Motivation and Methods in Learning Arabic in an AFL Environment

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Abstract:

Learning a second or other language has been closely associated with English for functional purposes for many decades. In a global context, English is perceived as a necessity for anyone wanting to progress in a career especially at the international level. However, in recent years with the shifting focus and locus of the worlds of business and finance, many have developed a keen interest in learning non-European languages such as Arabic and Chinese. The current paper considers a group of adults taking Arabic classes at their own expense in a non-Arabic speaking environment and outside of their everyday working lives. Aspects of language learning, in particular motivation and self-regulated learning are considered as factors in the learning process. The nature of the language to be learned is also examined with challenging features highlighted through the discussion. Participant responses are recorded and analysed in an attempt to note the interest in the learning process. The focus of the paper takes motivation in general and motivation as affected by the nature of Arabic and the language learning process into consideration.

Keywords: Arabic as a foreign language, motivation, methods, language challenges

1. Introduction

Learning a second language as an adult is viewed as challenging for a variety of reasons. One theory, that of the critical theory hypothesis, proposed by Lennenberg (1967), states that as a result of neurological changes in the brain, adults have difficulty developing full competency in any language if the acquisition or learning process does not begin before puberty. However, over recent decades several other factors, primarily psycholinguistic have been explored as factors in the success or otherwise of adults learning a second language. From a psychological perspective, motivation, attitude and self-regulation are viewed as major contributing factors to achievement of goals in language learning. A second factor is linguistic; languages are systemic and where the target language shares commonalities with the mother tongue, the learner is considered to have definite advantages over languages that differ considerably from the first language (L1). For European language speakers, Arabic, with its myriad differences, constitutes a language that can appear challenging. While Arabic is alphabetic it differs in its phonemes, phonetics, orthographic system, lexical items, syntax and text structure. Nevertheless in recent years, there has been a growing interest in learning Arabic as a second or other language. Up to the end of the 20th century, interest was primarily linked to those wishing to further their knowledge of Islam, a few development workers, academics and occasional travellers. In recent years in Ireland among other countries, interest in learning Arabic has widened beyond the desire to learn it for religious purposes. Some of this stems from greater contact with the Arab world in a more globalized context. Additionally in Ireland, Irish army peacekeepers have been stationed in South Lebanon with the UN peacekeeping initiative for a number of years and now acknowledge the benefits of learning the language of the host country. In addition to military personnel, a growing interest has been observed among private students willing to fund their own study of Arabic through participating in evening classes as an addition to their workdays. The current paper examines reasons why adult learners in a private language institute in Dublin are motivated to devote free time to learning Arabic as a second or other language and the linguistic challenges the language presents these learners. The study was conducted during the academic year 2012 – 2013.

2. Literature review

2.1 Psychological factors in the language learning process

Much work has been done on what motivates learners to study English and such studies frequently conclude that motivation is often instrumental and can lead to professional and financial benefits. (Gardner & Lambert, 1972) Few studies, however, have been conducted on the learning of other languages particularly among private students who often choose to study a language when there is no obvious instrumental gain. In motivational terms, the role of the first language is indispensable as an essential mode of communication within one's own culture and also as an integral part of one's personal and social identities. Moving to the acquisition or learning of a second language involves as Gardner (1985) suggests incorporating elements of a new culture (if the learning takes place in the host culture), in addition to the linguistic codes associated with the new language (Dörnyei, 1998). This can often prove challenging when learning an L2, particularly as learners are often adults and are either coping with or adjusting to a new culture, society and work or study environment. In the case of the current research, the adult learners have undertaken to study a new language, Arabic, in an environment, Ireland, where there is little or no exposure to the target language. In such situations the question of why learners undertake such a task, how they regulate their learning and how they cope with the challenges they face are all relevant questions.

