is not to be found inside the head of an individual person, it is born between people collectively searching for truth, in the process of their dialogic interaction" (Bakhtin, 1984 as cited in Doolittle and Tech 1999, p.110). Thus, the Arabic-speaking context is a cornerstone variable in constructing knowledge of Arabic language which is impossible without understanding the learning milieu (Applefield, Huber & Moallem, 2000, p.7-8). Constructing such understanding is also impossible without being immersed within the context. This makes the learning process inseparable from its context.

This theoretical conception perfectly fits the finding that learning Arabic in the Palestinian context makes instruction out of need since exposure means gaining access to a vast array of learning resources. The thing that grants the learner the opportunity of practicing Arabic under a variety of circumstances. In this case, knowledge about Arabic language is viewed as “neither a set of data nor a truth to be transmitted or discovered but a way of acting upon reality” (Fosnot, 1996) or simply an “emergent, developmental, non-objective, viable, constructed explanations by humans in meaning making in cultural and social communities and discourse” (Fosnot, 1996 as cited in Chimel, 2009, p.2), as contemporary constructivists believe. Accordingly, learning is a process of construction, in which a foreign learner personally and actively constructs knowledge in Arabic.

Building on that, since learning is rooted within the social environment and takes place when individuals interacts with each other, objects or events taking place around them (Lantolf & Throne, 2006, as cited in Aimin, 2013), it was proved in this study that it is necessary for learning to take place in a learning environment that offers a direct exposure to the learned material. Experiencing the world directly helps the learner in creating a better understanding, so that true learning takes place (Olusegun, 2015). This theoretical conception is proved in this study as well,

as participants confirmed that learning Arabic in the Palestinian context makes learning less challenging, especially in learning the PCA variety, in comparison to the Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) one to which the context mostly does not matter.

Comparing this study finding to findings reported in literature in this regard, it goes in line with Alish (2002) who reported that learning the MSA variety in an Arabic speaking context is advantageous as the learner is directly exposed to the kind of Arabic used in literature and media.

In the second place, the study found that learning Arabic in the Palestinian context still challenging. Research revealed that extensive exposure to Arabic is a burden. In simple words, full immersion within Arabic context puts a learner under the language pressure. Moreover, searching specifically the challenging aspects of the Palestinian society, participants classified the Palestinian political condition, including the limited- span visa, borders, restrictions, road blocking, demonstrations, strikes ...etc., as number one challenging aspect of the Palestinian general atmosphere. Above and beyond, the political situation impacts the kind of the learned language. Besides the political condition, the study findings underscored the socio-cultural aspect as another challenging aspect. Specifically, participants demonstrated that the learners' lack of cultural knowledge about the Palestinian context causes cultural misunderstandings that has substantial implications on the learning process.

This finding highly stresses the potent impact of the context on learning. Linking this finding to bodies of theory, the constructivist notion of intersubjectivity (see Rogoff, 1990; Gredler, 1997; Prawat & Floden, 1994) illustrates much of this conclusion. Being in an Arabic context, a foreign learner is standing on a ground inhabited by persons of various linguistic abilities in Arabic. Such diversity deters back the progress of the leaning process. When a foreign learner and other Arabic native speakers are not standing on the same ground, just as the case of

the foreign learners took part in this study, communication suffers and exposure to Arabic in the context turns to be a burden instead of an enhancement for learning. In other words, because intersubjectivity is the product of culture and history of the community (Gredler, 1997; Prawat & Floden, 1994), it becomes impossible for a foreign learner to get rid of the negative impact of the lack of intersubjectivity of the context.

The impact of the lack of intersubjectivity appeared in another finding. The cultural misunderstanding, mentioned earlier, comes as a consequence of the inadequate cultural knowledge a foreigner has about the Palestinian community. The fact that makes a foreign learner and native speakers of Arabic stand on different grounds of cultural norms, beliefs and values- in terms of the general atmosphere of the community to which each of them belongs. What strengthens this view is that the lack of intersubjectivity leads to cognitive conflict; when the learner confronted the Palestinian context, s\he experienced a state of confusion as a result of the conflict between his\her own cultural background and the new Palestinian cultural background.

However, such misunderstanding is not of a negative impact as the term suggests. But instead, as the study results proved, it has positive as well as negative impact. For constructivists, a learner has to be in an environment surrounded by problems and unanswered questions. Such context urges peer collaboration and exchange of ideas, which are considered major motives for cognitive conflict (Piaget, 1976 as cited in Applefield, Huber & Moallem, 2000). Similarly, the lack of cultural knowledge about the Palestinian context and the cultural variation across the new learning context culture and the learner's culture put the learner in a state of cognitive conflict. That is only resolved by absorbing this cultural variance and learning the Palestinian culture side by side to Arabic language. This is considered as enhancement for learning as learning Arabic in the Palestinian context grants the learner the advantage of learning the Palestinian culture. That is

since, as it is proved in this study, cultural knowledge about the context comes in the same package with language when it is learned in its context. Nevertheless, such misunderstanding might hinder language learning as some participants revealed. That is, using Piaget's terminology, to reach a state of mental equilibration either by adjusting the physical environment to make it compatible with the learner's mental structure about the Arabic culture, which is impossible, or by changing the stereotypical image a learner brings with him\her about the Arabic culture, the solution that most of the instructors assured (Phillips, 1995).

Speaking about the context in terms of being helpful or challenging, Arabic diglossia, as a crucial aspect of the Palestinian context, was placed in between. Investigation showed that diglossic nature of Arabic is challenging only at early stages. Otherwise, it is advantageous. That is as the program helps learners in bridging between the MSA and the colloquial varieties as the former is the birth- child of the latter and learning one of them supports learning the other. Adding to that, the diglossic nature of Arabic creates a motive for learning Arabic and aids the learning process as it offers the learner a variety of ways to communicate.

Viewing this finding in light of the study theoretical framework, a novice learner's lack of knowledge about the context puts him\her in a state of confusion and cognitive conflict towards Arabic language which results from the lack of intersubjectivity. Nevertheless, this confusion immediately disappears as a learner crosses the threshold of the early learning phase and advances across the learning levels. Moreover, the learner's awareness about this feature of Arabic language, even before coming to the Palestinian context, makes Arabic diglossia of a trifle impact on the learning process.

Thinking of this finding related to the diglossic nature of Arabic in light of previous literature, it is obvious that the current research findings contradict Al-Batal (1992), Suleiman

(2003) and Al-Husri (1985) which insisted on the fact that the diglossic nature of Arabic is challenging. Literature proved that Arabic diglossia imposes real challenges in learning as well as teaching Arabic not only for a foreign learner but for Arabic native speakers themselves. Nevertheless, this study revealed that Arabic diglossia causes no challenges in learning Arabic language except for the early phases of learning in which the existence of two varieties of Arabic causes frustration for a learner. This finding goes in line with Aramouni (2011) that concluded while native speakers of Arabic can overcome the complicatedness they encounter in communicating with people of other dialects through cross-dialects communication strategies, foreign learners find it challenging to understand and communicate with someone speaking a variety other than the one they know. Besides, this outcome confirms Fakhri's (1995) findings. Conducting a comparison between the MSA variety and the Moroccan colloquial in terms of the word order "sentence structure" and lexicon, Fakhri discovered that "the structural and lexical differences are so important as they obscure the relatedness of the two varieties" (pp.136- 137).

Building on instructors' viewpoints, such consciousness about Arabic diglossia is developed by two agents, (the learner and the teacher). On the first hand, the learner, according to constructivists, plays an active role in building awareness about the Palestinian context and Arabic language. The teacher, on the other hand, assists learners in, firstly, building such awareness and, secondly, bridging between the Arabic language varieties during the learning process. This is possible, according to the PAS instructors, because the Palestinian colloquial variety is the birth-child of the MSA variety and learning one of them supports learning the other.

