

Critical Language Awareness in Arabic Language Teaching: Five Modules for Professional Development © 2024 by Saurav Goswami, Esha Mukherjee, Rima Elabdali, Hina Ashraf, & Lourdes Ortega, at Georgetown University's Initiative for Multilingual Studies with funding from Qatar Foundation International, is licensed under [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International](#).

Note on how to use this module: We have designed this teacher development module for an audience of teachers of Arabic working with k-12 students (any context, any level). The module can be completed in 1.5 hours. You will find 5 modules like this one. Each can be used alone. If you want to use them all, we have numbered them 1 through 5 to suggest a beneficial sequence. We'd love your feedback! Just email us at lourdes.ortega@georgetown.edu.

Module 3

How does your identity impact your teaching?

Goal: Teachers will discuss and reflect on their own ethnolinguistic identities and how they may shape the classroom.

Introduction for Workshop Leader

When teaching Arabic as a foreign language in the US classroom, teachers often reflect on their own identities and how it influences their instruction. Teachers of Arabic come from different backgrounds, and learn the language in different ways. Some may come from Arabic-speaking backgrounds, like those who moved to the US as adults, or those with Arab heritage who grew up in the US. Meanwhile other teachers may have learned Arabic as a foreign language themselves in secondary school or in college. Students, parents, and teachers may have different perceptions of such teachers. Some find the most value in learning from someone who grew up speaking Arabic while others believe that non-Arab teachers serve as a model of success for students learning the language for the first time. For all teachers of Arabic, their linguistic and ethnic background can contribute to different senses of personal connection with the language. In the following dialogues, read about how teachers from varied linguistic and ethnic backgrounds talk about their relationship with Arabic, and how it shapes their classroom.

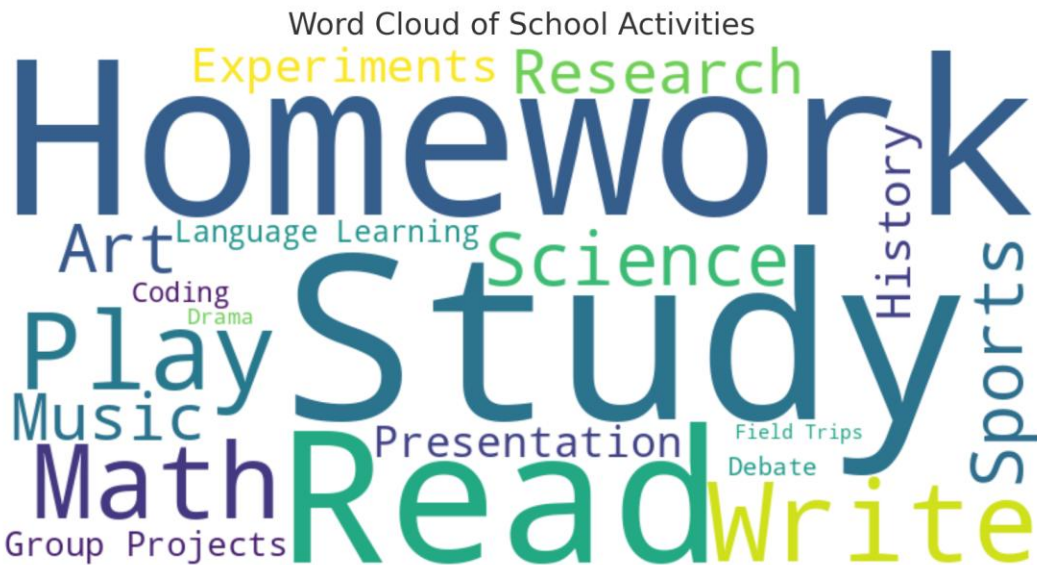
Please note that the module ends with an *Exit Ticket*, which is a reflective activity that teachers will individually fill out and submit to the workshop leader. The exit ticket should be handed out to participants as the last workshop activity.

For Participants

Part 1: Pre-activity

Take 10 minutes to think about the following question: *What traits or characteristics do you associate with yourself as a teacher of Arabic?* Now, create a Word Cloud showing the words you came up with. Share this with your colleagues. Here is a website to create word clouds: <https://www.wordclouds.com/>

For example, here's a word cloud illustrating various activities students engage in at school. The size of each word reflects its relative prominence or frequency:



Part 1: Perform these role-plays

Listen to the conversation between David and Amal, and Jessica and Mary, who are chatting about their personal backgrounds in Arabic, and teaching it to their students:

Dialogue 1

David and Amal met each other for the first time at an Arab cultural festival. During their chat, they discovered that they are both teachers of Arabic. David teaches at a private school, and Amal at an Islamic school.