Some work has been conducted in the USA on what motivates adults in a university setting to learn Arabic. Husseinli (2005) found among students surveyed at Yale University that main motivations or orientations for learning Arabic were "travel and world culture orientations, instrumental orientations and cultural identity." (p. 395) A further study carried out by Bouteldjoune (2012) identified the desire to learn Arabic in order to socialize with native speakers and build relationships with them as one of the primary motivating factors. While the USA has welcomed a large number of Arabic speaking immigrants over recent decades, and recognizes Arabic as a cultural language among the children of many of these immigrants, this is not the case in Ireland. Consequently, the motivation or orientation is more likely to be either for purely cognitive or intrinsic reasons or instrumental where a student might hope to find work in the Arabic speaking world.

Such situations highlight the importance of self-regulated learning, a factor described by Pintrich (2000) as "an active constructive process whereby learners set goals for their learning and attempt to monitor, regulate and control their cognition, motivation and behaviour, guided and constrained by their goal and the contextual features of their environment." (p. 553) According to Pintrich, the phases in self-regulation cover the whole learning process and in the early stages involve the creation of goals, activation of prior knowledge and of metacognitive strategies; in the case of language learning such activation involves acknowledgement that languages are systemic. Therefore, even when a language is totally new, the adult learner brings knowledge of how language works and metacognitive strategies from previous language learning experiences that can be re-applied to the new situation.

A further aspect of the self-regulation process is the recognition of the ease or difficulty of the task and the recognition of the capabilities that the learner brings to the task. Schunk (2005) explains that "task value beliefs include perceptions of the relevance, importance and usefulness of the learning" (2) and the liking the student has for the task. A further phase in the process is the learner's ability to monitor himself/ herself, manage the learning process and recognize strengths and weaknesses and overall progress in the course. Self-regulated learners are viewed as seeking help when needed and as having the ability to adapt their strategies to accommodate their development. With reaction and reflection, learners should be able to judge what they know or do not know and select the strategies they need to employ in order to improve. Much of this research has been conducted with high school students; however, the concept of self-regulated learning is intrinsic also to adult learning. Merriam (2001) summarises the five assumptions that underlie andragogy (methods for teaching adults) and these include ability to direct one's own learning, independence, identified learning needs or goals, desire to apply learning and intrinsic motivation. Some of these assumptions are still contested but I would argue that adults who undertake to devote some of their free time and money to learning another language for no apparent practical reason display to a great extent the ability to motivate themselves and to regulate their own learning. (See section on participants below)

2.2 Linguistic factors as key elements in the language learning process

The second factor to be considered in the current research is that of linguistic features of the target language. For years, contrastive language elements as key challenges in learning a second or other language were considered unfashionable and irrelevant (Gregg, 1995); however, it is now acknowledged (Kellerman, 1984; Kellerman & Sharwood Smith, 1986; Perdue, 1993; O'Brien 2010) that aspects of the target language, which differ greatly from the L1, may present

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specific challenges to the second or other language learner. Challenges, not all contrastive, in learning Arabic facing non-Arabic speakers can be classified as orthographic, morphological, semantico-grammatical and textual.

a. Orthography

The first challenge for beginner learners is clearly that of learning a new orthographic system. Some criticisms of the need to teach Arabic script to new learners have been made and some material for the teaching and learning of Arabic in recent times presents all material in the English alphabet (Arabic for Dummies, 2006). Additionally, many colloquial Arabic materials use English orthography as dialects are generally not written and those studying a dialect clearly intend to use it in the oral form. The Common European Framework (CEF) guidelines for basic language users make no mention of the introduction of a new script in the early stages of language learning and the focus is clearly on European languages that do not present the same challenges at the early stages. Perhaps the guidelines will need some revision given the growing interest in non-European languages particularly those of Arabic and Chinese.

