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Shifting paradigms in Arabic pedagogy and policy in the UAE: Opportunities and challenges for teacher education

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Abstract: In this chapter, we report on the current shift in Arabic pedagogy and its effect on teacher education. In 2017, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) Ministry of Education published the new General Standards for the Arabic Language Curriculum aiming to improve the quality of Arabic language instruction in the UAE. Arabic language instruction has long been a source of concern within the Emirati public school system as well as the numerous private schools in the country. While Arabic pedagogy has traditionally focused on memorization of grammar and recitation of texts in Arabic, the new standards have called for the implementation of a new constructivist model, stressing skills rather than content and higher order thinking rather than rote learning. This paradigm shift in Arabic instruction if done well will positively impact not only teaching and learning in the Arabic Language Arts classroom but also teacher education and how teachers are prepared and trained in their field. The purpose of this chapter is to examine the current state of Arabic language teaching and learning as well as focusing on the opportunities and challenges relating to this shift and how teacher education must reinvent itself to meet these

new standards. The chapter will conclude by discussing possibilities that would be of interest to stakeholders and teachers for classroom practices and approaches to teacher education that align with this new direction for Arabic language instruction in the UAE.

Keywords: Arabic Language, Teacher Education, Arabic Pedagogy, Arabic language professional development

Introduction

Similar to other countries in the Gulf Region, the UAE education system has developed very swiftly. Established in 1972, the formal education system has seen waves of modernization and has experimented with various models. The Ministry of Education introduced several ambitious courses for rapid improvement. As the UAE is planning for a post-oil economy, vast attention has been directed to educating students and preparing them for a knowledge-based economy (UAE Government n.d.). As such, much attention and resources have been focused on disciplines like English language and science (UNDP 2014). This development has been largely at the expense of Arabic language. Until this past decade, Arabic as a language and how it is taught has received little attention by both researchers and policy makers.

However, Arabic language has become increasingly in the spotlight as a central concern with students' underperformance in international standardized assessments (Carroll, Al Kahwaji, and Litz 2017, 318; Mullis et al. 2017, OECD 2019). For example, the UAE participated in the International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) in the 2011 as well as the 2016 cycles. While there was marked improvement from 2011 to 2016, close to half of the fourth graders, who were assessed in Arabic reading (49%), performed below the 'low international' benchmark score. Similarly, in secondary school, the performance in the 2018 Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) shows a similar picture for 15-year-olds as the PIRLS in primary school. Overall, the UAE ranked 46th out of 79 participating countries and economies. Those who took the assessment in Arabic scored over 80 points lower in reading than those who took the assessment in English (OECD 2019), which can be interpreted as close to three years of school achievement (Hill, Bloom, Black, and Lipsey 2008). To address this, the UAE made strong

Arabic language skills as one of the key objectives of the UAE Vision 2021 National Agenda (UAE Government n.d.).

To fulfil the Vision 2021 National Agenda and improve the quality of Arabic teaching and learning, the government of the UAE and the local governments of the seven emirates have supported over the years, numerous policies and initiatives designed to have a positive effect on student achievement (Taha 2109). One such initiative is the development and implementation of the 2017 Arabic language standards (UAE Ministry of Education 2017). These standards call for a paradigm shift in the Arabic classroom from rote memorization of grammar to Arabic as a tool for higher order thinking and critical skills development. This new direction has many implications on the way educators teach Arabic and therefore, how teachers must be trained to be effective Arabic educators. However, while there is increasing pressure for teachers to change their pedagogical practices, there is little ongoing support for the pre-service and in-service professional development. Indeed, there are no federally funded Arabic language teacher preparation programs (ECAE, 2020).

In this chapter, we will address this new direction for Arabic language teaching and learning and some of the changes required for successful implementation. First, we will discuss the challenges of Arabic and how it has traditionally been taught. Thereafter, the chapter will describe the 2017 Arabic standards in further detail before presenting findings of professional development and training survey data from PISA 2018 and a classroom observation study by the authors assessing the effectiveness of the policy changes. The chapter will conclude by discussing possibilities for classroom practices and approaches to teacher education that align with this new direction for Arabic language instruction in the UAE.

