Evaluating the quality of STARTALK Program for Teaching Heritage and Non-heritage Arabic Language Learners

Wafa Hassan
Western Michigan University

Abstract

STARTALK is a federally funded program launched as a new component of the National Security Language Initiative (NSLI) announced by former President Bush in January 2006 to increase the number of Americans learning and speaking foreign languages, and to provide students at all levels of education with an opportunity to learn the foreign languages of their choice. It is also designed to offer teachers of foreign languages creative teaching strategies to exemplify best practices in language education and in professional development. This study was conducted at Michigan State University to evaluate the quality of a specific STARTALK training program designed for teachers of heritage and non-heritage Arabic language learners. The study participants included 16 teachers and 30 heritage and non-heritage high school students. Two different survey instruments were used to collect data from the participating teachers and students. The data collected for the study were analyzed through the use of quantitative and qualitative methods. The findings indicated that both heritage and non-heritage groups have generally demonstrated positive attitudes towards Arabic language learning. The two groups, however, differed significantly in their perceptions towards the importance and the use of Arabic language in the context of the United States. The findings also revealed positive attitudes of the participating students towards the quality of the program activities. The study further revealed positive attitudes of the participating teachers towards the quality of their training program. Based on the significant findings of the study, it was concluded that the program has been successful since both students and teachers indicated that they were satisfied with the program activities. It was also

concluded that the study findings can be properly applied for conducting any successful language learning program. Several recommendations were made by both students and instructors to further improve the quality of the program activities. A number of suggestions were also made for future implementation of similar projects.

Introduction

STARTALK is a federally funded program designed to expand and improve both student learning and teacher training in strategically important implementation of world languages across the nation. As listed by the federal government, its three major missions are: (a) to stimulate significant increases in the number of students enrolled in the study of critical languages; (b) to increase the quality and supply of teachers of critical languages throughout the nation; and (c) to improve the quality of critical language curricula. It also provides student and teacher programs with curriculum templates, knowing that a common template design will facilitate instructional strategies and quality materials. The common templates are designed to capture best practices in curriculum, instruction, and assessment strategies. Since its foundation, STARTALK has formed an extensive community of practice that seeks continuous improvement in such criteria as outcomes-driven program design, standards-based curriculum planning, learner-centered approaches, and excellence in development of materials.

Today, a number of institutions are funding or offering a variety of STARTALK programs to expand foreign language learning throughout the United States. The National Foreign Language Center (NFLC, 2006), for example, is dedicated to promoting a language-competent society by developing and disseminating information that can help policy makers in implementation of various related programs. The main mission of the NFLC is to enhance the capacity of the United States to communicate in languages other than English. This mission can be accomplished by intensive and innovative strategic planning and development with globalized, organizations, institutions, and enterprises throughout the nation. Therefore, the NFLC solicits proposals from school districts, post-secondary institutions, state and regional educational agencies, language associations, and community-based

organizations to participate in the STARTALK programs. In this case, the mission is to promote the learning and teaching of critical languages in the United States through summer sessions that follow best practices in language instruction. The NFLC also seeks to influence public policy by systematically identifying and describing the consequences of unmet needs for languages in United States society. In addition, the NFLC researches and advocates policy and strategy at all levels of government to develop needed language capabilities within the United States. Finally, armed with research findings, the NFLC reaches out to improve the quality of STARTALK programs through the following resources: (a) federal, state, and local government, including diplomacy, trade, defense, national security, and public services such as health care and the justice system; and (b) business education, and industry, especially language for international business and for a linguistically diverse domestic population.

The National Security Language Initiative program (NSLI, 2006) also seeks to expand and improve the teaching and learning of strategically important world languages that are not now widely taught in the United States. Other programs under the NSLI umbrella include the National Security Education Program (NSEP) of the United States Department of Defense, study abroad and exchange programs of the United States Department of State, and Title VI of Fulbright Hays programs of the United States Department of Education. Funded by the United States Department of Education, teaching materials for learning foreign languages have been developed to provide online lessons aimed at beginning and intermediate students of the language. The materials specifically respond to a rapidly growing interest in Arabic language study among secondary school students. Using a variety of topics selected to interest high school students, the materials reflect the national standards established for Arabic under the sponsorship of the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages as well as the latest principles in online instructional design. The materials may be easily used by individual learners who would like to study on their own or by teachers assigning them for individual or group learning.

Many institutions of higher education offer a variety of the STARTALK programs during the summer for teacher preparation to teach foreign languages to K-16 students by implementing a variety of methods and procedures including formal classroom instruction,

interpersonal communication, field trips, and group or individual project presentations. Needless to say that each project has its own goals and objectives; but as far as to the foreign language learning concern, the National Standards for Foreign Language Learning has set up a number of specific goals for teaching foreign languages through the STARTALK programs. As follows, Lawrence (2006) suggests five major goals for implementing such programs stipulated by the National Standards for Foreign Language Learning.

Goal 1: Communication

- Interpersonal Communication: Students engage in conversation, provide and obtain information, express feeling and emotion, and exchange opinions.