Written Arabic is an alphabetic language consisting of 28 letters. It is also a phonetic language in which there is a direct relationship between the sound one hears and how it is spelt. In both these respects, the language presents little or no difficulty but there are other factors to be considered. Certain characteristics of Arabic orthography, it is argued by Ibrahim, Eviatar and Aharon-Peretz (2002), can slow the processing of the letters and for this reason they argue that learning to read in Arabic is harder than learning other languages. Two main features: the similarity of many Arabic letters with only the number and position of dots to differentiate one from another (Table 1) and the changing shapes of Arabic letter (Table 2) depending on the position of the word can complicate the processing of the letters in words and texts. (O'Brien, 2010).

Table 1. *Arabic letters with dots*

b	t	th	n	y	ي ن ث ت ب
r	z				ر ز
d	dh				ذ د
j	H	kh			خ ح ج

Maamouri (2006) points out that while the Arabic alphabet has just two letters more than that of English, there are over 60 base forms because of the changing shapes of letters given their location in a word. The following table gives examples of the shapes of one letter ه (somewhat equivalent to English 'h') in various positions:

Table 2. *Shapes of letter 'h'*

بَيْتِهِ وَالِدُهُ	رِهِ إِسمِها	هِوَ هَدِية	ه
as an attached letter representing 'his' joined to 'house' and as an independent letter because of the non-joining letter 'his father'	medial letter as in 'river' and as the suffix for her tacked on to the word 'name'	'h' as initial letter in 'he' and 'present'	'h' standing alone

The absence of diacritics representing short vowel signs and sounds on many words also presents challenges to deciphering a word and learners have to get used to the absence of these short

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vowels in texts. The following example illustrates the ambiguity that can arise from the absence of such diacritics:

Table 3. *Ambiguity with absence of diacritics*

teacher (female) mdrsah	مدرسة	school mdrsah	مدرسة
mudarrisah	مُدرِّسة	madrasah	مَدرَسَة

While Ibrahim et al's study (2002) examined the effects of Arabic orthography on early learners' identification of letter and grapheme to phoneme conversion and concluded that the characteristics identified in the Tables 1 and 2 present serious challenges to young Arabic learners, a similar conclusion could be drawn for adult learners (based on personal experience and informal discussions with learners). The complexity of Arabic orthography has been shown to slow down word recognition because of left hemisphere overload in the process of analysing graphemes and synthesizing these into words and text. Knowledge of topic and context to disambiguate meaning is a major strategy often leading to memorization of text.

However, in spite of such challenges, the benefits to learning the Arabic script are tremendous and essential if a learner is to acquire correct spelling, pronunciation, dictionary skills, vocabulary development and learn to read Arabic texts. Some of the features identified already such as absence of short vowels diacritics and the presence of symbols such as sukkun ْ, a small circle indicating silence or no vowel and shadda ّ illustrating the doubling of the consonant which, if not done correctly, can lead to ambiguity and confusion in transliteration. A good example of this can be found in the most common Arabic Muslim male name of Mohammad as illustrated in the following table.

Table 4. *Variety of spelling on one name*

English transliteration of name all found in use	Arabic name
Mohammad Muhammad Muhammed Muhamed Muhamad Mohamed Mehmed Muhammet Muhamet Mehmet	مُحَمَّد

With knowledge of the Arabic script, such confusion does not occur. In addition, the bonus attached to learning the script is that it is also useful in languages such as Farsi, Pashtu, Kashmiri and Uyghur.

Acquisition of individual Arabic consonants is generally not onerous and many resemble English consonants. The new sounds of (ain) ع and (ghain) غ along with differentiating between close sounds of the two Hs ح and ه are likely to be the most challenging. Diacritization or vocalization is the most challenging aspect of learning Arabic orthography. While English also has an abundance of short vowel sounds, these are always represented in the written form (bin, bun,

ban); Arabic short vowels are superscripts or subscripts and are rarely present in texts other than those for young learners, thus challenging even the most advanced student of Arabic at times and providing much discussion in Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP) session and computational and corpus linguistics. Mohamed & Kubler (2008) illustrate the confusion that can arise from the omission of short vowels:

Table 5. *Omission of short vowels*

I bought an analgesic from the pharmacy	اشتريت مسكن من الصيدلية.
maskan (home)	مَسْكَن
musakkin (analgesic)	مُسَكِّن
masakn (they (F) held)	مَسَكْن

Omission of shadda and sukkun can also lead to ambiguity as illustrated in the following table with words that follow similar consonant patterns but differ in short vowel structure

Table 6 *Omission of shadda and sukkun*

he went	ذَهَبَ
he gilded	ذَةَّبَ
gold	ذَهَب

Thus the importance of recognizing the semantic significance of short vowels, the shadda and sukkun should be clear. Learners have to learn to disambiguate such features in readings as they mature as readers into non-vocalized and more sophisticated texts.

b. Morphology

The second challenging area for learners of Arabic is that of morphology. Arabic is classified as an introflectional or synthetic language unlike English that tends towards a morphologically analytic language. An analytic language uses separate morphemes and grammatical words rather than inflections to express relations within a sentence. Of course, English is not a purely analytic language as we see with plural, progressive and possessive morphemes but it is much more so when compared with Arabic which employs inflections in the form of prefixes, infixes and suffixes to express tense, aspect, person, gender, number, voice and case.

The following table illustrates some of the grammatical morphological changes undergone by words in the formation of verb tense, person, noun plurals and possessive adjectives.

Table 7. *Grammatical morphological changes*

Translation	Transliteration	grammatical morphology
girl/ girls	bint/ banaat	بَنات بِنْت
pen/ pens	galam/ aagalaam	أقلام قَلَم
house/ houses	bait/ biiuut	بيوت بَيت
his book/ her book	kitaabuhu/ kitaabuhaa	كتابها كِتابُهُ

More recent teaching materials provide graded introductions to these features beginning with the most regular and moving on to more complex forms. A far more challenging aspect of morphological structure is that of derivation for the production of lexical items. The tri-lateral root system can generate many different variations with slight infix, prefix or suffix alterations as

illustrated in the following table that shows the many derivations from the tri-lateral root K-T-B and all connected to the basic meaning of KTB, to write:

Table 8. *Multiple lexical items from a single root*

he wrote/ inscribed/ recorded/ composed/ drafted	Kataba	كَتَبَ
to write/ to correspond with/ exchange letters with/ communicate with	Kataba	كَتَبَ
correspondence/ exchange of letters/ communication	mukaatabah	مُكَاتَبَة
book/ letter/ note/ message	Kitaab	كِتَاب
Bookish	Kutubii	كُتُبِيّ
writing/ handwriting/ inscription/ communication	Kitaabah	كِتَابَةً
documentary/ graphic	Kitaabiii	كِتَابِيّ
writer/ clerk	Kaatib	كَاتِب
notary public	kaatibu al'adl	كَاتِبُ العَدْل
bookseller/ librarian	Kaatib	
bookstore	maktabah	مَكْتبة
office/ desk/ bureau	Maktab	مَكْتَب
clerical work	'amal kitaabiii	عَمَلٌ كِتَابِيّ
Typewriter	aalah kaatibah	الَةٌ كَاتِبَة
to be destined/ fated (to be written)	Kutiba	كُتِبَ
to predetermine	kataba Allah	كَتَبَ الله
correspondent/ reporter/ newsman	mukaatib	مُكَاتِب
underwriter/ subscriber	muktatib	مُكْتَتِب

There are patterns and the three letters of the root always remain in the same positional relationship though with some infixes. The goal is to help learners develop an understanding of the word derivation process and to build skills in deriving lexical items from the base root; this is essential for effective use of an Arabic dictionary.

   c. Semantico-grammatical
Matching a concept to a form found in the new language can present difficulties for the elementary and pre-intermediate learner, in particular when the relationship between form and concept differs from the mother tongue.