Linguistic characteristics of Arabic

Arabic as a language may pose several challenges for students. One challenge is that Arabic is diglossic (Aldannan 2010, Almoosa 2007), which can be defined as a language which has two distinct forms which are used simultaneously for different purposes (Ferguson 1959). MSA, the formal language children learn in school and use in reading and writing, is noticeably different in its phonology, morphology, and syntax from the dialect form of Arabic (SpA), which is the spoken language that is used in informal contexts (Mahfoudhi et al. 2011). In the Gulf Region and specifically in the UAE, this is complicated by the wide use of English as the *Lingua Franca* in the greater community and in most public arenas. Many Arabic-speaking parents speak either SpA or English with their children (Malek 2015, Moukhallati and Al Amir, 2015), and many children speak broken Arabic or a language other than Arabic with their housemaids, nannies, and drivers (Tibi and McLeod 2014).

Beside the diglossic aspect of Arabic, another unique characteristic is its shallow and opaque orthography, as its script can be written with or without short vowels¹. When a text is written with short vowels, as is the case with all textbooks used in primary school, some religious texts and some children's books, the shallow orthography makes it relatively easy to derive the phonology and has been found to have a positive effect on reading comprehension (Abu-Rabia 1999, 2019, Taha & Azaizah-Seh, 2017). Children, when learning MSA in preschool and primary years use texts and textbooks that are vowelized with diacritics or short vowels inserted on every letter to ease them into reading accurately, and then those short vowels are sporadically used starting around middle school. Some researchers have suggested that the

¹ (for discussion, see Mahfoudhi et al. 2011, Taha & Taha 2020).

addition of short vowels inhibits processing speed and fluency in early primary grades (Abadzi 2017).

As students enter formal schooling and despite overlap between SpA and Arabic (Feitelson, Goldstein, Iraqi, and Share 1993, Abu-Rabia 2000,) children may face challenges in the skills necessary for strong language skills in MSA (Ayari 1996, Ibrahim and Aharon-Peretz 2005, Saiegh-Haddad & Everatt 2018). Both the diglossic and orthographic features of Arabic can create added challenges for language and reading development. However, if utilized well in Arabic language education, this diglossic feature may be an untapped resource that educators may utilize to improve language skills rather than viewing it as a weakness. Specifically, when diglossia is referenced explicitly in instruction regarding similarities between SpA and MSA in structure and vocabulary, it might support students' deeper understanding of the language and will allow them to see Arabic language in its entirety and how SpA & MSA are indeed intertwined. These challenges are exacerbated by the lack of proper Arabic teacher preparation and training that enables teachers to utilize students' background knowledge, as well as scaffold and support students' Arabic development. Rather, Arabic language has been taught in a rigid way, which focuses on accuracy, heavy content rather than fluency and long-term skills (Taha 2019).

Arabic Teaching and Learning

Arabic pedagogy has traditionally focused on grammar, recitation and memorizing syntactical and spelling rules (Faour 2012, Versteegh 2006). This is primarily due to the fact that as the language of Islam, Arabic is revered as a sacred language that needs to be preserved and protected in its pure and untainted classical form. This approach to Arabic teaching has changed

very little over the years and has led to an over-emphasis on memorized patterns and forms in classrooms that geared most of learning towards lower order thinking skills (Taha, 2019). Teachers have focused primarily on whatever content they find in the government-imposed textbooks to cover content, memorize verse and prose, labor over grammar and memorize syntactical and spelling rules (Faour 2012). This traditional approach focused on Arabic primarily as an art form to be revered and accepted as is instead of a tool that can be used for discussion, problem solving, invention, innovation and communication. However, this approach has not proven to be an efficient for language and literacy development. The 2018 PISA results indicate that UAE schools dedicate much more time to reading instruction compared to other countries with similar student performance (OECD 2019).

Furthermore, there are currently a lack of consensus of effective instructional practices to tackle the specific challenges of Arabic language and literacy development. Over the past decade, scholars across the region have made great strides in uncovering the unique aspects and components of Arabic language and literacy development (i.e. Mahfoudhi et al. 2011). While this is a vital first step, there is no evidence-based instructional strategies that have proved effective for teachers.