- Interpretive Communication: Students understand and interpret written and spoken language on a variety of communication topics.

- Presentational Communication: Students present information, concepts, and ideas to an audience of listeners or readers on a variety of topics.

Goal 2: Cultures

- Practices and Perspective: Students demonstrate an understanding of the relationship between the practices and perspectives of the culture studied.
- Products   and Perspectives: Students demonstrate an understanding of the relationship between the products and perspectives of the culture studied.

Goal 3: Connections

- Knowledge of Other Disciplines: Students reinforce and further their knowledge of other disciplines through the foreign language.

- Distinctive Viewpoints: Students acquire information and recognize the distinctive viewpoints that are only available through the foreign language and its cultures.

Goal 4: Comparisons

- Nature of Language: Students demonstrate understanding of the nature of language through comparisons of the language studied and their own.

- Culture: Students demonstrate understanding of the concept of culture through comparisons of the cultures studied and their own.

Goal 5: Community

- Beyond the School Setting: In addition to within the school setting, students use foreign language learning beyond the school setting.

- Life-long Learners: Students show evidence of becoming life-long learners by using the language for personal enjoyment and enrichment.

Since its creation, STARTALK has provided learning opportunities in critical languages for students (K-16) and professional development for teachers of critical languages, primarily through summer programs. The project is being continued through 2014 with the goal of establishing programs in all 50 states. Currently, programs are being implemented in Arabic, Chinese, Dari, Hindi, Persian, Russian, Swahili, Turkish, and Urdu.

Background

According to a study by Lowis (2009), there are approximately 322 million Arabic native speakers and roughly 422 million total speakers around the world. In fact Arabic is the commonly spoken Semitic language throughout the world. Arabic is distinguished by the diversity of its varieties, thus different populations have different dialects

of the language. The colloquial form of Arabic changes by region and by certain social and societal factors, including education, socio-demographic and socioeconomic circumstances. However, standard Arabic language is widely taught in many schools, universities, and used in the media, workplaces, and government.

Due to the considerable cultural diversity in the United States, since the early 2000s, there has been an increasing call for the teaching and learning of critical languages such as, Arabic, Chinese, Hindi, Korean, Persian, Portuguese, and Russian. A study by the Modern Language Association (Welles, 2004) indicates that undergraduate enrollment in Arabic courses has doubled each year since the beginning of the 2002-2003 academic year.

Since September 11, 2001, teaching Arabic in the United States has become the focus of more attention from the educational community. In August 2002, the United States Department of Education created the National Middle East Language Resources at Brigham Young University to focus on languages of Middle East (Morrison, 2003). As indicated by Morrison, the funding for this program reflected the federal government's growing awareness of the need to focus on enhancing the nation's understanding of Middle East affairs and languages. While at the time teaching Arabic in elementary and secondary schools was not nearly as the teaching of Western European languages such as French, German, and Spanish, there has been an increased demand for teaching Arabic, particularly in private schools (Morrison, 2003).

During the summers of 2007-2013, Michigan State University offered successful STARTALK professional development programs for teachers of Arabic. In the previous programs the emphasis was on incorporating the National Standards for Foreign Language Learning in the 21st Century into the curriculum to enhance instruction. During the first year instructional activities concentrated on communication. The second year addressed culture and connections to other content areas. In the third year the program was emphasized on communities and comparisons. In the remaining two years the program was mainly focused on putting it all together. In addition, the focus of attention was centered around the differentiated language instruction, where teachers teach to all kinds of students, including heritage, non-heritage, and native speakers in their Arabic classrooms. As a result a model was

adopted that allowed participants: (a) to attend training workshops during the morning; (b) to observe the modeling of how to teach Arabic using only the target language; and (c) to obtain opportunities for teachers to teach, review, reflect, and re-teach interactive and communicative Arabic lessons to all kinds of students. Students participated in the afternoon sessions creating real classroom environments where teachers applied their new professional skills. The 2011 program was a true success as perceived by program evaluation of the participating teachers and students. The ultimate success was happened when the program continued to provide students with Arabic instruction during the year through an after school sessions. Students who participated in the summer program did also ask their school principals for the opportunity to continue learning Arabic by participating in the after-school program. As a result of the 2011 and 2013 programs, the participated students who were from a high school in Detroit city were able to continue their Arabic study when their school offered four Arabic language classes among other foreign languages offered to their students.

Purpose of the Study

As part of a new plan to strengthen ties with K-12 schools, to advocate for Arabic language learning, and to promote the goals of the program, the current study examined the quality of the STARTALK program designed for teaching heritage and non-heritage Arabic language learners. The study is a part of a series of activities including student participation and evaluation of the program activities, teacher participation in preparation workshop, teacher implementation of the program activities, and teacher feedback and evaluation of the program effectiveness. The study was also designed to seek opinion of the participating teachers about the quality of the STARTALK training program. The study was further designed to determine the perception of heritage and non-heritage students regarding the quality of instruction through the STARTALK program.