   i.   One example of this is in the expression of time at the level of tense. All natural languages have systems for the grammatical realization of time and both Arabic and English employ verb forms to communicate some aspects of time. The temporal focus, however, differs as English is a tense language and Arabic is generally classified as aspectual (O'Brien, 2010). This means that the expression of time in Arabic is concerned more with the nature of the event than with the time relationship of the event to the speaker. The two Arabic verb forms indicate a perfective (completed event) and imperfective event (not completed or continued or was repeated several times). Thus a verb form may

refer to a habitual event or an event in progress with disambiguation provided in the adverbial time phrase as illustrated in the following example.

Table 9. *Habituality and progressivity*

Amna is writing a letter to her mother.	تَكْتُب آمنة رِسَالة إلَى أمِّهَا.
Amna writes a letter to her mother every day.	تَكْتُب آمنة رِسَالة إلَى أمِّهَا كل يوم.

In situations that are classed as habitual in the past, the concept of habituality is generally conveyed through the imperfective form of the verb together with the past form of the verb 'to be'. The same verb phrase is also used for past progressive and habitual events with the past marker indicated in the use of the verb 'kaan' (to be- past form). The Arabic perfective form generally expresses punctual and completed events in the past. The following table illustrates how the habitual event is communicated on the verb form in Arabic whereas past habituality in English is generally expressed through the adverbial phrase.

Table 10. *Past habituality and past punctual*

Amina played tennis yesterday.	لعبت أمينة التنس أمس.
Amina played tennis every day last year.	كانت أمينة تلعب التنس كل يوم العام الماضي.

Both imperfective and perfective Arabic verb forms (table 11) can encode the equivalent to the English present perfect with the imperfective indicating the English continuative present perfect in terms of an event that is still on-going and the Arabic perfective to illustrate the existential use of English present perfect.

Table 11. *English present perfect*

Ali has lived (been living) in Dublin for three years.	imperfective verb form in Arabic	يسكِن علي في دُبلِن لِمُدة سنة.
I have not seen him since Saturday.	perfective verb form in Arabic	ما رَأيْتُهُ مُنْذ يَوْم السَّبْت.

ii.　　Another example of conceptual and form differences are found in the expression of conditionality and possibility. In conditional clauses, verb choice can communicate the modality of the event in both languages. Choice between Arabic particles 'law' or 'idha' indicates the likely or unlikely nature of an event while the choice of verb form (perfective or imperfective) indicates time relationship between the event in the main clause and the conditional clause. The logic of sequence affects the choice of Arabic verb form so a likely event will have a verb in the conditional clause in the perfective form and the main verb in present or future form. An unlikely event is expressed through an imperfective verb form in the conditional clause thus giving the opposite of what constitutes verb choices in an English conditional clause as illustrated in the following table:

Table 12*. Conditionality*

If Mariam goes, I shall go with her.	إن ذهبت مريم، أذهب معها.
If you threw rubbish in the water, the fish would die.	لو رميت زبالة في الماء، فقد موت ألأسماك.
If you throw rubbish in the water, the fish will die.	إن رميت زبالة في الماء، سوف تموت ألأسماك.

These few examples illustrate some challenges faced by learners of Arabic at the grammatical and meaning interface.

d. Textual

As the learner graduates to reading paragraphs and longer texts, the stylistics of Arabic syntax can be confusing on occasion. The punctuation system differs from that of English and this is textual and semantic rather than systemic as English is. An Arabic text often depends on linking devices such as 'wa' and 'fa' to form a text in the way that English uses punctuation. (Sa'adeddin, 1987).   Repetition as manifested in Arabic texts may challenge learners' interpretation of what constitutes a good text. Stylistically, the systems are quite different and as Johnstone Koch (1991, p.27) points out "the texts I have examined are characterized by repetition on all levels: phonological, morphological, lexical, syntactic and semantic. We have seen repetition of form and content."