Several other steps have been taken to shift Arabic pedagogy towards one that focuses on higher order thinking skills. One such initiative is the introduction of school inspections for private schools in various Emirates in the UAE including Dubai, Abu Dhabi and more recently in Sharjah. For example, in Dubai, inspections are conducted on an annual basis by the Knowledge Human Development Authority (KHDA). Receiving an “outstanding” rating means that the school is doing exceptional work on a range of components including school culture, classroom environment, academic standards, curriculum delivery, safety procedures, provisions made for

special needs students, and levels of achievement in every content area. The ratings are given for both attainment and progress and the scale used for these inspections is: outstanding, very good, good, acceptable, weak and very weak (KDHA n.d.). While 17 schools were found to be outstanding in the 2018-19 academic school year, there were no Arabic programs, for native or non-native Arabic learners within these schools that received 'Outstanding'. Only one school received a 'Very Good' progress with the majority of Arabic programs receiving a 'Good' or 'Acceptable' rating. Furthermore, among the comments in the reports, Arabic was cited as a weakness among several of those schools in the final reports. The supposed weakness may stem from a variety of sources. It may be that there is a disjuncture or a misalignment between the methodology used in Arabic language teaching and learning in the classroom compared to other subjects and departments in the schools inspected. It also may be that teachers are not trained to implement student-centered methods to engage students.

The New Standards-Based Approach for Arabic

In an effort to modernize and improve the teaching and learning of Arabic language in schools, a central initiative has been the development of the 2017 Arabic content standards by the Ministry of Education (MoE) in the UAE. These new standards may be the beginning of a call for a paradigm shift in how Arabic is taught in schools (Ministry of Education, 2017). The new standards-based curriculum, also designed and developed by the MoE, focuses on Arabic as a tool for learning and addresses the development of 21st century skills within the framework of the Arabic language arts curriculum with a specific focus on communicative literacy development, critical thinking and problem-solving skills. Developed in partnership with regional and international partners, these standards focus on higher order thinking and are

divided into six areas of study: reading literacy, reading literary text, reading informational text, writing, listening and speaking. There is a strong focus as shown through the numerous learning outcomes on literary texts, writing and language throughout all grades with reading literacy strongly emphasized in the early grades. The standards are designed to support students' development not only in Arabic Language Arts but also in other disciplines they study in school that use Arabic as the medium of instruction.

The standards require that teachers introduce strategies for students to comprehend, analyze and evaluate a variety of subjects as well as text types and genres (i.e., informational, literary, and poetic) and actively engage students to encourage them to become lifelong readers. Furthermore, the assessments, as a monitoring and evaluation tool of the new curriculum, focus on texts that are new to the reader as opposed to previous years where students were tested on the same texts they studied in class (Ministry of Education, 2017).

The new standards movement in the UAE calls for a new direction in the way Arabic is taught. In teaching according to the standards, Arabic teachers can no longer teach directly from the textbook and prioritize memorization of grammar rules and other more traditional techniques. As this is a relatively recent shift, there is a need understand the extent to which this standards-based approach is being implemented in UAE classrooms and whether these changes are shifting the way teachers are teaching and students are learning.

Teacher Education and Professional Development

This new direction for Arabic teaching and learning has many implications for teacher education as there needs to be a shift how teachers are prepared for the classroom. Teachers need suitable preparation and ongoing training to ensure quality and engaging instruction and strong

learning outcomes (Darling-Hammond 2010, Taha-Thomure & Speaker, 2018). Teacher training programs have the dual goal to prepare and graduate teachers who both know their subject (i.e., in this case Arabic) as well as being able to implement effective pedagogy and methodology so that learning occurs (Taha 2017). Unfortunately, as Faour (2012) observes, many teachers in the Arab world do not have the content and pedagogical skills required to teach critical thinking, higher order thinking, reflection or metacognition through student-centered learning. In the UAE, most teachers of Arabic have studied Arabic literature (Taha 2017). Many teachers have various degrees with little to no formal pedagogical training. The result of this is that teachers might be proficient in Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) but are not trained in language pedagogy.

Taha (2019) investigated the path to Arabic Education Teacher Preparation programs. With the UAE five federally funded higher education institutions and more than 100 private higher education institutions (Nassir 2017), no federal institution of higher education offered an Arabic language teacher education program. Rather, education programs are offered with general pedagogy and possibly a course in Arabic or linguistics. Conversely, a few private institutions offer Arabic language teacher preparation programs, but these have been found to lack quality, rigor and alignment with what modern programs of teacher preparation look like, all of which are needed for the paradigm shift the country is calling for (Taha 2019).

In an effort to improve educators' skills, the UAE Ministry of Education has introduced licensure for all teachers, include Arabic educators. As of 2017, it is mandatory for all teachers, including Arabic teachers, to be licensed within the first year in the classroom. Licensure includes passing two assessments: one in the specialization of the teacher and the other in pedagogy (UAE Government 2020). This is a step to ensure a certain level of competency for all teachers. However, while it ensures that educators in the field have the content knowledge and

the skills necessary to implement the desired pedagogy in the classroom, there is no guarantee that any change will take place in the classroom, which is what is greatly needed.