Attitudes towards language learning: Attitudes are an integral part of language learning, as they are believed to influence one's behaviors. Weinburgh (1998), for example, explains that positive attitudes towards

foreign language learning bring on behaviors that support and enhance language learning, such as selecting and reading books in the foreign language. Researchers offer multiple definitions of the construct of "attitude". Rokeach (1968) defines attitude as "A relatively enduring organization of beliefs around an object or a situation, predisposing one to respond in some preferential manner" (p. 12). Brown (1994) adds "Attitudes, like all aspects of the development of cognition and have affect in human beings, develop early in childhood and are the result of parents' and peers' attitudes, contact with people who are different in any number of ways, and interacting affective factors in the human experience" (p.168). Consequently, attitudes can be regarded as a learned behavior that is formed early on during childhood as a result of different stimuli and can have an evaluative preferential reaction. According to Rosenberg and Hovland (1960), attitudes consist of three components: the cognitive, the affective, and the behavioral components. The cognitive component consists of one's perceptions and beliefs of a concept and/or a situation. The affective component refers to one's emotional reactions towards that concept and/or situation. The behavioral component refers to one's tendency to behave in a certain way towards the concept and/or situation.

Literature Review

In a seminal piece by Husseinali (2006), Arabic heritage learners were described as having several motivations driving their study of Arabic. By presenting the opinions of all learners of Arabic who felt an affiliation to the language due to familial and/or religious backgrounds, the study illustrated that of what qualifies as a "heritage learner" can be anyone from a wide range of background that a heritage learner is not simply a person whose family speaks Arabic. The notion of heritage learner was also linked to a sense of connection to the language and a means of learning about one's self. However, the focus on postsecondary students draws on an assumption that all heritage language learners inherently feel an inclination or sense of affiliation to their heritage language that motivates them to learn the language. The article seems to indicate that while their motivations vary for any number of individual and social reasons, heritage learners are, overall, motivated to start with. Another work by Ibrahim and Allam (2006)

which classified types of college level heritage students seems to intimate the same; indicating that heritage learners somehow feel a connection to their heritage language. The idea then, is that these students feel motivated already to learn Arabic.

In examining the situation of heritage learners at the K-12 level, however, students' motivation to learn the language is much less clear. The literature includes no survey of K-12 Arabic heritage learners' attitudes towards their language, or towards learning it, nor how it might change across the educational spectrum. What many educators at the K-12 level report, however, anecdotally suggests that K-12 learners of Arabic tend to be uninterested in the language, and even uncomfortable about admitting that they speak the language, in some extreme cases. The documentary "I Speak Arabic," dated 2003, makes it clear that broader social attitudes towards the Arabic language and the Arab culture shapes kids' attitudes towards learning the Arabic language.

Social and political factors, including current negative stereotypes perpetuated by entertainment and news media, surround the Arabic language and Arab cultures and communities. Such factors may exert a powerful influence on K-12 students' attitudes and level of interest in the language and culture, though it is not clear how precisely. Heritage learners of Arabic at the K-12 levels face the socializing effects typical of grade school, and they are more susceptible to the peer pressure and the powerful urge to conform to the mainstream, rather than explore a unique feature of their own identity. Interestingly, literature seems to indicate that the early efforts among Arab immigrants to teach Arabic never quite took hold as immigrants strived to integrate themselves with the local culture rather than stand out. It cannot be assumed that heritage learners of Arabic at K-12 level are intrinsically motivated to learn the language of their home (Husseinali, 2006).

A quick overview of literature on heritage and non-heritage learners reveals that little information exists on the affective and social benefits of mixed classes. In particular, when considering languages that may suffer mainstream stigmatization or prejudices, a gap exists in the research on the role of interactions between heritage and non-heritage learners. It is unknown if and how shared learning experiences among heritage and non-heritage learners might counter or somehow mitigate social stigma towards a language and culture, if at all. Still further, it is unclear if a shared learning experience with non-heritage learners would

foster more positive affective responses to the language and maybe serve as a motivator via the collective experience of exploring and learning the language. In fact, the literature is largely silent on what exactly motivates K-12 heritage learners (of Arabic or otherwise) to actually feel an interest in learning the language of their culture.

The literature does, however, reveal that how students self-identify as heritage or non-heritage learnersmay not be as static as once perceived (Lee, 2011) and that the categories of "heritage" and "non-heritage" are far from homogenous (Fishman, 2001). Experts refer to the term "heritage language learner" as bearing an elastic quality (Wiley, 2001). In fact, the labels may provide somewhat of an inaccurate picture when considering their implications for differentiating instruction and assessment and/or cultural affiliation. Typically, it is assumed that "heritage learners", by virtue of having a foreign language in their home or family background, automatically possess an ethno-cultural attachment to the language and learning it. This may or may not be the case as well.