David: I learned Levantine Arabic while growing up in Lebanon, and then came to the US as a teenager. I went back and forth between Lebanon and the US with my family. Though I am much better at English and Spanish, I decided to teach Arabic at a private school because it is part of my heritage.

Amal: So you speak many languages and still choose to teach Arabic! I grew up in Egypt and after college, I came to teach Arabic in the US in an Islamic school here. It is my first language.

David: Ah, so do you teach your class Egyptian Arabic?

Amal: I teach *FusHa*, but I always share my Egyptian dialect with them. What do you teach?

David: I also teach *FusHa*, but I prefer Levantine words. I love both, though we don't speak Arabic at home.

Amal: I love Arabic too! Being a native speaker, it's something I adore. It's *my* language, my *identity*. When you teach a language you love, and it's a part of you, it will be reflected on your students.

David: Yes, I agree. Your students see your passion.

Amal: Exactly. Yeah, especially if the topic is difficult, I ask them to compare with Egyptian dialect because it is so common. I tell them, "Go home. Ask your parents if they heard this at all in Egypt". So being a native speaker, it helps me feel more confident when I'm teaching. But I also have a colleague who is Somalian. He did not grow up speaking Arabic, but he teaches *FusHa*. He is an excellent teacher.

David: So he is not a native Arabic speaker, but still a good teacher?

Amal: Definitely. Just because you know Arabic from childhood, doesn't mean that you will be good at teaching it. If you love what you are doing, you will excel, and you will be able to teach well.

David: I agree. Love for the language is most important, and teaching skills don't come from growing up with the language only.

Dialogue 2

Jessica and Mary met for the first time at a professional development workshop for teachers of Arabic. They both discovered they teach middle school students in public schools in different areas of the United States.

Mary: As someone also who didn't grow up speaking it, how do other people react to your Arabic?

Jessica: In general, I think people are surprised that I speak Arabic. They're just like, "wait, you speak Arabic? Like you're fluent in Arabic?" You know, it's surprising to them. People who are Arab, though, are usually also surprised but also very enthusiastic and encouraging.

Mary: Yeah, I also find Arabs to be very encouraging. Maybe it's because I'm brown, but people are not usually shocked that I speak Arabic. They do get surprised at the Egyptianness of my accent!

Jessica: Oh! Do you teach the Egyptian dialect then?

Mary: Yes, I mostly teach the Egyptian dialect. I'm most comfortable speaking it, and I think it's important to reflect the real world in the classroom, so I speak mostly in dialect.

Jessica: That makes sense. I also teach some Levantine dialect, but my more comfortable language is definitely. I have a lot of students from Arabic-speaking backgrounds though, so I encourage them to share their dialect, and I try to include other authentic sources when teaching them too.

Mary: Yeah, it can be tricky, especially when you did not grow up speaking a dialect or learn one in college.

Jessica: Yes, I think it's nice that my students can see me as an example of someone who became fluent in Arabic. As a white person though, I feel very conscious of the fact that I'm teaching a language that is not my personal culture and language. I was aware of it when teaching French, but with Arabic it's different. I think there is a racial and ethnic element here.

Mary: That makes sense. I want my students to understand that there are different languages and different cultures, and they're all equally valid. I think in the US, where everybody speaks English and everybody subscribes to this primary culture, there's this sense that there's one right way to do things and Arabic literally flips that, you know, like you write in the opposite direction, and most kids that I work with, that is mind blowing to them.

Jessica: Exactly. When I taught French, it felt different than teaching the language and culture of a group that is minoritized in the US. I feel like part of my responsibility as a teacher is to make my students aware of the stereotypes and their misconceptions of the language and the culture.

Part 2: Create your dialogue in pairs

With a partner, take 10 minutes to discuss your own backgrounds and how it shapes your teaching. Based on your discussion, create a short dialogue.

Part 3: Reflect in Whole-Group Discussion

- In what ways do the teachers' backgrounds affect their teaching of Arabic in their classroom?
- In what way do the teachers' backgrounds influence their Arabic teaching profession?
- How is identity important?
- Do you have colleagues who also teach Arabic? How are your backgrounds similar or different? How does this influence your individual teaching practices?

Exit ticket

Fill out your thoughts about the main topic of this module: teachers' identity and background in the Arabic classroom.

1. What is one takeaway from the conversations that you can apply to your own teaching?
2. Go back to your word cloud. Are there any changes or additions you would make?

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