Arabic Teacher's perspectives of their training

To understand the current training experiences of Arabic teachers in the UAE, the authors analyzed data from the 2018 PISA. Along with student data, the PISA collects data from teachers and specifically language teachers about their qualifications, classroom practices, and satisfaction with professional educators. We were primarily interested in the qualifications and professional development opportunities of current Arabic teachers. The 2018 PISA sample surveyed 4990 Arabic teachers about their education and ongoing training.

From this subsample, several trends appeared around Arabic teacher qualifications. Most Arabic teachers completed some teacher education or training program (86%) with most teachers reporting that they attended a standard teacher education or training program (74%) at an accredited educational institution. Far fewer reported attending an in-service teacher education program (17%), which allows teachers to be in the classroom while training for their license. One year after the introduction of teacher licensure, the clear majority of teachers have been or are in the process of obtaining some kind of teacher training. However, it is unclear if the mandate for licensure in the UAE has had any impact or if this was the status quo prior to 2017.

When asked about the content of their training, the sample of teachers responded that their training was distributed between reading literacy (35%), pedagogy of reading literacy (34%) and general pedagogical knowledge (31%). Similarly, almost all respondents reported that both Arabic as a language and the pedagogy of Arabic were areas of emphasis in their formal education.

Another topic of interest was the current professional development activities of Arabic teachers. Most teachers reported being required to attend professional development activities in the last year (75%). They also reported quite a variety of topics they attended. Table 1 shows the percentage of teachers who reported having the topics either included in their teacher education or their professional development in the past 12 months. This gives an indication as to which topics are being addressed in both teacher education and in-service professional development. Unsurprisingly, while much of teacher education is dedicated to content knowledge, pedagogy and curriculum, professional development offers much more of a variety of subjects. Some of the more frequent topics that Arabic teachers engage with are ICT skills, assessment practices, classroom management, cross-curricular skills, and parent-teacher cooperation. While all of these are vital topics for educators, what is surprising is that standards-based practices or student-centered learning are not among them. This data gives an indication of the type of professional development Arabic teachers are currently experiencing. However, it does not shed light on the quality and length of the professional development. Nor is the data able to show us to what extent skills and strategies acquired in those professional development sessions are getting transferred into the classroom.

Table 1. Arabic teacher's education and professional development activities (in percentages)		
	Percentage included in teacher education	Percentage included in professional development

		activities in the last 12 months
Knowledge and understanding of my subject field	80	40
Pedagogical competencies in teaching my subject field	72	42
Knowledge of the curriculum	71	41
Student assessment practices	56	52
ICT (Information and communication technology) skills for teaching	58	53
Student behavior and classroom management	61	50
School management and administration	29	35
Approaches to individualized learning	56	43
Teaching students with special needs	30	42
Teaching in a multicultural or multilingual setting	38	41
Teaching cross-curricular skills (e.g., problem solving, learning-to-learn)	57	50
Student career guidance and counseling	38	38
Internal evaluation or self-evaluation of schools	31	44
Use of evaluation results	44	48
Parent-teacher cooperation	49	50
Second language teaching	24	24
Communicating with people from different cultures or countries	31	39

Teaching about equity and diversity	35	38
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It is a positive sign that during their teacher education many Arabic teachers reported engaging in activities linked to subject-specific pedagogical and content knowledge of Arabic. Furthermore, many teachers also reported having engaged in teacher education or professional development activities of a cross-curricular or multi-disciplinary nature. Currently, most professional development workshops offered in the UAE are typically daylong seminars throughout the school year. Teachers attend professional development days in which they can select several different 2-hour sessions on a variety of topics. While many of these sessions are interactive, there is often a mismatch between the topics being offered and the realities of the classroom and the actual needs of the teachers. Although, this indicates that these are topics that are being addressed in teacher training, it does not address the quality of training nor does it speak to the long-term transfer necessary to be fully integrated into the classroom.

Observations of Arabic Primary Classrooms

To gain a more qualitative perspective into the pedagogical practices of Arabic language teachers, the first author in collaboration with several colleagues conducted a series of observations in primary Arabic classrooms in the UAE. This study was designed to shed light on the current pedagogical practices of Arabic teachers and to see if the many policy and structural changes to the education system since 2017 have had an impact on Arabic classroom practices. The observations discussed below were conducted as a case study in one private English medium school in the later part of 2019. The school population was overwhelmingly Arabic native speakers, who spoke Spoken Arabic (SpA) at home. The investigators observed nine classrooms

from Kindergarten through fifth grade and interviewed three teachers. While this remains a small sample, several reoccurring patterns of the primary Arabic classroom are worth discussing.