Here, the teacher is the one who guided, scaffolded and directed learners in overcoming the potential learning challenges that were expected to rise as a result of Arabic diglossia. That is by making students conscious of such a feature of Arabic and then, by helping them bridging

between the two varieties of Arabic through making them conscious of the key differences between the two varieties.

In literature, there is a massive amount of studies that underscored Arabic diglossia as a chief reason for learning challenges. In this study, however, scaffolding provided by the PAS teachers created a blocking wall that stopped such challenges from occurring. In such type of learning setting, "[t]he classroom is no longer a place where the teacher ("expert") pours knowledge into passive students, who wait like empty vessels to be filled." Instead, the learner tends to be more actively engaged in the process of learning. The teacher, as well, is more likely to function as a "facilitator who coaches, mediates, prompts, and helps students develop and assess their understanding, and thereby their learning" (Olusegun, 2015, p. 68).

In SCT, "children develop the capacity to regulate their own activity through linguistic means by participating in activities (mental and physical) in which their activity is initially subordinated, or regulated, by others" (Lantolf & Thorne, 2000). This way, they can acquire the language used by other members of a community like adults and older peers. That is as, according to constructivists, language mastery cannot be achieved without a certain level of regulation, self-regulation in particular. The acquired language, in later stages, is mostly used by the child to regulate his\ her own speech or behavior (Lantolf & Thorne). Likewise, foreign language learners of Arabic, especially novice ones, regulate their learning, behavior and speech to their instructors and other Arabic native speakers surrounding them. The thing that boosts their awareness about the language. Knowing that a language has two varieties, Arabic diglossia is no more a challenge. This regulation, other-regulation, after a very short time turns to be a self-regulation in which the second language learner starts learning Arabic language varieties and distinguishes between them

with “minimal or no external support,”(Lantolf & Thorne, 2000) represented by guidance and monitoring provided by the teacher and other Arabic native speakers.

Such a shift actualizes only through knowledge internalization. Building on Wresch metaphor (see Wresch, 1988), while a learner needs lots of support at early stages of learning, learning Arabic in the Palestinian context, although is a totally brand new milieu for a foreign learner, after a certain time, the learner starts gradually abandoning support offered by others surrounding him\her, through internalizing the external support and exchanging it into an internal, long-lasting resource for mentally learning and functioning.

Learning the Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) Variety

The second research question tackles the learning challenges related to learning the MSA variety from foreign learners’ as well as Arabic instructors’ perceptions. Trying to answer this question, inquiry resulted in a number of paramount conclusions.

As a first conclusion, investigation about learning the MSA variety in the Palestinian context disclosed that this variety is less preferred to be learned than the other one. Likewise, results showed that its learning is challenging. Participants related this finding to a group of factors that all are consequences of the context. Other than being a boring, tough and unrewarding variety, they reported that it is not the communication tool used in the Palestinian context. The existence of an easier, nicer, more functional and rewarding variety, which is the Palestinian colloquial Arabic, makes of MSA challenging and, thus, a less preferred variety. Besides, since the MSA variety represents Arabic language structure more than the colloquial one as it has a fixed structure, variation across the Arabic language linguistic system and other languages systems was reported as another reason for classifying learning the MSA variety as challenging.

Vygotsky's assumption about knowledge attainment elucidates this finding. Knowledge typically comes from others surrounding the learner and growth of knowledge results from discourse with peers and older adults (Morford, 2007). When the MSA variety is not commonly used on a daily basis among Palestinians, its learning will be challenging and, consequently, it will be less preferred by foreign learners, especially those learning Arabic for communication and entertainment purposes.

This finding is in agreement with Grigore & Bituna's (2015) study as it revealed that learning Arabic language can be less challenging if and only if the learning process begins by learning the "spoken language". Besides, Aramouni's (2011) study supports this finding as it found that the difficulty of learning Arabic could be overcome only if learners begin learning with the Arabic spoken variety. Additionally, learning only the MSA "offers the students little opportunity for typical everyday oral interaction". Maamouri (1998), as well, goes side by side with this study finding as it found that the MSA is "nobody's mother tongue and is rarely or almost never used at home in the Arab world".

Simultaneously, this finding contradicts Alish (2002) and Versteegh (2004) that reported that learning the MSA variety is preferred over the vernacular variety. That is as learning the MSA variety offers the learner a direct "access to literature and written and spoken media."

Research highlighted two major factors that cause MSA to be categorized as tremendously challenging. In the first place, Arabic grammar was categorized as the ultimate challenging aspect of the language. The huge number of grammar rules, the fixed structure of grammar and the fact that grammar learning consumes a lot of time and needs a mediator, which is English mostly, are all specific reasons for this general conclusion. In the second place, variations across Arabic and the learners' native languages' linguistic systems, e.g. pronunciation\vocalization of some sounds,

and variations between Arabic language varieties were highlighted as integral factors that hinder learning.

As every rule has an exception, examination in this respect revealed that learning MSA can be less challenging. This exclusion was related to the fact that MSA variety has a fixed structure and the learner has a very easy access to all of the learning resources of all types in Fusha, if compared to Ammya. Generally speaking, such a finding strongly emphasizes the powerful impact of context, presented by the grant influence of language on the learning process. This finding seems harmonious with the constructivist approach of learning which assumes that “it is necessary to create learning environments that directly expose the learner to the material being studied,” MSA variety in this case. In the Palestinian context, the variety to which the learner is more exposed is the vernacular variety, not the MSA one. Such knowledge of MSA variety is found neither inside a foreign learner’s head nor outside in the environment. But instead, it exists between Arabic native speakers socially interacting with each other (Bakhtin, 1984). Thus, experiencing the world directly aids the learner in creating a better understanding for reality (Olusegun, 2015).

For constructivists, knowledge is a construction which “is enhanced when the experience is authentic.” Besides, “authentic experiences are essential so that an individual can construct an accurate representation of the real world, not a contrived world or even can construct mental structures that are viable in meaningful situations” (Doolittle & Tech, 1999, p.5). However, reality laying outside in the Palestinian context varies from the material a learner is exposed to in the MSA class. That is as the MSA learning takes place only inside the class and the spoken variety among people is unlike the variety learned in the class. Moreover, the structure of MSA variety learned through instruction totally differs from that of the Arabic spoken variety. This situation

decreases the learning authenticity because of the incompatibility between the learned material inside the class and that a learner is exposed to outside.

Examination of the MSA variety learning unveiled about a number of learning challenges, some of them are directly related to Arabic language while the others are linked to the context itself. Starting with Arabic language-related challenges, most participants' views place Arabic grammar in the first place. Case ending, agreement; subject-verb agreement, number agreement, singular, dual and plural agreement and feminine- masculine agreement specifically, verb, noun and gerund conjugation, adjective placement and the huge number of specific grammar rules were highlighted as the foremost grammar- related challenges. Arabic writing is classified in second place after grammar. Writing- related challenges include composing well-structured sentences, complex and conditional sentences mainly, discriminating between letters that do not and discerning the different shapes of a letter. These challenges are related to the variations between Arabic and English syntax. Vocabulary is categorized in third place. The fact that the vocabulary of MSA is huge, the learner's ability to recall the needed terminologies to the context of learning is limited and imperfect and the context of learning adds to the meaning of the terminologies are stressed as the utmost challenges. Some other language-related challenges include reading and comprehending written texts, vocalizing Arabic sounds properly, transliteration and L1 interference in L2 learning.