Definitions of heritage and non-heritage learners too often focus not on how the learners themselves identify themselves and relate to their heritage language, but on how they might be characterized in terms of their knowledge and abilities in discrete linguistic skills, or their desire to learn the language. This strategy for defining heritage and non-heritage learners was guided by questions of differentiating learning experiences. However, if examining definitions from the learners' self-identifications, the question then becomes, what implications does this have for learning in combined learning tracks for heritage and non-heritage students? The opinions might be as numerous as the experts. If one takes the opinion of mutual benefit for the learners in combined/non-differentiated courses, the question to be investigated is whether students in such learning settings can in fact benefit from one another if mixed in the same classroom setting affectively, and in turn, motivationally, socially, and linguistically.

The affective element of learning a heritage language remains a greatly under-explored aspect of heritage and non-heritage language learners' experience. It is still unclear what role positive or negative affects in motivation to learn a heritage language. Experts have long shown that social contexts surrounding language learning have a strong impact on the motivation of learners (Allard & Landry, 1994; Gardner,

1985a; Giles & Byrne, 1982; Kim, 1992; Landry & Bourhis, 1997; Sung, 1998; wen, 1997). Others have also shown that motivations for studying the Arabic language, at least at the post-secondary level, vary widely from personal to career-related to educational and everything in between (Fishman, 2001; Husseinali, 2006; Lee, 2011; Shaheen, 2009; Wiley 2001).

The role of the educational program, the community, the broader socio- and geo-political context, and the language itself all exert a role in shaping learners' attitudes and motivations for or against studying a language. Additionally, the literature (Valdes, 2001) has also shown that heritage learners have language learning needs to that differ from mainstream students. These facts might lead educators to question the efficacy of mixing heritage and non-heritage learners in the same classroom. Yet there is little expert evidence to indicate either detrimental or positive effects to such a setup, at least from the affective and motivational perspective. As heritage learners are affected by mainstream attitudes towards a language (Wiley, 2001), so too are non-heritage learners. For students of Arabic, specifically, the endeavor of learning Arabic is an endeavor of countering the trend of a language popularly demonized in public media (Shaheen, 2009). It may be of importance to heritage learner educators to better understand how shared learning experiences help shape language learning attitudes among learners of Arabic.

To date, there are not many studies, of which we are aware that examine how shared learning experiences in Arabic classrooms impacts Arabic heritage and non-heritage students. The issue of motivation in mixed heritage classroom settings may not be a new one. However, the literature provides little evidence of the social interactions between heritage and non-heritage learners and how they impact heritage learners' motivations for language learning. It is not clear what leads heritage learners' to develop positive attitudes towards learning Arabic or feel an emotional sense of attachment to, or pride in the language and culture.

As it was mentioned earlier, the literature has examined motivations of heritage learners of Arabic (Husseinali, 2006), but the questions still remain regarding not which goals drive learning, but what engages and encourages learners once they are in mixed heritage classrooms, and what motivates them once they are working together

and learning Arabic with their very different experiences and attitudes towards it. If heritage speakers in the past worked to adapt and integrate with mainstream culture, and now mainstream students are engaged in the learning of Arabic, this may serve as a catalyst for reconciling the tension heritage learners feel towards their home language, culture, tradition, and the broader society.

A study was conducted by Mona (2012) to examine the effectiveness of a STARTAL training program in professional development of a group of Arabic teachers. A survey instrument was used to explore perceptions of these teachers regarding the extent to which the major goals and objectives of the training have been achieved. The findings indicated that the training initiatives tend to emphasize on pedagogical knowledge and skills rather than content knowledge. The findings also indicated that such initiatives tend to focus on some Arabic teachers approach professional development with fundamental goal of gaining knowledge and skills rather than earning a degree.

A unique online training course was offered by the National Middle East Language Resource Center in July 2013 to help the interested Arabic teachers develop their own highly effective programs and share them with others. The course was designed to promote self-efficiency and strategic self-regulation in order to for produce the best learning outcomes. Participating teachers learned to build articulated learning sequences appropriate to their students' need and maturity in a manner to compete with national language learning standards.

A study was conducted by this investigator (Hassan, 2014) to evaluate the perceptions of a group of Arabic language teachers regarding their developing their professional skills. The findings indicated that among various components of the professional skills, implementing differentiated language instruction was perceived by the participating teachers to be the most important factor followed by integrating "in order of importance" technology and Arabic instruction, using effective learner-centered teaching strategies, using and maintaining Arabic language, implementing a standards-based curriculum, developing curriculum and thematic units, implementing performance assessment methods, and conducting constructive action research in Arabic instruction. It was concluded that Arabic language teachers needs certain training initiatives to improve the quality of their professional skills. Such initiatives included providing opportunities for

special workshops, facilitating teachers with appropriate teaching materials and other instructional tools as a part of curriculum development; designing and implementing appropriate curriculum suitable to the needs of teachers and students, creating a special network for Arabic language teachers to communicate with each other and to share their ideas for improving their students' learning process; and improving the quality of Arabic language teaching strategies by collecting appropriate data from these teachers and by implementing the most effective strategies recommended by the teachers.

In their interesting book, August and Shanahan (2006) have discussed on a broad number of issues related to teaching strategies and professional development of teachers of second-language learners. The authors mainly tackle on a variety of strategies for professional development of teachers with regard to five specific policies and procedures, including development of literacy among second-language learners, cross-linguistic relationships among second-language learners, socio-cultural context and literacy development, strategies for educating language-minority students, and student assessment. According to the authors, teachers' professional development will be assessed based on their quality of job performance as related to the aforementioned instructional strategies.