Preliminary analyses of the data show that two years after the introduction of the new Arabic standards, teachers at the schools did have their license from the MoE. However, we observed still organize their classroom in a traditional way. Most of the observed lessons were primarily focused on recitation and teaching of grammatical concepts. All observed classes in grades one through five were highly teacher centered. It was observed that primary Arabic teachers focused on recitation and grammar for most of the lesson time. The textbook was the primary source of material for the classroom with only few authentic sources available for use. The interactions in the classroom were mostly teacher driven in a Question-Response-Evaluation format. Expressive production of Arabic language was minimal with students responding orally or in writing with single word or simple sentence-responses. A positive sign was the increased amount of group work in the higher elementary grades. This encouraged students to practice their Arabic language skills, and students generally were mostly expected to be using MSA rather than dialects or English. When we interviewed the teachers, she mentioned that she was explicitly trying to incorporate more group work in the classroom.

To highlight, one class was centered around the theme of physical exercise. As typical for a lesson at the beginning of the unit, the new vocabulary was introduced. To engage students, the teacher brought in a soccer ball. This authentic artifact was used to engage students in the lesson and was, indeed, very effective. In a Question-Response-Evaluation format, the teacher probed the students for the vocabulary words required in the lesson. The teacher engaged in rich language and complex sentences in MSA. However, the students were only required to call out single words. This single word vocabulary was later reinforced with a worksheet which also

required a similar written response from students. The worksheet was completed in groups of four and answers were compared later in class. While it is important for students to be able to start from fundamental word level vocabulary, this proved to be a reoccurring pattern throughout many observations. The teachers focused on the basic, low-level language skills and only intermittently challenged students to use their language in a more communicative way for higher order thinking.

New Directions for Teacher Education

Clearly, this paradigm shift towards standards-based instruction and teacher licensure in the UAE has important consequences for the Arabic teacher education. However, based on the data presented above, there appears to be little change in what is happening in the classroom or in teacher training and professional development. To prioritize higher order thinking, like problem solving, and frame Arabic as a tool which is valuable to students, the general pedagogy must move to a more constructivist approach, implicitly fulfilling the priorities set by the standards. A constructivist approach can be defined as a theory of learning in which individuals build on what they know already using ideas and new knowledge in which they come in contact (Resnick 1989). A constructivist approach would shift the role of the student from that of passive to active participant in their learning and the role of the teacher from the source of all knowledge to a facilitator that supports students in their quest for higher understanding, scaffolding new concepts with them (Atwell 1987).

Moving towards a more constructivist approach in Arabic language arts might have several implications. First, to make meaning of the new knowledge students would develop higher order skills like critical thinking and problem-solving. Second, students may develop new

perspectives towards Arabic language; seeing it as a tool to engage with texts of different genres and with authors who offer a whole range of new ideas and ways to use the language. While this approach may not be without critics, the shift does address the call to revise and modernize Arabic language teaching and learning to prepare students to participate in a knowledge society (UNPD 2014).

A constructivist approach would mean that Arabic teachers would utilize student-centered methods. A student-centered approach is not simply group work that the teacher assigns. Rather, it is where the focus of instruction shifts from the teacher to the student. The teacher becomes a facilitator and someone who scaffolds student learning through carefully planned learning experiences. One example of student-centered instruction is project-based learning (PBL). PBL can be defined as a method “...in which students gain knowledge and skills by working for an extended period of time to investigate and respond to a complex question, problem, or challenge” (Knoll 1997, 59). PBL has not only been found to improve academic achievement (Geier et al., 2008) but also has been credited with increase in student engagement and motivation (Thomas, 2000). PBL often begins with the teacher asking a question and students devising their own direction to solve the question (Thomas, 2000). Through PBL in an Arabic language arts classroom, students employ Arabic language to engage in complex reasoning and problem-solving skills. Organized around a central theme, the teacher can reinforce and expand students content knowledge of Arabic vocabulary as well as grammar and mechanics (Knoll 1997, 59). The PBL method would emphasize Arabic as a tool for written and oral communication that has everyday value.