This finding is consistent with Al-Shallakh's (2010) study that classified Arabic writing orthography, grammar and phonetics as the most challenging areas of Arabic language system. This study classifies Arabic grammar as the number-one challenge. It is consistent with Al-Shallakh (2010) and Abu-Irmies's (2014) studies' findings as the majority of both studies samples reported Arabic grammar of MSA variety as the top challenging aspect of Arabic language

learning. Besides, all of the previous challenges are a result of variations between Arabic language system and a foreign learner language system, in the first place, and variations across the Arabic dialects, in the second place. This finding seems compatible with Al-Shallakh (2010) who revealed that all language related challenges are a consequence of Arabic diglossia as he insisted that any language- related challenge cannot be understood in isolation from Arabic diglossia.

Shifting to challenges related to the Palestinian context, this research unveiled about four key challenges related to different aspects of the Palestinian general atmosphere. The first challenge is the variation between the linguistic systems of Arabic language and other Latin languages on one hand and between Arabic varieties on the other hand. The second challenge is the textbook or curriculum. In this regard, research proved that the lack of vocalization from the book and finding the suitable material impedes learners from continuing learning on their own. The third challenge is the lack of coherence between a learner's previous and new learning. The last challenge is the learners' individual differences.

In both language and context-related challenges, Arabic diglossia is stressed as a vital source of learning challenges. When Arabic diglossia is a part of the Palestinian context, theoretically speaking, the learning context played an integral role in initiating such learning challenges. That is as Arabic language is an inseparable part of the Palestinian context, thus, it plays a considerable role that cannot be underestimated in terms of learning the MSA variety. Viewing this finding in light of Vygotsky's assumption that the context of learning and a learner's thoughts can never be separated from each other (Applefield, Huber & Moallem, 2000), this finding seems logical. That is as social constructivism highly stresses the necessity for understanding society, so that a learner constructs learning based on this understanding (Derry, 1999; McMahon, 1997 as cited in Kim, 2001). The lack of coherence between the previous

learning of Arabic attained in previous learning contexts and the new learning achieved in the PAS program seems a rational finding. That is, as learning is “cumulative in nature, nothing has meaning or is learned in isolation” (Shuell, 1986, p.416). In view of that, prior knowledge plays an integral role in acquiring new knowledge. The schemata that a learner brings to the context of learning and the extent to which these schemata are activated during learning has significant implications on what will be obtained from the new knowledge and whether or not it will make any sense to them (Shuell, 1986).

Although the lack of coherence between the new learned knowledge and the prior one is reported as a challenge, it still has a positive impact. Learning occurs when a learner experiences a state of cognitive conflict resulting from the inconsistency between a learner’s existing knowledge about the subject matter and the newly acquired one (Piaget, 1976 as cited in Applefield, Huber & Moallem, 2000). Then, as a learner attains a new experience about MSA, this experience either goes in line with the learner’s mental structure related to MSA or contradicts it. In case of contradiction, a learner have to accommodate in order to either preserve an accurate representation or create a new rational personal or social depiction of this knowledge. For achieving such accommodation, a foreign learner needs to mediate an artifact, which is mostly English or his\her native language, since language is the tool through which understanding of a social context is constructed (Spivey, 1997). This is what foreign learners of Arabic reported as their first language “L1” interference in second language “L2” learning, Arabic language.

Reviewing language-related and context-related challenges in light of previous studies, the finding that textbook, the textbook lack of vocalization specifically, is a challenge is in consistence with Al-Shalakh (2010), Al-Anati (2003), and Kaleefa & Al- Hrou, (2007). All of these studies highlighted the textbook as a salient source of the learning challenges. Al- Shalakh's

(2010) finding, for instance, showed that the textbook used by the program is unsuitable for learning Arabic because of the poor preparation of the material. Among the suggestions offered by Al-Shalakh to overcome such a challenge is that the textbook should focus on learning speaking correctly. This finding is highly consistent with the current study finding; the lack for curriculum that emphasizes pronunciation of Arabic, especially the vocalization of the Palestinian colloquial sounds. This finding is in agreement with Dweik and Al-Shalakh (2015) study, as well, that unveiled that the textbook used in the studied program does not focus on teaching speaking.

Investigation about learning the MSA variety included the search for challenges facing foreign learners in communicating with Arabic native speakers. Examination divulged about three main conclusions. As a general conclusion, the study categorized communicating in Fusha as challenging. That is since MSA is a very precise variety, so it leaves no room for mistakes. Moreover, Arabic native speakers use a modern form of Fusha for communication, which makes the MSA variety unfamiliar and, thus, challenging for communicating. Nevertheless, communicating using the MSA variety is still useful.

In spite of the fact that communicating using the MSA variety is challenging, research proved that the extent of challenge is not fixed in all cases of communication. But, instead it depends on the topic; the more the topic is deep, the more it requires profound thinking and rich knowledge, hence, the more it becomes harder for the learner to use Arabic to talk about it. Believing that “all knowledge comes from others, and growth of said knowledge comes from discourse with peers and/or teacher” (Morford, 2007), knowledge learners attain about MSA allows them to understand other people's speech, especially when people speak a colloquial dialect differs than the dialect a foreign learner knows. Besides, using the MSA variety helps

learners in acquiring the best kind of Fusha as being in Arabic speaking context forces them to communicate in Arabic using the variety they know; MSA.

This finding is consistent with Maamouri's (1998) and Aramouni's points of view as both studies confirmed that the MSA variety is rarely used among Arabic native speakers as it is not the communication tool. Similarly, this finding goes in line with Dajani, Mubaideen & Omari's (2014) study that revealed that foreign learners give up learning "Fusha" once they find out that it is not the communication tool.

As a last conclusion in this regard, research proved that a learner's challenge is a teacher's challenge. Arabic instructors teaching in the PAS confronted teaching challenges just like their students. The individual differences among learners, including learner's background, prior knowledge, learning abilities and age variation were stressed by instructors as the most perplexing challenge since it imposes extra burden on the teacher. The other challenge is finding the material that suites each learner's needs, learning preferences and style. The last challenge is the fact that an Arabic word has more than one meaning; one is literal and the other is social, which challenges a learner in the process of structuring a sentence. Consequently, the teacher needs to teach both types of meaning or, at least, a word's literal meaning and its most commonly used social meaning to help learners overcome such a challenge and communicate fluently. It is apparent that these challenges are learner-related, material\ textbook-related and Arabic language-related respectively. The learner, textbook and language are all cornerstone factors of the learning context. This finding, theoretically speaking, stresses the massive context impact.

Learning the Palestinian Colloquial Arabic variety

The third research question explores the challenges facing foreign learners in learning the Palestinian colloquial Arabic variety. Investigation disclosed about five key outcomes. To start,

inquiry about the extent of challenges a learner experiences in learning the Palestinian colloquial Arabic variety revealed that the majority of participants reported that learning the colloquial is extremely challenging. They related this finding to the facts that, Arabic is a difficult language, the PAS program intensively focuses on teaching Arabic vocabulary, the colloquial Arabic variety requires constant and extensive practice, which is absent in some situations and the diglossic nature of Arabic language causes misunderstanding, which causes communication to break down.

As an exemption for this general finding, research divulged that learning the Palestinian colloquial Arabic can be less challenging under certain circumstances. Research revealed that the Arabic speaking context offers an extensive and intensive exposure to the Palestinian colloquial variety, which enhances the learning process. That is as this variety is the natural way of communication for Arabic native speakers. Moreover, participants remarked that flexibility of the Palestinian colloquial makes its usage more elastic as mistakes are acceptable. Besides, the similarity between the two varieties of Arabic, the MSA and the colloquial, causes learning one variety to assist earning the other.

As another exclusion, examination in this concern showed that learning the Palestinian colloquial can be both challenging and easy concurrently. That is as participants viewed learning basics of Arabic as an easy task while nuances of Arabic still challenging. Nevertheless, the learner's level and time devoted for learning the variety are vital factors in determining how challenging or easy it is to learn the colloquial language.