2.3 Materials

Materials for teaching Arabic as a second or other language according to communicative methodology is extremely limited for the reasons already referred to in the introduction i.e. that interest until quite recently was primarily for religious purposes and therefore most materials were designed for Qur'anic reading purposes. Another factor that influences the production of material is the diaglossic situation as dialect versions of Arabic vary considerably from one country to another. For that reason, language teachers in countries such as Egypt and Lebanon that host a number of language learning institutes generally focus on teaching communication through the local dialect and mostly concentrate on the spoken form. Few discourse analysis studies have been conducted on Arabic as a language and therefore the analysis to inform the development of material in Modern Standard Arabic hardly exists. Some more communicative material has been produced with the increasing interest in Arabic as a foreign language but much still needs to be done. Some existing materials, Mastering Arabic Book 1, along with teacher-developed materials were used with the students who participated in this research.

3. Participants:

Participants were all enrolled in a private language school in Dublin and were studying in their own time. Each participant was informed of the purpose of the research, given details on ethical issues in research participation and given the choice to participate or not. In total, 50 students participated all of whom were studying the language at elementary and pre-intermediate levels. Table 13 shows the range of first languages of participants although most speak English both at home and in the workplace naturally as English is the medium of communication in Dublin.

Table 13 *Number of participants*
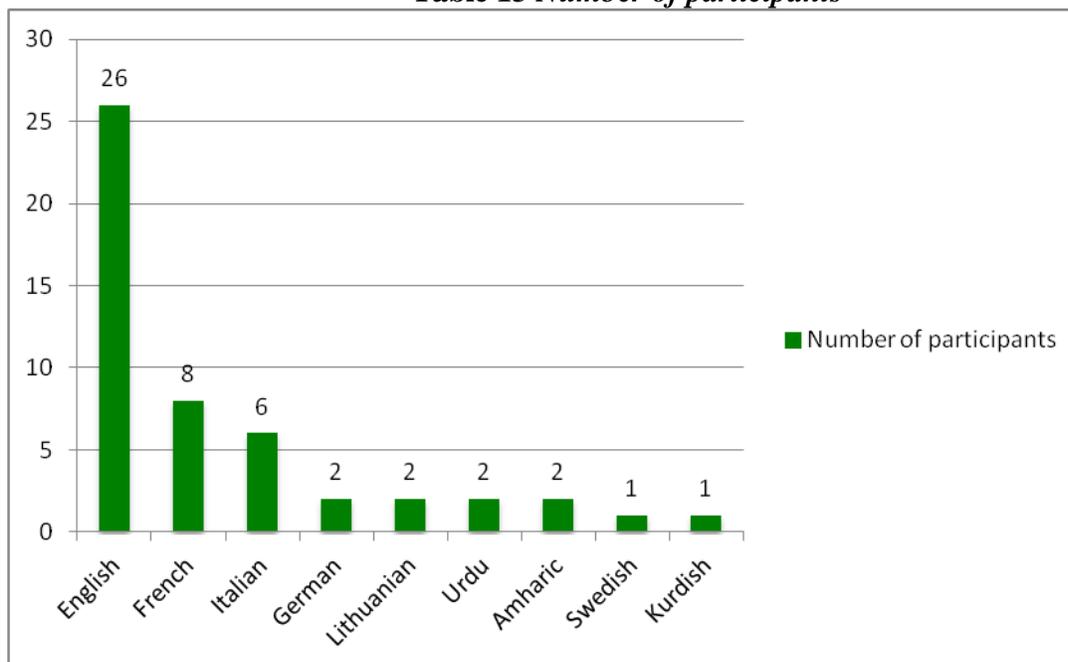
Participants were asked to complete a questionnaire containing a total of 20 questions that explored their reasons for learning Arabic and included issues ranging from exposure to Arabic on a daily basis, travel to Arabic speaking countries, general motivation for learning the language and the linguistic challenges faced in learning Arabic. The questionnaire was administered at the conclusion of classes and participants were assured that all responses would be categorized according to linguistic origins but no names would be used. It was reiterated that the purpose of the survey was purely for academic research purposes.