Another method that has been found to be very effective in other language arts classrooms is The Workshop Approach. Pioneered by Lucy Calkin (1994), the Workshop

Approach starting in upper primary grades allows for extensive time of task for students' independent reading and writing. The Workshop Approach divides the classroom instruction into sections, where in the first part of the class the teacher gives a mini lesson focusing on one aspect of language (i.e., sentence structure). Then students engage in individual writing or reading. The advantage of this method in a language arts classroom is that it allows teachers to have explicit teaching time as well as develops students' autonomy in the writing and reading process (Calkin 2006). Another important outcome is that students have ample opportunities to practice different types of writing and working their way through the writing process. In a Reading Workshop, students are exposed to a vast quantity of texts. In the 2018 PISA teacher questionnaire teachers reported that the longest text that they used was only a few pages. Students need to be able to develop the skills, stamina and grit to handle longer texts. To increase student fluency, students need to be extensively and repeatedly exposed to texts of varying lengths and genres. The Workshop approach allows for this, once students are able to read fluently, while also enabling teachers to focus on specific aspects of mechanics as well as individualized learning by utilizing mini lessons in the classroom.

Recommendations for Policy Makers

Not only must teachers re-evaluate how they are conducting their classes, but policy makers can also support this shift in several ways. The most important is improving the quality of teacher preparation and teacher training programs. It is well documented that educators who have deep understanding and knowledge of their discipline and can implement effective pedagogy are the key to student success (Darling-Hammond 2000, Faour 2012, Taha 2017). While this combination of content and pedagogical knowledge is required in the licensure

process, it is also imperative for teacher preparation and training programs to offer and ensure that their graduates have both. Currently in the UAE preservice educators can either be prepared through a formal education program that focuses on general pedagogy or on Arabic Literature which focuses on the understanding of deeper topics in literature with heavy emphasis on literary critique and classical prose and verse. There are no federally funded Arabic language teacher preparation programs (ECAE, 2020). The establishment of such programs would provide an opportunity to set a high standard of training with modern and effective preparation for teachers.

It is not only important to have a strong preparation system for teachers prior to entering the classroom, but teachers who are already in the classroom must have the chance to develop and refresh their skills for the classroom. This is especially true of all teachers currently in the field using the new UAE Arabic content standards. As discussed above, Arabic teachers are currently attending professional development on a variety of topics but the professional development model being utilized does not guarantee long-term transfer of skills. A more effective model might be to have a continuous, bottom-up approach (Villegas-Reimers 2003). In this approach, schools, departments, and teachers are active stakeholders in deciding the focus of the program of professional development creating stronger teacher buy in. Most importantly, professional development needs to occur over a sustained duration (Darling-Hammond, Hyler, and Gardner 2017). Professional development which takes place over a sustained duration allows for learning that is both rigorous and cumulative. Furthermore, it gives teachers the opportunity to apply what they have learned in professional development with ongoing support in an iterative process, which is more likely to lead to sustained change.

Policy makers can also support the development of an evidence-based set of ‘best practices’ in the Arabic classroom similar to the Reading Panel’s (2000) in the United States.

The Reading Panel, consisting of a group of experts in the field of reading and education, was brought together by the US Government to assess the effectiveness of different reading approaches in English language arts (National Reading Panel 2000). This group made great headway in determining “best practices” on how to implement effective literacy and reading instruction in the United States. An Arabic language equivalent would require both energy and resources but would enable teacher education and professional development programs to have a strong research and evidenced-based repertoire of “best practices” to train teachers for the Arabic Language classroom.

Conclusion

In this chapter, we have attempted to highlight the current transformation in Arabic teaching and learning and its effects on teacher education in the UAE. Through many initiatives, the UAE government has tried to modernize and transition Arabic from a traditional focus on recitation and grammar to Arabic as a tool for communication and higher order thinking. This shift is strongly emphasized through the development of the 2017 Arabic language standards. However, despite this new direction for Arabic language arts, it is unclear if the standards approach has had any impact on classroom practices. Preliminary research shows that there has been little effect. A vital next step is to provide ongoing support for teachers in the implementation of these standards to help them transform their classrooms. This can be most effectively achieved through re-evaluating and redesigning Arabic teacher education and professional development practices. This type of support will ensure that teachers not only understand but can implement 21st century learning competencies in their classrooms and can help students to acquire them through the use of extensive reading of authentic Arabic texts of

varying genres. This will also ensure that modern theories of language learning and development as well as current methods might be implemented in the classroom. Giving teachers the skills and the sustained support to develop those skills will transform the Arabic classroom. It is through this change that students will be prepared for the knowledge economy and for a future that depends on its youth having the needed literacy skills.

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