Qatar Foundation International is one of the most promising organizations which provide appropriate grants to numerous institutions of higher education and other educational organizations across the United States to offer best practices in teaching Arabic as a second language. It is a non-profit organization in the United States with a shared mission to connect cultures and advance global citizenship through the world of education.

During the fall semester of 2013, Alperson presented a year-around assessment of the STARTALK program conducted in Howard Community College through the use of three different instruments as follows:

Instructional Aide Weekly Survey. This instrument was developed and used by Alperson (2013) to reassess the STARTALK program initiated in Howard Community College. The findings indicate that the majority of students either completely or somewhat agreed with the following statements: (a) My role this week was clear; (b) I feel that I am

involved; (c) I can speak freely to the instructor; (d) I feel appreciated; (e) I understand why I am in the class; (f) I think the instructor values me for my skills; (g) I know each of my classmates and their names; (h) I feel part of Chinese/Hindi/Arabic/Farsi team; and (i) My classmates have been asking me questions.

Attitudes and Motivation Test Battery. This instrument is a paper and pencil measure of attitude and motivation regarding learning a second language which was developed by Gardner (1985b) and later on was adapted to the assessment needs of the STARTALK programs at Howard Community College. The instrument is wildly used in language acquisition studies and has four major components which are briefly defined as follows:

- Motivation: Desire to learn the language, and attitudes toward learning the language.
- Language Anxiety: Language class anxiety and language use anxiety.
- Integrativeness: Students' openness, interest, and orientation toward a second language.
- Parental Encouragement: The extent to which students are encouraged by their parents.

As a result of a pre and post test comparison of the STARTALK program, language anxiety among a group of students was significantly reduced at the end of participation in the program. However, while the program resulted in some changes due to motivation, integrativeness, and parental encouragement components of the instrument; these changes were not large enough to be statistically significant.

Intercultural Development Inventory. This is an online test written by Hammer (1998) based on a developmental model of intercultural sensitivity by Bennet (1986) and is wildly use by colleges and business industry. The instrument is designed on the basis of a cultural proficiency continuum from "Monocultural Mindset" to "Intercultural Mindset" and is well utilized in many research studies. It was administered at the first and last STARTALK classes offered and has four major components which are briefly defined as follows:

- Denial: Little recognition of more complex cultural differences.

- Minimization: Cultural commonality which can make deeper recognition of differences.
- Adaptation: Ability to shift cultural perspective and adapt behavior to cultural context.
- Acceptance: Cultural commonality and the difference between own and others' culture.

The instrument was utilized to determine students' perceived orientation (where they see themselves in the cultural proficiency continuum), students' developmental orientation (where the test see them in the cultural proficiency continuum), and students' orientation gap (showing the difference between their perceived orientation and their developmental orientation). Although there were some changes as a result of pre-test and post-test comparison of students' perceived orientation, students' developmental orientation, and students' orientation gap; these changes were not found to be statistically significant.

Arabic Language Teaching Through STARTALK Programs. This part of the literature presents a number of Arabic Language STARTALK programs offered by different institutions of higher education as well as several other public and private education institutions.

During the summer of 2013, a STARTALK program was offered by the Arabic Language and Culture Institute of Louisville, Kentucky, which was granted by the National Security Agency and the National Foreign Language Center. Participating students were immersed in the world of Arabic language and culture each day, practiced their language skills on an ongoing basis, as well as with Arabic speakers locally and internationally, through group Skype conversations to the Middle East. The primary purpose of the program was to provide students with verbal language skills to allow them to clearly and successfully communicate on a basic level with Arabic speakers. The Arabic Language and Culture Institute teaches critical language and culture skills through group classes, private lessons, and distance learning to students, schools, businesses and government personnel, allowing for success in a global world. The instructors of the Arabic Language Institute are native to the Middle East or North Africa, or are

Americans who have mastered Arabic and have significant experience in understanding of the cultures.

An Arabic language STARTALK program was offered to high school students during the summer of 2013 by Seattle Pacific University with a focus on serving minority and low-income applicants. A group of high school students from outside Seattle also attended with the condition that they arrange their own housing, transportation, and meals outside of the camp. The camp included two levels of Modern Standard Arabic. The main focus was on fostering language acquisition, intercultural understanding, and a desire for international travel. During the camp, Level 1 students learned basic writing, reading, listening, and speaking skills. Level 2 students applied their language skills and cultural knowledge in realistic simulations. The camp introduced students to practices and perspectives of the Arab-speaking world. Classes and activities during the camp emphasized on student-centered learning. Learning the Arabic language was reinforced through skits, role playing activities, music, cultural games, technology, and lessons from guest speakers. The last day of the camp was focused on student performances in a culminating showcase for classmates, family, and community members.

