A Language's Demise Through a Curricular Evolution: A Preliminary Study

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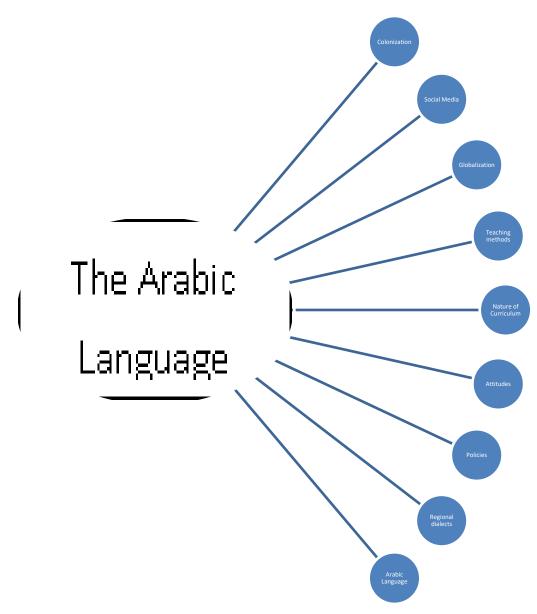Address: 1762 Old Louisquisset Pike, Lincoln, RI 02865

Introduction

Languages are unique. They are forces that surpass the demarcations of communication. Languages define cultures and preserve histories. Having identified the essence of languages, nations have dedicated a special niche for teaching their citizens the foundations of their native languages and asserting their pride in their cultural heritage and paving the way for a successful conservation of their people's identity and future. Accordingly, the educational system in many countries became the bedrock of language preservation and the curriculum emerged to represent its spirit and modus operandi. However, the death of languages is an expression of a genuine reality. This phenomenon is a reflection of powerful forces that managed to erase languages that were endemic to certain regions. These forces include colonization and, currently, globalization. Unfortunately, instead of embracing its mission of language preservation, the power of the curriculum has become an accomplice in the process of erasing languages in many countries in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA).

This phenomenological research aims to identify the impact of the curricular changes on language preservation in Lebanon, Egypt, and Morocco. This preliminary qualitative study seeks to analyze any potential patterns that may exist among the curricular changes in the Arab nations and to assess the impact of current curricular design on the native language of Arabic. The rationale is to understand how curricular progressivism affected the Arabic language and to assess its current status in the aforementioned nations.

The authors of this study utilize Critical Social Theory (CST) in examining the impact of curricular factors on the Arabic language in the MENA region. CST was chosen because it offers an effective approach to the analysis of societal, cultural, and historical forces and their impact on educational outcomes (Leonardo, 2004). By using CST, the authors conducted a preliminary study in Lebanon to explore the factors impacting the Arabic language in the MENA region. The authors developed a conceptual framework to examine the impact of social, cultural, and curricular influences on the Arabic language (See Figure 1).

Figure 1 Conceptual Framework

Methodology

Research methods included face-to-face and Skype interviews with Arabic language and education faculty members at the American University in Beirut, Lebanon. The interviews focused on eliciting faculty's perceptions of the curricular changes and cultural factors that impacted the Arabic language in Lebanon. This preliminary study was conducted to identify the key factors involved in addressing this issue.

Preliminary Findings

The preliminary findings indicated that Arabic teaching methods and curricula contribute to the decline in the appeal of Arabic. The curricula are outdated and the teachers rely on memorization and archaic teaching methods. Teachers emphasize the teaching of grammar, but not the conversational aspects of Arabic. They attribute this

approach to the lack of in-depth research on effective Arabic teaching methods in colleges of education, as well as the lack of professional development for teachers of Arabic.

Participants also indicated that almost 50 percent of children go to private schools in Lebanon, in which English or French is the language of the curriculum. Even in public schools, science and mathematics are offered in English or French. This practice makes students perceive Arabic as unsuitable for learning science and antithetical to modernization. Interviewees indicated that parents wanted their children to learn science and math in English to find jobs after graduation.

One professor indicated that local dialects compliment the teaching of standard Arabic in schools and ease the learning of the language. However, another participant stated that the multiplicity of local dialects is confusing students and impeding learning Arabic. Unanimously, participants agreed that colonization had a negative impact on teaching Arabic; however, one stated that, "the English language has moved from colonization to globalization." In addition, one professor pointed out that social media had adversely impacted using Arabic.

By the end of the century, "more than half of the 7,000 world languages could vanish" (Al Jabry 2013). One of these languages could be Arabic. Many factors have corroded the Arabic language including colonization, globalization, antiquated teaching methods, outdated curricula, negative attitudes towards the language, curricular policies, and the numerous regional dialects. The impact of social media on students' selection of English as the language of communication was an additional factor that participants highlighted in this study. Hossam Abouzahar (2018) stated that college educated Arabs view foreign languages as "more functional, prestigious, and likely to guarantee them a job." Interestingly, participants reported that teachers prefer to teach in English or French rather than in Arabic because they find these two foreign languages to be easier in communication and instruction.

The implications of this research indicate that higher education institutions must take an active role in enhancing the Arabic language through several venues. Firstly, they can declare Arabic as the medium for teaching in most colleges. Secondly, universities must increase the scientific input of the Arab region. If the Arab world makes significant scientific contributions, more research will be translated from Arabic to English or French, not vice versa. Thirdly, increasing the Arabic language's presence on social media will aid in improving the language's image. Modernizing the Arabic language curricula to increase its utilization will also improve students' views regarding the vitality of Arabic in a global world. Fifthly, revamping the Arabic language teacher training programs and using research-based teaching methods will make students value and enjoy learning Arabic.

The authors plan to expand this study to several countries in the MENA region—including Egypt and Morocco to examine the perceptions of Arabic language educators and education professors regarding the status of the language in their respective nations. The authors will elicit these educators' views regarding the factors that impact Arabic teaching in their countries, as well as their recommendations to combat the problem.

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