In the learning process, knowledge can never be viewed as a final, packaged product to be offered for a learner. Instead, knowledge is a process of construction (Lave & Wenger, 1991). When knowledge is language-related, especially when it is associated with the spoken variety, practice becomes an essential requirement for accumulating knowledge and expanding linguistic

repertoire. Nevertheless, when practice is absent from the process of the Palestinian colloquial Arabic variety learning, as the study revealed, the learning process suffers. What complicates the situation even more, is the PAS program's heavy focus on teaching vocabulary on the part of other language aspects. Yet, as participants demonstrated, vocabulary could be acquired unconsciously and spontaneously through immersion within the context. That is as knowledge of Arabic spoken variety is embedded within social activities, therefore, learning such knowledge takes place when a foreign learner socially interacts with native speakers (Lantolf & Throne, 2000)

Nonetheless, obtaining such knowledge can be affected by the teaching approach adopted by a teacher. In case of learning a spoken variety, the teaching approach has to be based on learning through interaction; e.g. “reciprocal teaching, peer collaboration, cognitive apprenticeships, problem-based instruction, web quests, anchored instructions” approaches (Shunk, 2000), not through approaches based on memorizing the language terminologies. This analysis brings to the mind the question; who is responsible for obstructing such a challenge from occurrence? Building on constructivism theory, it is assumed, the educator is the one who is responsible for “design[ing] a learning format that is aligned with the student’s current state of knowledge” (Brandon & All, 2010, p. 90). The PAS instructors and officials are the ones in authority of sculpturing the teaching approaches that must be of constructivist features.

The study general finding that learning the Palestinian colloquial variety is challenging, agrees with Aramouni's (2011) study which showed that learning Arabic vernacular variety is challenging. However, challenges can be overcome if learning of Arabic begins by learning the spoken variety. Simultaneously, it is consistent with Grigore & Bituna (2015) study which disclosed that in spite of the fact that Arabic language is challenging, the learning challenges can be reduced if a learner started learning with the vernacular variety using modern approaches to

learning. In the same context, the finding that learning the Palestinian colloquial Arabic can be less challenging due to the similarities between Arabic varieties contradicts Aramouni's (2011) study. Aramouni reported that a grant percentage of foreign learners learning "Fusha" in Jordan faced a high difficulty in comprehending the Jordanian colloquial Arabic, which underscores the distinctiveness of each variety's features.

Moving to the second conclusion in this regard, surveying participants viewpoints concerning the challenges related to learning the Palestinian colloquial Arabic variety unveiled about a numerous amount of challenges. Grammar of the Palestinian colloquial Arabic is highlighted as the uppermost challenge. Grammar of Ammya is unstructured as there are no fixed, written rules that structure the learning process. Vocabulary, remembering and recalling vocabulary of the Palestinian colloquial Arabic variety specifically, is the other learning challenge. Also, variations in pronunciation, e.g. consonants vocalization, diacritics "long vowels" changes and speech speed, across the Palestinian colloquial dialects cause communication to break, which deters the learning process. Additionally, since Arabic writing in general was categorized as challenging, writing in the Palestinian colloquial Arabic was stigmatized as challenging as well. Research revealed that learners suffered in learning reading and writing Arabic alphabet. This finding was related to the insufficient time assigned for learning Arabic letters.

Beside the previous challenges, which all are language-related, research unveiled about some other learning challenges that are context-bound. The first challenge is the diglossic nature of the Palestinian colloquial Arabic variety which causes learners to mix between the two varieties of Arabic in learning. Moreover, variations across the colloquial Arabic dialects obstruct learners from understanding native speakers, which results in misunderstanding. Once misunderstanding

between conversation parties takes place, communication breaks down. This challenge has implications on the whole learning process; on one hand, a learner needs to bridge between the MSA and the colloquial varieties and between the different dialects of the colloquial variety. Such bridging, on the other hand, puts the teacher in charge of determining the suitable phonetic map for every learner.

Both of the language and context-related challenges of learning the Palestinian colloquial Arabic can be grouped under one big challenge; communication breakdown. That is as variations across the Arabic language aspects and the linguistic aspects of a foreign learner language, on one hand, and between Arabic varieties, on the other, cause communication to collapse, as it was revealed by participants. That is since a foreign learner's linguistic background is dissimilar to an Arabic native speakers' and his\her attained knowledge about Arabic is limited. Accordingly, existing in the Palestinian context, the learner finds him\herself standing on a ground differs than that of a native speaker. So misunderstanding and communication failure are natural consequences.

Communication using the Palestinian colloquial is the third aspect searched in this respect. In general, the study found that communicating using the Palestinian colloquial is challenging. Inquiry revealed that a foreign learner lacks the ability to speak like an Arabic native speaker, therefore, misunderstanding is unavoidable. Three key variables increase the potential of misunderstanding. First, the colloquial Arabic variety lacks a fixed, specific, written body of grammar that monitors communication. Second, variation between the colloquial dialects, either within the Palestinian context or across the Arab world. Third, Arabic native speakers' wrong assumption about a foreign learner's ability to communicate using the colloquial Arabic. Nevertheless, the survey showed that communicating using colloquial Arabic still easy. That is as

the Palestinian context offers rich opportunity for communication. Moreover, exposure to Arabic at an early stage of life makes its learning at later stages less challenging.

When a foreign learner communicates with an Arabic native speaker using the Palestinian colloquial, both of them have unequal knowledge about the language basics necessary for communication. That is especially the Palestinian colloquial Arabic, just like any other Arabic colloquial, lacks for a fixed body of written grammar that a foreigner can learn, so that, s\he can communicate easily following these grammar rules. That is as successful language learning requires two main components: the first is a meaningful communication practice in the classroom and the second is a pedagogical approach to grammar to overcome the complexity of grammar. That's because grammar is about learning the language structure for the sake of understanding how a language functions in order to use it (VanPatten & Benati, 2010). Consequently, while a native speaker has the knowledge related to communication using “Ammya”, that s\he attained by being exposed to the variety since childhood, a foreign learner lacks such knowledge. Moreover, while a native speaker is conscious about the variations across the colloquial dialects, especially across the Palestinian context, a foreign learner, even who masters the Palestinian colloquial variety, does not necessarily have the same knowledge about such variations. Thus, misunderstanding and, consequently, communication breakdown become absolute consequences of any communication attempt, the fact that makes communication not a trouble-free task.

Going back to literature, this finding is in agreement with Aramouni (2011) who disclosed that while an Arabic native speaker can overcome the obstacles they encounter in communicating with people speaking other dialects through cross-dialects communication strategies, a foreign learner finds it a really hard task to understand and communicate with someone speaking a variety other than the one they know.

Enquiry regarding the teaching challenges confronting instructors in teaching the Palestinian colloquial Arabic variety revealed that teaching Ammya is a challenging task. As a first challenge, research revealed that the teacher struggles in finding the suitable material written in or about the colloquial variety. And in case the material is available, the teacher is responsible for checking and reworking it. Nonetheless, Arabic teachers suffer from the lack of time and money devoted for making research for reworking the material and planning for teaching. The second challenge is the diglossic nature of Arabic that requires a teacher to select a phonetic map that supports each student in bridging between the MSA and the colloquial varieties in learning. The third challenge is the teacher's lack of means of teaching since the program in-need for suitable and well-equipped classrooms. The fourth challenge is the wrong presupposition that a native speaker of Arabic can teach the colloquial variety. As the last challenge, investigation revealed that Arabic instructors suffered from the fact that teaching the colloquial Arabic variety is about teaching how to communicate and not the language philosophy.