During the summer of 2013, Lincoln High School located in Des Moines, Iowa implemented a four-week Arabic program funded by the STARTALK. The purpose of the program was to motivate students to become active learners of languages, especially Modern Standard Arabic. The participating students were divided into ability groups for Novice, Intermediate, and Advanced learners. Students acquired proficiency in reading and communication about themselves, family, education, celebrations, and shopping. Students also participated in a food fair where they tasted and compared the foods and spices from the Arabic speaking countries. The daily activities included instruction in Arabic by native speakers, culture and art activities, physical activities, and use of technology for research, portfolio development, and language assessment. At the end of the program, each student earned one semester of high school credit for successful completion of the program.

The University of Chicago in collaboration with the Chicago Public Schools' Office of Language and Cultural Education offered a summer Arabic language course specifically designed for high school students with funding from STARTALK. This program provided

opportunities for the participating students who wanted to take their third year of high school courses in Arabic to consolidate their knowledge, continue the momentum of their language skills development, and prepare them for continued Arabic language studies. The students were taught by university faculty, received an official University of Chicago transcript with their grade, and had access to state-of-the-art learning facilities as well as special events that allowed them to practice their language and cultural skills. The DePaul Arabic STARTALK Student Program is an intensive immersion program for high school students interested in pursuing Arabic studies. The program was designed for two weeks in the summer and was held on weekdays for a total of 60 contact hours. After orientation, potential students were selected through an interview and placement test prior to the start of the program and placed in beginner and intermediate groups according to their test results. The participating students received standard-based instruction delivered by trained native speakers of Arabic. In addition to student-centered language instruction, participants used technology and were engaged in a range of cultural activities including instruction in Arabic calligraphy by a certified calligrapher, traditional Arabic group dance, Arabic songs and poetry, and many other activities, designed to introduce the students to Arab culture practices, products, and perspectives.

Methods and Procedures

The research design for this study was based on the mixed quantitative and qualitative methods and procedures. The quantitative design was applied to analyze the data through frequency distribution of the findings. The qualitative design was used to analyze the data collected based on personal profiles of the participating teachers as well as their responses to the open-ended items of the survey instruments.

Program Strategies. The program design was based on certain innovative teaching-learning strategies implemented:
  a. to create a sense of collaboration between teachers and students;
  b. to create pleasant learning environments where teachers and their students are involved in the learning process;

    c.   to continue providing the students with Arabic instruction during the year through an afterschool program;

    d.   to have focused on differentiated language instruction, where teachers teach to all kinds of students, including heritage, non-heritage, and native speakers in their Arabic classrooms;

    e.   to obtain ample opportunities for teachers to teach, review, reflect, and re-teach interactive and communicative Arabic lessons to all kinds of students;

    f.   to engage teachers in standards-based learning activities that can enable them to learn how to help their students become lifelong learners by using Arabic beyond the classroom;

    g.   to utilize curriculum units that allow students demonstrate an understanding of the nature of Arabic language and culture;

    h.   to help teachers develop instructional skills that encourage students to advance their Arabic skills beyond the basic level and share the world in creating global citizens who can truly understand the nature of cultural perspectives through comparisons of Arab and American societies; and

    i.   to collect feedback and reflections from students that can help improving teaching-learning strategies.

Participating Teachers. As reflected in Appendix A, the participating teachers in this study included two males and 14 females. With the exception of one case from North Carolina and another one from Massachusetts, all other teachers were living in the state of Michigan. Four cases were from Lebanon, three cases from Iraq, two cases from Libya, two cases from Palestine, and the remaining five were from Israel, Jordan, Syria, Yemen, and the United States. Five of them reported to have Master's degrees, six cases had Bachelor's degrees, three of them had Associate or Vocational degrees, and the remaining two had some college education.

Teachers' Survey Instrument. The survey instrument used to collect of data from teachers elicited their demographic and professional backgrounds, their perceived needs assessment and motivation for participation in the teacher preparation program, their post-evaluation of the program activities, and their individual comments about strengths and weaknesses of the program activities.

Participating Students. The participating students in this study included 15 heritage and 15 non-heritage high school students who were attended in one of the summer session classes of the Arabic STARTALK Program. Females represented nearly 80% of the participating students. A majority of these students indicated they have learned the language from their own parents.

Students' Survey Instrument.   The survey instrument used for collection of data from students elicited their demographic background, their perceived motivation for learning Arabic language, their post-evaluation of the program activities, and their individual comments about strengths and weaknesses of the program activities.

Using the target language from the first day of instruction.   By implementing the STARTALK Program the teachers learn: (a) how to teach Arabic from the very first day of instruction; (b) how to teach with the goal in mind; (c) how to teach content within a set theme; (d) how to differentiate language instruction through a variety of methods to help students grasp new vocabulary and use them effectively in basic sentences; (e) how to use new technology in the classroom to provide students with different methods of learning the material; (f) how students benefit from repetition, constant interaction, and movement through a variety of activities; and (g) how to pair heritage and non-heritage counterparts to better understand each others' cultural inputs and differences.