4. Results

4.1 Overview

Initial questions asked were aimed at providing an overview of motivational factors for learning Arabic and the use of other languages in day-to-day life. All participants were enrolled in Arabic courses at levels 1 and 2 that would be classed as beginner and elementary. Participants were first asked to indicate the language they spoke most widely on a daily basis, at home, work and in social settings. Of the 50 participants 39 speak English at home, 48 at work and 38 in social settings. Other languages spoken at home included: French (2), Mandarin (1), Polish (1), German (1), and Italian (1).

Participants were asked about their exposure to Arabic through either visiting or living in an Arabic speaking country. While few have lived in the Arab world (1 in each of Algeria, Sudan, Saudi Arabia, Lebanon, and 2 in Egypt), several have visited Arabic speaking countries.

Motivational factors for learning Arabic varied widely and are illustrated in the pie chart below.

Table 14. *Reasons for learning Arabic Font size inside the table should be 12*
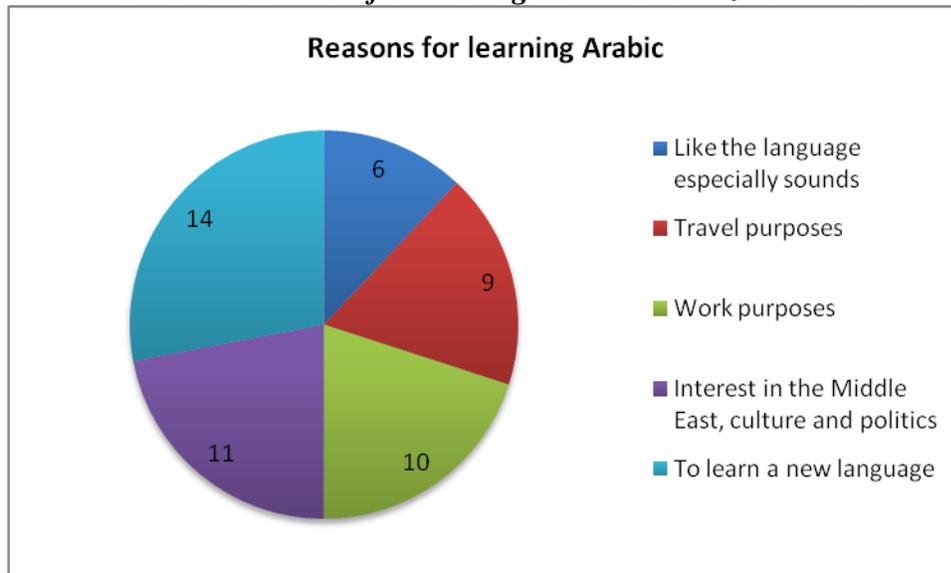
Learning another language at a young age would appear to be a factor contributing towards their interest or motivation for learning Arabic with 80% indicating that they had learned a second language at a young age.

4.2 Challenge of learning Arabic
A number of questions focused specifically on what aspects of learning Arabic that proved most challenging (questions 14-19) for them As the research was conducted with those who are in the early stages of learning Arabic, the questions are concerned with issues that arise in early lessons.