Finding or constructing the suitable material and helping students in overcoming the challenge of Arabic diglossia through developing phonetic maps suit each student's need, time, money and effort, which are not offered for an Arabic instructor. This conclusion depicts the learning context, the PAS program, as an obstruction, not an enhancement, for learning.

Additionally, the pre-mentioned learning challenge; the wrong presupposition that a native speaker of Arabic can teach the language, that most participants reported, can be understood if viewed in light of the constructivist assumption that true learning takes place only when constructivist teaching happen in all the classes and activities. This assumption stresses the fact that a teacher have to own certain qualities. Simply, to create an effective constructivist classroom, teachers from every subject area have to learn or even develop their own teaching

strategies that are based on both Piaget and Vygotsky's theories and implementing such theories when assigning tasks or conveying information. An Arabic native speaker, although s\he masters the language, is never a good teacher unless s\he is specialized in Arabic teaching.

This conclusion depicts the teacher's participation in the learning process in a way that contradicts the traditional teaching approach. Constructivism originally rejects viewing the learning environment as a place where the teacher is the holder of knowledge and the learner is the one to which knowledge is transmitted, or stamped, through traditional teaching techniques. Instead, when the learner is the active agent who actively and personally constructs his own understanding, the teacher is a facilitator who coaches, directs and guides the learner in the learning process (Olusegun, 2015)

The last result in this regard concerns learning both varieties simultaneously. The inspection's findings showed that learning both varieties concurrently is challenging, yet helpful. Generally speaking, instructors underlined one key learning challenge. They pointed at the "conversation partner" who might exploit the learner to learn his\her native language or whose knowledge might be deficient or wrong, the fact that complicates the learning process. At the same time, participants demonstrated that learning both varieties of Arabic is helpful as learning one variety aids learning the other especially in case the learning levels of both varieties are close.

Communicating with Arabic Native Speakers Using Arabic

The fourth research question examines the challenges confronting foreign learners of Arabic in communicating with Arabic native speakers using Arabic language. The majority of participants agreed that the Palestinian colloquial Arabic is preferred over the MSA variety. Participants related this preference to a number of reasons. Firstly, the colloquial Arabic variety is the natural means of communication among Arabic speakers. Secondly, compared to the MSA

variety, the colloquial is easier for communication. Lastly, as a consequence of the previous two factors, a learner's capabilities allow him/her to communicate using the colloquial but not the MSA variety. When the Palestinian colloquial Arabic is attained within its context, it instantaneously turns to be the preferred and, consequently, easier variety for communicating with Arabic native speakers. The Palestinian colloquial is the communication tool used within the Palestinian context, which means that the learner is extensively and profoundly exposed to it. The fact that makes him/her acquire the hugest amount of knowledge of the vernacular and communication strategies necessary for social interactions. That is because creating a learning environment that directly exposes the learner to the “material being studied” is a prerequisite for learning to take place. That is as experiencing the world straightforwardly can help the learner in creating meaning (Olusegun, 2015).

Besides, since PCA variety is the communication tool in the Palestinian context, it is more preferred to be learned as learning it enhances a learner's ability to easily communicate, interact with Arabic native speakers. That is, as learning the spoken variety a foreign learner and an Arabic native speaker stand on the same ground in terms of the used communication tool. As a result, having knowledge in the same domain, both a foreign learner and a native speaker's communication flows easily and smoothly.

Inspecting the easier variety for communication, research proved that the Palestinian colloquial Arabic variety is easier, if compared to the MSA variety. Participants related such a conclusion to two fundamental causes. At the outset, they remarked that the colloquial Arabic variety structure is more flexible than the MSA variety's, which makes the colloquial Arabic more functional than the MSA. Besides structure, research unveiled that a learner's preferences and

learning abilities determine the easier variety. Most of the study participants showed a preference and exhibited a better learning capacity for learning the colloquial variety.

This finding highlights language and the learner as key essential components of the learning environment that affect the extent of easiness a learner's experiences in communication. Because the Palestinian colloquial Arabic variety has a flexible structure, it is functional and, thus, easier for communication, if compared to "Fusha". That is as the Palestinian vernacular variety is the means of communication among Arabic native speakers.

As the greater bulk of the study sample classified communicating in Arabic as challenging, the study surveyed the kind of learning challenges participants confronted in communicating from learners and instructors viewpoints. The survey disclosed a substantial number of challenges. Starting with challenges reported by foreign learners, firstly, participants demonstrated that Arabic native speaker's expectations about a learner's communication abilities and skills hinders any communication attempt. Secondly, the limited time available for a learner to express his/her thoughts in a conversation hampers communication as well. Thirdly, the literal translation; participants demonstrated that translating their thoughts literally from their mother tongue into Arabic caused lots of fragmented, meaningless structures to appear in their speech, which causes misunderstanding. Lastly, the variations across the Palestinian colloquial dialects causes frustration for a learner.

As for the learning challenges reported by instructors, firstly, they argued that Palestinian people shows reluctance to communicate using the MSA variety. Secondly, they demonstrated that learners suffered from the linguistic misunderstanding. Such misunderstanding, according to instructors, is an outcome of the learner's inadequate knowledge about Arabic language, the Arabic language system which is characterized by complexity and the diglossic nature of the

Palestinian colloquial Arabic variety. Thirdly, instructors remarked that the difficulty of simulating reality obstructs students from transferring knowledge gained in the class to the external environment. Lastly, absence of homogeneity in the class was highlighted as another learning challenge.

Initially, for constructivism, the learning context that enhances social interaction among speakers is a prerequisite for true learning to occur. The study findings pointed at some deficits in the Palestinian context that caused communication using Arabic within the context to suffer. Palestinian people reluctance to communicate with foreigners using their language hampers the learning process of Arabic. What complicates the situation even more is the limited time offered for a foreign learner to take part in conversations. This is because of a native speaker's wrong assumption that a foreign learner does not have adequate knowledge in Arabic, thus, cannot communicate. This directly leads to misunderstanding especially when a learner literally translates from his\her mother tongue to Arabic. This literal translation is a consequence of the unequal knowledge that a foreign learner and other native speakers have about Arabic.

Viewing the findings related to communication challenges from a different angle, there is the challenge of difficulty of stimulating reality outside of the class. That is because of the program week logistic potentialities, as instructors reported. Besides, the learners' inability to transfer the new learned knowledge to outside the class make the learning process more intricate. In constructivism, learning takes place when an individual is able to "code" the learned material in a "generic manner to maximize the transferability of learning to new situations"(Bruner (1957). When a foreign learner of Arabic confronts a challenge in transferring the learned material from the class to the external learning milieu, the Palestinian context, this means that learning did not occur as appropriately as it must be. For instance, the learning process might lack a cornerstone

phase called de-contextualization. That is as knowledge mostly is acquired in a specific context, which makes transferring it into another learning context at a later stage problematic. Nevertheless, meaningful learning entails acquisition of decontextualized knowledge; knowledge “must be abstract so that it can be related to a variety of different situations.” This can be only if knowledge is used to “clarify a number of situations, and thus stress the importance of the learner encountering relevant example” (Bransford and Franks, 1976, as cited in Shuell, 1986, p. 420). This occurs through the process of coding, thus, when coding is done inaccurately, learning transfer stops.

Learning Arabic Language Linguistic Systems

Regarding the fifth research question, research revealed that all Arabic language aspects; orthography, syntax, semantics, phonetics, phonology and morphology, in a way or another, influence Arabic learning process.

Arabic Writing System “Orthography”

Inspection about the learning challenges-related to Arabic orthography revealed that learning Arabic writing is challenging. That is as it slows down the learning process. Two key aspects; the Arabic alphabet and transliteration technique, were accentuated as the utmost challenging features of learning writing. Starting with alphabet, participants highlighted some major learning challenges related to learning the Arabic alphabet. As a first challenge, participants remarked that differentiating between letters that connect and that do not and dotted and un-dotted letters and identifying the different shapes of a letter, especially from one font type to another, is the most challenging aspects of learning Arabic alphabet writing. The second challenge is case ending; participants claimed that placing diacritics at the end of a word is extremely challenging.