Findings

The findings of this study are presented in two parts. The first part provides teachers' evaluation of the quality of the training program and instructional activities and their perceived needs assessment for improving instructional strategies. The second part includes students' attitudes towards the quality of the program activities.

Part 1: Teachers' Evaluation of the Training Program Effectiveness.

This part includes teachers' needs assessment for improving their instructional activities, expectations for increasing their knowledge and skills as a result of participating in teacher preparation, their interest in implementing effective instructional strategies, their perceptions of post-program effectiveness, and their satisfaction of certain program activities.

Teachers' needs assessment for improving their instructional activities. The findings indicated that a vast majority of the participating teachers rated the following program activities for teaching Arabic language to be either important or very important: materials development and adaptation; assessment of the program effectiveness; the structure of Arabic language and its pedagogical grammar; second language acquisition; the importance of the United States educational systems and classroom management; the importance of educational technology; the role of reflective practice and leadership strategies; and the importance of pathways to seek for certification.

Teachers' expectations for increasing their teaching knowledge and skills. Most of the participating teachers indicated that as a result of involvement in the program activities they expect to increase their knowledge and skills in the following areas on interest: instructional approaches and methods; curriculum development and lesson design; instructional planning and strategies; materials development and acquisition; assessment of the program effectiveness; the structure of Arabic language and its pedagogical grammar; the role of second language acquisition; the role of United States educational systems and classroom management; the role of educational technology; reflective practice and leadership; and the importance of pathways to certification.

Teachers' interest in implementing effective instructional strategies. The majority of the participating teachers were interested in learning about: developing content-based instructional units; developing instructional units that integrate language and culture; setting reasonable expectations for students; writing an effective lesson plan; incorporating

authentic materials and tasks into lessons; conducting class in the target language; providing instruction that makes the target language comprehensible to students; encouraging students to use the target language in classroom; providing students with appropriate feedback; designing tasks that promote meaningful classroom interaction; developing classroom tasks that use students' prior knowledge; grouping students in different ways such as small groups, pairs, or entire classes; employing real-life task that have students apply was they have learned in a culturally appropriate manner; effectively using available technology and media to enhance learning; developing assessments that reflect teaching goals; aligning program effectiveness assessments with standards; collecting a variety of types of evidence of student learning; using program effectiveness assessment on a regular basis to modify and improve instruction; designing assessment tasks that simulate real-life use of language; providing multiple opportunities for students to fulfill class expectations; and using students' self-assessment to enhance the quality of instructional strategies.

Teachers' perceptions of the post-program effectiveness. Appendix B presents effectiveness of the post-program activities based as evaluated by the participating teachers. As a result of an overall post-program evaluation of the activities, it was found that a majority of the participating teachers demonstrated positive attitudes towards the quality of the program by indicating that: the institution where we were housed supported our program; the administrative leadership provided strong support for the program; we were comfortable giving our opinions on decisions that may have had an effect on the program development; we were kept informed about issues that may have an effect on the program logistics; changes in the program were communicated to us in a timely fashion; the goals of the program were clearly stated; the goals of the program were achieved; the program had adequate language materials including textbooks, dictionaries, and videos; the teacher trainers were interested in helping us become a better language instructor; the teacher trainers had adequate language proficiency in the language we teach; the teacher trainers were knowledgeable about language education and were a good resource for information about program implementation, teaching materials, etc.; each of us is planning to become certified to teach our native language; each of us would like to participate in another

summer teacher training program; each of us would like to teach in a summer language workshop; as a result of participation in this program, each of us are confident in teaching our native language; and the program had adequate instructional resources including computers, overhead projectors, supplies, and other teaching materials.

Teachers' satisfaction of certain program activities. Attitudes of the individual teachers toward certain program activities are also reflected through their assessment of such activities and are presented in their unedited form.

- The hands-on parts of the program, especially those related to building bridges and creating virtual museums by students, were very interesting activities.

- I liked the grouping activities and using the target language in all areas of teaching the language, such as planning the lesson, presentations, assessment, and field trips.

- The best part of the training was working with students on different projects, as well as discussions and the exchange of information between teachers.

- All parts of the program were important, especially since each part was explained in a clear way supported by appropriate examples and details.

- In my opinion integration of other subject areas such as math, science, and social studies is the most important strategy to motivated students to learn a new language.

- There were a lot of innovative activities and new methods in teaching Arabic to both heritage and non-heritage students with regards to their cultural backgrounds.

- The guest speaker was so intelligent and knowledgeable and was well-prepared in delivering the lectures and the materials she was presenting.

- During the training process we met new people and we learned a lot by using different resources and by sharing our ideas and our experiences.

- The most productive part of the program dealt with sharing experiences with other teachers and learning how to apply such experiences in our teaching plan.

- The program was very interesting for us as bilingual teachers because we got a lot of instructional resources and teaching materials to be apply in our classrooms.

Part 2: Students' Attitudes towards the Program Activities.

This part includes the extent to which the participating students are interested in learning foreign languages, their overall post-program evaluation, their attitudes towards certain program activities, and their suggestions for improving the quality of program activities.

