

***Breaking the Mold: Arabic Language
Arts Teaching & Learning:
Introduction to Special Issue***

Arab Journal of Applied
Linguistics
e-ISSN 2490-4198
Vol. 08, No. 01, 2023, i-v
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This special issue was designed to focus on Arabic language arts teaching and learning, a field that has not received enough interest from researchers and specialists.

Prospective authors were invited to submit articles that:

- Showcase cutting-edge research on Arabic language arts teaching and learning from around the globe as well as teacher educators' and student teachers' experiences and outcomes in educational contexts.
- Illustrate probable solutions to the issue of learning poverty within an Arabic Language Arts context.
- Explore a wide range of topics linked to the theme of this Special issue including design Arabic language arts curricula, cutting edge and evidence-based teaching methodologies and approaches, science of reading implications for Arabic language arts teaching and learning, teachers and student perspectives and experiences, large scale Arabic language arts reforms,

national literacy strategies, issues of quality, equity, accountability and assessment, fluency, reading interventions, etc.

- Disseminate information about Arabic language arts best practices in the MENA region and beyond.
- Identify important implications for future research in the field linked to Arabic language arts teaching & learning.

This special issue welcomed contributions which addressed qualitative, quantitative, or mixed method; empirical or theoretical paper; critical review paper; and book reviews related to Arabic language arts teaching and learning.

The first article of this special issue written by *Andreas Blom* and *Laura Gregory* (World Bank), is titled: “The World Bank’s approach to reducing learning poverty in the Middle East and North Africa: Advancing Arabic language teaching and learning”. The article defines learning poverty as the percentage of 10-year-old children who are unable to read and comprehend a simple text in Arabic (Gregory et al, 2021). Learning poverty was at 59% prior to Covid-19 pandemic and it is predicted that the rate will be close to 70% post pandemic. The article stresses the importance of giving all children a solid foundational skills basis in Arabic language and lays out a proposed plan to fight learning poverty through a path that has eight components to it which are: Setting literacy goals, building a bridge from colloquial to modern standard Arabic (MSA), expanding early MSA exposure, aligning instructional resources to follow a systematic phonetic approach with a focus on reading comprehension in a literature-rich environment, revisiting Arabic language teacher education programs, reducing

achievement gaps, intervening early with struggling readers, promoting family and community awareness, and balancing purposeful use of technology.

The second article written by *Amani Batakji*, an advisor on educational policy and titled: *“The Elephant in the Room: An analysis of the Arabic language initiatives in the UAE from the perspectives of educators”*. This article is a qualitative study that analyzed the perceptions of a group of educators and policy makers regarding Arabic language initiatives implemented in the UAE. The author concludes with some powerful insights regarding the urgent need for language in education policies to be defined anew.

Article three titled: *“Now our Arab students read Arabic books”*: Arabic Curriculum Innovation through Children’s Literature” and authored by: *Mariam AlHashmi, Kay Gallagher, Raja Asad, and Rama Baroud* explored the implementation and impact of literature integrated program in Arabic classes using a multiple-case research design that included three schools in Jordan, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates. Results demonstrated that a literature-integrated approach not only influenced the practices of teachers of Arabic but also witnessed an impact of the teachers, school environment, curriculum, and school administration on its implementation and promising some success if enough support was garnered for it.

The fourth article titled: *“Teacher professional development: A magic wand”* and authored by *Hanada Taha*, is a mixed-methods study that examined the impact of teacher professional development (PD) on their classroom practices and students’

early reading skills in Arabic language. The author concluded by observing that quality and effective teacher PD that leads to enhanced student Arabic language proficiency is the result of continuous and focused teacher learning and development that needs to be intentional, sustained, and accessible. The author proposed a teacher PD model that incorporates teacher choice and accessibility to quality PD, sufficient PD duration, in-class coaching and reflection, and knowledge of learner, teacher and subject matter.

Seeing a special issue through is a daunting task that cannot be done alone. I extend my heartfelt thanks to the authors who were so responsive to all the editorial requests and were punctual in their submission of manuscripts and the reviewers who selflessly reviewed and commented on the manuscripts in a timely manner. I would like to thank *Raiya Taha Thomure* for all the assistance in reviewing the final manuscripts and ensuring that the authors' guidelines are adhered to. I would also like to thank the editorial board of AJAL including *Prof. Habib Abdesslem* (editor in chief), *Dr Abdessattar Mahfoudhi*, *Dr Khaled Barkaoui*, and *Dr Sahbi Hidri* for extending this invite to me as a guest editor of this issue.

Wishing you all a thought-provoking read of this special issue on Arabic language arts teaching and learning.

Hanada Taha Thomure, is a Professor of Arabic Language Teaching and Learning at Zayed University. Her main research interest revolves around the modernization of the teaching of Arabic language and literacy, standards and literature-based

instruction, development of policies and national literacy strategies for Arabic as a first language.

References

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