The last challenge is similar sounds; participants demonstrated that writing letters that have close articulation is always accompanied with learning challenges.

As for transliteration, generally speaking, participants argued that writing Arabic using Latin script is challenging while writing in Arabic letters is more useful. That is, using Arabic alphabet in learning Arabic makes the learning process more structured and learning meaningful, which reduces the extent of challenge throughout all levels. Moreover, learning Arabic while knowing the letters enhances the learner's involvement in the learning process, which enriches the learner's comprehension of the language. On the contrary, participants categorized Latin script as damaging for the learning process except for the early stages of learning, in which writing using Latin letters can be supportive for the learning process. That is as this technique helps in illustrating the structure of Arabic, especially the difference in structure between the MSA and the colloquial varieties and sounds articulation.

Examination concerning the learning challenges facing learners from instructors perception revealed some other learning challenges. Firstly, instructors stressed L1 interference in L2 learning, which mostly appears in learning Arabic alphabet and sentence structure. Secondly, they are related to sentence structure as Arabic language has two types of sentences; nominative and verbal, whose structures are different. The fact that English has only nominative sentences, participants mostly struggle in structuring a verbal sentence. Thirdly, they argued that a word's multiple functions and meanings; literal and social, challenge learners in expressing their thoughts through writing.

These challenges are all consequences of the distinctive features of Arabic language, if compared to Latin languages especially English. For instance, speaking about Arabic alphabet-related challenges, connection between letters, change in a letter's shape based on its position in a

word and diacritics placed at the end of a word depending on its function in a sentence are features of Arabic but not English. Since these features are produced by the variation between Arabic and other Latin languages, and because all of the participants are Latin language-speakers, these features represent a new distinctive knowledge that might contradict a learner's prior knowledge; his\her native language knowledge. The fact that causes cognitive conflict and makes learning Arabic writing challenging as their first language will absolutely interfere in learning Arabic.

In literature, Arabic orthography was classified among the top challenging aspects of Arabic besides grammar and phonetics, which is proved in this study as well. This finding is in agreement with Al-Shalakh (2010) and Ryding (2013) and contradicts Abu- Irmies' (2014) study that revealed that Arabic writing is not challenging. Moreover, the finding that Arabic has similar letters goes in line with Maamouri's (1998) finding that out of the (28) letters, there are (22) letters that are so close in script to the extent that some of them are only distinguished by a dot or a stroke.

Arabic Sounds System “Phonology, Morphology and Phonetics”

Investigating Arabic sound system as a potential source of learning challenges, research outcomes showed that it is an integral motive for learning challenges confronting foreign learners. Validating this general finding, participants mentioned a number of justifications. Firstly, they argued that Arabic sound system is different from the sound system of Latin languages. Arabic is a language belonging to Semitic languages, which is a group whose sound system is completely different from the sound system of Latin languages. This, in its turn, creates a big gap between the sound systems of English and Arabic. Secondly, participants pointed at Arabic sounds articulation as a crucial issue. That is as some Arabic sounds have close pronunciation. Arabic instructors

demonstrated that learners found a difficulty in differentiating between some sounds. Thus, any change in pronunciation changes the whole meaning. This, in its turn, results in misunderstanding while a learner is interacting with other Arabic speakers, which slows down the learning progress and, consequently, impedes communication. Thirdly, participants demonstrated that a learner's background, including nationality and native language, determines the extent of challenge a learner experiences in learning Arabic sounds.

Research revealed that the impact of Arabic sound systems is not restricted to the learner, but includes the teacher and the learning process as well. In this regard, Arabic instructors underlined some challenges facing them in teaching Arabic phonology and morphology. First of all, they claimed that teaching Arabic sounds requires the teacher to teach phonetics. Subsequently, a teacher's failure in teaching phonetics leads to a learner's failure in learning Arabic sounds properly.

As a last conclusion in relation to challenges resulting from Arabic sound system, all of the previously mentioned challenges, according to foreign learners, can be reduced through exposure. That is as participants argued that the impact of such challenges on the learning process can be cut down through constant and extensive exposure to the language. This finding stresses the Arabic sound system as an influential factor in the learning process of Arabic. This finding is in agreement with Abu-Irmies' (2014) study in which the greater portion of the study sample reported that they experienced a difficulty in articulating Arabic sound properly. Al-Shalakh (2010) and AL-Rasheed's (2013) studies are consistent with this finding as both studies classified Arabic sounds articulation as problematic.

Arabic Grammar “Syntax”

Arabic grammar was related to by foreign learners as a key challenging aspect of Arabic. A number of justifications were brought to the scene as a verification. In the first place, participants argued that Arabic grammar is originally a difficult aspect of Arabic language. Highlighting the most challenging aspects, participants related to differences between Arabic and English languages systems which makes its learning for a foreign learner a challenging task. In the second place, they indicated that the numerous grammar rules, which requires a strong memory for learning, retaining and recalling them, complicates its learning. Moreover, participants argued that literal translation in learning Arabic syntax “structure” causes misunderstanding to occur.

Research revealed about some key learning challenges related to grammar. Firstly, participants highlighted agreement; gender agreement, number agreement and subject-verb agreement specifically, as a challenging grammatical issue. Secondly, they pointed at verb conjugation, especially conjugating present tense. Thirdly, they underlined adjective placement within a sentence. Participants related such a challenge to variations across Arabic and English languages. Thus, when a learner literally translate from one language to another, a learner incorrectly places adjective within a sentence. Fourthly, addition, the fact that Arabic endures making addition of a limitless number of words. Fifthly, forming plural in Arabic follows no specific rule that govern all the processes of plural formation. Sixthly, the immense number of grammar rules that exceeds a learner’s ability of learning, retaining and recalling them.

This finding powerfully states that the context has components responsible for the existence of the learning challenges. All of the previously mentioned justifications and learning challenges are related to Arabic language and the learner. Linking those findings to literature, it

was noticed that the finding that grammar was classified as the most challenging aspect agrees with Al-Shallakh (2010) and Abu-Irmies' (2014) studies that revealed that learning Arabic grammar, MSA variety grammar, is challenging.

Learning Arabic Vocabulary “Semantics”

Since a substantial portion of the language learning process is concentrated on how much a learner acquires and retains that language terminologies, Arabic vocabulary; the extent of challenge and the type of learning challenges a learner experiences precisely, were examined. Results of the examination revealed some key findings.

Regarding the first finding, investigating the extent of challenge experienced in learning Arabic vocabulary, participants remarked that Arabic vocabulary is an integral source of learning challenges. Learners related such a finding to different variables. Firstly, lack of cognates between Arabic and English, the mother tongue of most participants. Secondly, the program's heavy reliance on memorizing instead of practicing technique in teaching vocabulary. Thirdly, the vocabulary learning process, inside the class, is random and unstructured. Fourthly, an Arabic terminology has a variety of synonyms. Finally, Arabic has similar words with different meanings, that is related to the fact that Arabic has the feature of three-letter root system which makes it challenging to distinguish the meanings of words derived from the same root.

The lack of cognates between Arabic and other Latin languages and the three-letter root system are a product of the distinctiveness of Arabic language as it belongs to a semiotic languages group which is vastly different from the group of Latin languages. Since language is part of the context which plays an integral role in the language learning process, this finding stresses the context effect on learning. However, other justifications like the program's extensive focus on memorizing instead of practicing technique in teaching vocabulary and the unstructured

and random process of vocabulary learning are related to the adopted teaching approach by the PAS program.