Table 15 *Challenges of learning Arabic*

Aspects of Arabic	Number of responses that highlight these as difficult
Sounds of the letters	28
Shapes of the letters	14
Differentiating between letters that look the same	18
Recognising how letters change shape in a word	13
Joining letters	11
Letters that do not join	2
Joining letters to make words	8
Letters that change shape in a word	11
Spelling words	6
Learning new words	28
Reading sentences in a story	30

4.3 Correlation between participant profile and language challenges

Having outlined the important linguistic backgrounds and language use of the participants, it is important to correlate this with the aspects of the language which they find challenging. This is in order to understand the relationship of prior linguistic education on learning Arabic, which is considered a particularly difficult language to master. The first language of the participants was used as the dependent variable on which the different challenges indicated were assessed. Of the 50 participants, slightly over 50% (26 participants) are native English speakers, the language through which Arabic is being taught at the early stages of learning and which is the home language of just over 80% of the participants. A Pearson's chi-squared test ($\chi 2$) was applied to the data to evaluate how likely it was that any observed differences between the various first language speakers were a factor in what aspects of Arabic they found challenging. The table below highlights some the results for the different tests run.

Table 16. *Correlations*

Challenge	Pearson chi-square result
Sounds of the letters	0.16
Shape of letters	0.42
Differences between letters that look the same	0.33

It is clear that the participants' first language has no significant impact on what learners find challenging in learning Arabic. The differences in their experiences would seem to indicate that motivational factors have the greatest impact on their success. Motivation and self-regulation as learners were identified in the literature review as vital ingredients contributing towards success in language learning. Participants in the current study indicated that their motivation could primarily be classed as integrative as only 20% focused on an instrumental motivating factor, work purposes, as the main driving impetus. Clearly, participants have involved themselves in the pre-actional process stage of learning language by identifying their reasons for undertaking the course and clarifying their goals. As indicated, these are mainly cultural, travel, desire to learn a new language and finally work purposes. The discussion on the language challenges allows post-actional reflection of the stages of the learning process.

The opportunity to reflect on the learning experience provided an opportunity to identify aspects of learning Arabic that are challenging. Discussion of the various aspects of Arabic above indicated elements that differ and could present challenges. Some sounds of Arabic are similar to those of English but in particular it was indicated that the emphatic letters including the emphatic H, T and S are challenging. These sounds are very easily mistaken for their less emphatic counterparts especially for native speakers of English and while teaching materials stress these letters, in continuous speech it is not always easy to tell the difference between the emphatic and non-emphatic. When we speak about the difference between children and adults learning a language, this area of pronunciation and recognition of sounds is relevant to the discussion. It is generally easier for children to hear, practice and perfect those sounds that are alien to one's L1. One explanation often suggested for this is children's lack of self-consciousness and willingness

to imitate and practice what they hear. Some participants, however, indicated that learning the sounds was easy and these mainly were those whose L1 is not English.

Grammatical aspects of Arabic that were highlighted as difficult were mainly verbs, gender, plurals and case endings of nouns and the concept of the dual. Verbs, in particular for native English speakers present challenges for two main reasons: the inclusion of the personal pronoun in the initial part of verb form and the changing end structure of the verb according to the person being referred to. This is generally a challenge in the early stages of learning Arabic but as learners move along they are likely to find that verb acquisition in terms of tense and aspect becomes less complicated. In terms of nouns, English has a biological gender where males are referred to with a specific pronoun, females with another pronoun and everything else as neuter 'it'. Therefore, for most native English speakers learning gender in another language is generally a challenge even with European languages. This is true also for the concept of case as English does not have case ending and depends on word order to disambiguate the relationship between nouns in a sentence. Plurals with the system of infixes, even for native speakers of Arabic, are challenging.

5. Conclusions and Recommendations:

This study was exploratory and focused on elementary and beginner levels in learning Arabic. While the study was brief, it has helped to highlight aspects of why adults undertake learning a second and foreign language in an environment that would be classed as input impoverished. It has also focused on the fact that Arabic is a language that many are interested in learning because of the challenges involved and because of interest in the culture and society of Arabic speaking countries. It was also pointed out that materials for the teaching of Arabic communicatively are in short supply and it would be beneficial to develop materials based on a functional systemic analysis of the language. This would greatly facilitate the teaching and learning of the language for practical everyday communication.

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