This finding indicates that such an approach is non-constructivist in its nature. Theoretically, a learner's cognitive development and deep understanding must be the foci of a learning process (Fosnot & Perry, 1996). This constructivist view, consequently, entails that learning is a knowledge construction, not transmission or recording of information conveyed by others (Applefield, Huber & Moallem, 2000). Nevertheless, participants' responses indicated that vocabulary was taught as a fixed body that can be transmitted directly from their instructors to them, the understanding that is originally related to traditional educational philosophy which is challenged by constructivism assumptions (Hirtle, 1996). In view of that, vocabulary, like any other type of knowledge, is a growing and promising explanation developed by humans involved in a process of meaning making within a cultural and social discourse (Fosnot, 2013). Thus, adopting memorizing technique in isolation from practice converts learning into a burden.

The finding that Arabic vocabulary is challenging goes in line with Bergman (2009) study that classified vocabulary as a hard aspect of the language since Arabic does not have any cognate terminologies with English as it is not an Indo-European language. Besides, this finding related to the teacher's teaching approach is consistent with Mall's (2002) study that a teacher's teaching approach highly influences the learning process. The study concluded that since teachers depended on the grammar translation approach, they stressed grammar rules and vocabulary memorization.

As an exception for this general finding, learning vocabulary was viewed as not challenging. Participants related that to the program approach in teaching. That is as Arabic vocabulary learning follows a straightforward process. Besides, it is taught within a context,

through texts, and not through focusing on teaching abstract terminologies. Nonetheless, utilizing vocabulary in communication with Arabic native speakers is categorized as the hard part. This finding was reported mainly by Arabic instructors in the PAS. Although it contradicts the earlier finding, it is still logical. That is as instructors limited the challenges to utilizing the learned vocabulary in communication.

As for the other finding in this regard, participants highlighted a number of main vocabulary-related learning challenges. Some are context related while the others are related to Arabic language. On the first hand, assuming that the learner and the teacher are parts of the context, context related challenges include the learner's limited memory, which creates a difficulty in recalling the Arabic counterpart of an English word. Second, the teacher's teaching style or approach in teaching vocabulary. Third, the learners' diversity and individual differences that cause learners to receive unequal teaching.

Mentioning the diversity of foreign learners of Arabic brought to the researcher mind Vygotsky's advice that "[t]o embrace diversity, students must interact socially". Building on the above discussion, although instructors reported that in-class communication is open and available, participants complained from the lack of practice opportunities. Moreover, "for communication to occur at its most effective point; all participants must be on the same common ground"(Powell & Kalina, 2009,p.245). In the case of the PAS students who came with different cultural and linguistic backgrounds, having such a shared ground is kind of impossible. Nonetheless, Vygotsky believed that using language in the class is the most significant process in creating a social constructivist setting in which all students are involved. Simply, "[s]tudents should use language as much as they use oxygen" (Powell & Kalina, 2009, p.245). That is as, according to Vygotsky's

social constructivism, “language precede[s] knowledge and the process of social interaction using language helps individuals learn” (p. 246).

On the other hand, language related challenges include the fact that Arabic has the feature of polysemy (a word with multiple meanings depending on the context). Second, the fact that forming plural in Arabic follows different, multiple rules. What makes this fact even more challenging is the PAS Program intensive focus on teaching vocabulary more than grammar.

Why do Foreign Learners Learn Arabic?

This research hypothesizes that a learner’s intention of learning Arabic is linked to the kind of learning challenges facing him\her. Participants’ responses disclosed some of the learners' major intentions of learning Arabic. Instructors remarked that learners come to the Palestinian context either for an educational, communication, entertainment or work-related purpose or because of affiliation feeling towards Palestine.

This finding is consistent with Abu-Irmies (2014), Husseinali (2006) and Qiao, Abu & Kamal (2013) which revealed that learners flocking to Palestine to learn Arabic either to get jobs, to discover the Arabic culture and heritage of their ancestors, or to understand the Holy Qur’an and Hadith, in case of Muslim learners. Simultaneously, this finding differs from Taha’s (2007) study finding that focused on the learners’ purposes of learning Arabic only in America. The study unveiled that purposes of learning Arabic include the gradually increased need for bilinguals after 11th September attack, the need for Arabic for international trade and diplomacy, the need for Arabic for every Muslim's daily practices as it is the language of the Holy Qura'n, and the need for Arabic for constructing communication and relationships for world peace negotiations.

Some participants were not able to spot the correlation between a learner’s intention of learning Arabic and the kind of learning challenges facing him\her. Maybe because they are still

novice learners of Arabic. However, responses delivered by the majority of the study sample proved the hypothesis as they were able to recognize a direct link between the two variables.

Still, some instructors added to the hypothesis other two variables that actualizes it in a better way. On one hand, they remarked that there is a strong correlation between a learner's learning objective, teaching approach and the type of learning challenges a learner confronts. On the other hand, they elucidated that when a learner has a real intention for learning Arabic, s\he becomes highly motivated towards learning the language and, consequently, the learning challenges become of little impact. In other words, there is a strong correlation between a learner's intention, motivation and learning challenges facing him\her.

Going back to literature, despite the fact that a considerable number of studies searched the learner's intention of learning Arabic, to the best knowledge of the researcher, there are not any previous studies that tackled the correlation between learners' learning objectives and the learning challenges confronting them in learning Arabic. This stresses the importance of this study, as having such a correlation supports teachers in predicting the potential learning challenges a learner is expected to confront ahead of its occurrence by knowing the learner's intention of learning the language. Thus, teachers take into their consideration solving or, at least, obstructing such challenges from occurrence.

Summary

Discussing the study findings in light of the previous literature and the adopted theoretical framework, it is apparent that some of the study findings go in line with most of what was presented in literature especially regarding the learning challenges and learners' intentions of learning Arabic. Further, theories of constructivism, social constructivism and sociocultural theory perfectly explained and justified the study findings. However, some other findings like the finding

that a learner learning intention is directly linked to the type of learning challenges confronting a learner did not fit what was presented in literature as previous studies did not tackle this issue.

Conclusion

This chapter discussed the study key conclusions in view of the previous literature and the theoretical frameworks; constructivism, social constructivism and socio-cultural theories.

Recommendation for Further Studies

This study tackled the challenges facing foreign learners in learning Arabic in the Palestinian context. It, to the best knowledge of the researcher, is the first one of its type done in the Palestinian context. Identifying the learning challenges facing foreign learners in learning Arabic in the Palestinian context is just the first step in the field of second language learning. Accordingly, this field requires more studies on similar contexts to Birzeit University. That is, results of this study are necessarily generalized to other contexts. Moreover, the field of second language learning\ teaching is in a massive need for studies that tackles the ways for confronting the learning challenges facing a foreign learner including, as a possible solution, the teaching approaches that must be adopted by second language learning programs' officials and Arabic instructors.

On the level of Birzeit university, as the university is the incubator of one of Arabic teaching programs, the Palestine and Arab Studies (PAS) program, it must support any research effort tackling the issue of teaching Arabic as a foreign language in Palestine.

Limitations of the Study

Conducting this research, the researcher encountered some limitations. Among the utmost influential limitations is that the study samples were meant to be (30) foreign learners of Arabic and (5) Arabic instructors. Nonetheless, the researcher was able to meet only (24) learners besides

the (5) teachers. Further, after managing and planning for interviews and focus groups, the researcher lost some participants; e.g. some of them travelled and others showed low or no interest in participating. The thing that forced the researcher to start the process of searching for other interested participants from scratch, which wasted lots of the researcher's time in the data collection phase. This, in its turn, caused the researcher to extend the research timeframe to the summer semester (summer 2017-2018) in order to be able to meet the needed number of students that helps the researcher to reach the saturation stage.

Another limitation is that, as the study methodology shows, the researcher planned for collecting data from foreign learners through conducting focus-group discussions. However, during the data collection process, the researcher experienced a difficulty in grouping students into focus groups as their free times are incompatible. This forced the researcher to meet some of the students individually, which affected the type of collected data as it was perceived that focus-group discussions, compared to individual interviews, are more effective in collecting more comprehensive data since participants raise inspiration in each other.

The PAS semester's timing and span is another limitation. The semester starts and ends in times that differ from Birzeit University semester. Besides, the PAS semester is relatively shorter than the ordinary semester. The fact that made it impossible for the researcher, as a regular student at the university, to meet students during the whole semester. This, in its turn, made it impossible to collect, decode, analyze and, also, check validity and reliability of the data at the same semester. However, the researcher tried to overcome the reliability and validity checking step by using communication means like the phone and email. Nevertheless, meeting learners and instructors personally would have been a better choice if there were enough time for that. That is,

it would reduce the time that is consumed through using technological communication means (e.g. telephone, social media like Facebook and email)

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Appendices

Appendix (1)

Focus-Group Discussions

Research Question #1: What are the major challenges facing non-native Arabic speakers learning Arabic in Palestine?

Focus-Group Discussion Questions:

- Have you ever learned Arabic before in a context other than Palestine? Is it an Arabic context?
- If yes, in which context it was harder for you to learn Arabic? To what extent does learning Arabic in that context is more difficult or easier than learning Arabic in the Palestinian context? why?
- In which ways does learning Arabic in Palestine differ than learning Arabic in that context?
- How helpful is learning Arabic language while living in an Arabic speaking milieu (Palestine)?
- To what extent do you think that the Palestinian general atmosphere is a source of the challenges facing you?
- To which aspects of the Palestinian society / life do you relate the learning challenges facing you? Why?
- How does the political situation in Palestine affect your motivation to learn Arabic?

- The PAS Program teaches courses like: Social\Political Science, Palestinian Society, The Palestinian Question, Women in Arabic Society, Arab Society, Palestinian Cultural Studies, Modern and Contemporary Arab Thought, what kind of context- related challenges such courses help you to overcome?

Research Question #2 :What are the challenges facing non-native Arabic speakers in learning Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) variety?

Focus-Group Discussion Questions:

- Which variety do you prefer to learn the MSA variety or the colloquial one? Why?
- How easy or challenging is it to learn MSA? Why?
- How easy or challenging is it to communicate with Arabic native speakers using MSA?

Why?

- What kind of challenges does learning the MSA variety cause for you as a learner?

Research Question #3: What are the challenges facing non-Arabic native speakers in learning the Palestinian colloquial Arabic variety?

Focus-Group Discussion Questions:

- How easy or challenging is it to learn Palestinian Colloquial Arabic? Why?
 - How easy or challenging is it to communicate with Arabic native speakers using Palestinian Colloquial Arabic? Why?
 - What kind of challenges does the learning of the Palestinian colloquial Arabic variety cause for you as a learner?
-

Research Question #4: What are the challenges facing non-native Arabic speakers in communicating with Arabic native speakers?

Focus-Group Discussion Questions:

- Which variety of Arabic do you use to communicate with Arabic native speakers? Why?
- Which variety do you find easier to use?
- How challenging is it to communicate in Arabic? Please explain.

Research Question #5: What are the challenges facing non-native speakers in learning Arabic orthography, syntax, semantics, phonetics, phonology and morphology?

Focus-Group Discussion Questions:

- How does Arabic language writing system affect learning Arabic?
- To what extent does learning Arabic letters using can affect the process of learning the language?
- To what extent do you believe that the Arabic sound system affects your ability to learn the language?
- To what extent do you consider the Arabic language grammar a source of challenges facing you in learning Arabic?
- To which extent do you think that Arabic language vocabulary is hard to learn?
- Which features of Arabic language (Phonetics, phonology, syntax (structure\grammar), orthography and semantics (vocabulary)) are you finding more challenging to learn? In which part\ of the language do you feel that you face more challenges?

Research Question #6: What are the purposes of learning Arabic as a foreign language by non-native Arabic speakers?

Focus-Group Discussion Questions:

- Why did you choose to learn Arabic in Palestine?
- Why did you choose Birzeit University to learn Arabic?
- What are the main reasons behind learning Arabic? Please explain in detail.

Appendix (2)

Interview with the Arabic` Instructors

Research Question #1: What are the major challenges facing non-native Arabic speakers learning Arabic in Palestine?

Interview Questions:

- To which extent do you think that learning Arabic language while living in an Arabic speaking milieu (Palestine) is helpful?
- To what extent do you think that the Palestinian general atmosphere is considered as a source of the challenges learners face in learning Arabic?
- To which aspects of the Palestinian society / life could you attribute the learning challenges that face your students?
- How does the political situation in Palestine affect leaning Arabic as foreign language, Arabic culture and your students' motivation?
- To what extent do you believe that the existence of different varieties (Standard and Colloquial) is a challenge for your students?

Research Question #2: What are the challenges facing non-native Arabic speakers in learning Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) variety?

Interview Questions:

- What kind of challenges are your students facing in learning Modern Standard Arabic)?
- To which factors could you attribute such challenges?
- What are the challenges that you are facing in teaching Modern Standard Arabic?
- What are the main reasons behind such challenges?

Research Question #3: What are the challenges facing non-Arabic native speakers in learning the Palestinian colloquial Arabic variety?

Interview Questions:

- What kind of challenges are your students facing in learning Modern Standard Arabic)?
- To which factors could you attribute such challenges?
- What are the challenges that you are facing in teaching Modern Standard Arabic?
- What are the main reasons behind such challenges?
- What are the challenges facing your students leaning both Modern Standard Arabic and colloquial Palestinian Arabic?

Research Question #4: What are the challenges facing non-native Arabic speakers in communicating with Arabic native speakers?

Interview Questions:

- To which extent do you think that communicating in Arabic is a challenging task for your students?
- Could you describe the challenges that face your students in communicating using Arabic?

Research Question #5: What are the challenges facing non-native speakers in learning Arabic orthography, syntax, semantics, phonetics, phonology and morphology?

Interview Questions:

- How does Arabic language writing system affect the learning of Arabic?
- To what extent does learning Arabic letters using Latin script can affect the process of learning the language?
- To what extent do you believe that the Arabic sound system affects the student's ability to learn Arabic language?

- To what extent do you consider the Arabic language structure a source of challenges facing your students in learning Arabic?
- To which extent do you think that Arabic language vocabulary is tough / hard to learn?
- Which features of Arabic language (Phonetics, phonology, syntax (structure\grammar), orthography and semantics (vocabulary)) do you think that your students are finding more challenging to learn?

Research Question #6: What are the purposes of learning Arabic as a foreign language by non- native Arabic speakers?

Interview Questions:

- From your perspective, what are the purposes for which your students are learning Arabic?
- To which extent do you think that the purpose for learning Arabic ameliorates or exasperates the challenges that your students face? Please provide some examples if possible.

Appendix (3)

A letter to PAS students

For participating in the study



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February, 28th, 2017

Dear Student,

I am Maram Abusaleh. I am an MA student working on my Master degree in Education with concentration on Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL). At the present time I am working on my Master's thesis. I am investigating the challenges facing non-native Arabic speakers learning Arabic as a foreign language. The title of my research project is "Challenges Facing Non- Native Arabic Speakers in Learning Arabic at Birzeit University". I would like to ask you to participate in my study. I will be interviewing you for 20-30 minutes asking some questions about your experience learning Arabic. Any information collected will be confidential and used only for the purpose of the study.

Most Truly,

Maram Abu Saleh