Students' interest in learning foreign languages. The findings indicated that a vast majority of the participating students demonstrated either agreement or strong agreement to the following statements: I enjoy learning foreign languages; I enjoy speaking, reading, and writing foreign languages; I enjoy meeting and listening to people who speak other languages; I feel comfortable being around people of different cultural and ethnicity; I think that learning another language will help me understand people who are different from me; I think it is important to learn other peoples and places; learning about other peoples and places will help me get along better with people who are different from me; learning a new language will help me do better in school; learning a new language will help me get a better job in the future; and this fall I plan to study the Arabic language that I learned through the program.

An overall post-program evaluation by the participating students.
As a result of an overall post-program evaluation, it was found that a majority of the participating students demonstrated positive attitudes towards the quality of the program by indicating that: they felt comfortable being around people of different cultural and/or ethnic backgrounds; they enjoyed meeting and listening to classmates who speak other languages; learning another language is helpful to better understand and get along with people of different national origins; learning a new language will help performing better in school; learning another language will help finding a better job in the future; interaction with people of other nationalities is joyful; the teachers were knowledgeable and performed well in teaching the Arabic language; the books and other teaching materials were helpful in better understanding the course content; learning a language during the summer was really a good experience; the field trips were constructive for learning the language; and the multimedia resources such as computer facilities, Internet access, and videos were very useful for developing and improving our language learning knowledge and skills.

Students' attitudes towards certain program activities. Attitudes and perceptions of the individual students towards certain program activities are also reflected through their assessment of such activities and are presented below in their unedited form.

- I enjoyed being able to participate in the classroom discussions and presentations. I especially enjoyed the presentations because we learned a lot about our culture.

- I really enjoyed the field trips and hands-on activities such as building bridge, making virtual museum, and learning vocabulary through pictures and objects.

- This was a very nice program and we had a lot of fun. The teachers were very nice and helpful. That is why I would like to participate in this program again.

- The best part of the program was I met a lot of awesome people like program director, teachers and students; and I made some new friends.

- Through this program, we learned to apply what we knew into our daily routine activities. The program applied our knowledge and enhanced it in a fun environment.

- The program was extremely productive and exciting. I also enjoyed the guest speakers who were invited to enhance our knowledge of the Arabic culture.

- During this course, we talked mostly in Arabic. It was a lot of fun meeting new people and learning how to present in front of people without getting nervous.

- The Arabic textbook and other teaching materials were very good. What I really enjoyed the most was the friendly interaction between students and teaching faculty.

- The hands-on activities like building a bridge between countries, making presentation by PowerPoint, and how to look at our culture in a proud way were very constructive.

- Our instructors were very kind and they made sure we understood everything was taught. Also the project that our group did was very helpful for future references.

- I liked that we got to learn different hands-on arts and crafts of the Arabic culture. I also liked that our teachers guided each group to finish a variety of the projects.

- I really felt very comfortable around our instructors and was not afraid to express my ideas about different subjects we were discussing.

Implications

The following summation is drawn from a variety of the findings as they relate to the perceptions and attitudes of the participating students and teachers. These findings can be properly implied for conducting any successful language learning program.

1. A vast majority of the participating students demonstrated positive interest about learning foreign languages in general and indicated to be able to speak, read, and write the languages. Most of these students indicated that they feel comfortable getting along with people of different cultural and ethnic backgrounds; that learning another language will help them better understand peoples of various origins; that learning a new language will help improve their societal knowledge and skills; and that learning a new language is going to help find a better job in the future workforce.

2.   A majority of the participating students demonstrated positive attitudes towards the quality of the program by indicating that: the teachers were knowledgeable and performed well in teaching the Arabic language; the books and other teaching materials were helpful in better understanding the course content; learning a language during the summer was really a good experience; participation in group presentations and classroom discussions was a very informative learning experience; the field trips were constructive for better learning the language; the hand-on activities such as building bridges, making virtual museums, arts and crafts of Arabic culture, and increasing knowledge of vocabulary through pictures and objects were very interesting learning experiences; and the multimedia resources such as computer facilities, Internet access, and videos were very useful for developing and improving their knowledge and skills.

3. A vast majority of the participating teachers found the following program activities for teaching Arabic language to be either important or very important: materials development and adaptation; assessment of the program effectiveness; the structure of Arabic language and its pedagogical grammar; use of the second language acquisition; the importance of educational systems and classroom management; the

importance of educational technology; the role of reflective practice and leadership strategies; and the importance of pathways to seek for certification.

4. A majority of the participating teachers were found to be interested in learning about a number of activities including developing content-based instructional units; developing instructional units that integrate language and culture; setting reasonable expectations for students; writing an effective lesson plan; incorporating authentic materials and tasks into lessons; conducting class in the target language; providing instruction that makes the target language comprehensible to students; encouraging students to use the target language in the classroom; providing students with appropriate feedback; designing tasks that promote meaningful classroom interaction; developing classroom tasks that use students' prior knowledge; grouping students in different ways such as small groups, pairs, or entire classes; employing real-life tasks that have students apply was they have learned in a culturally appropriate manner; effectively using available technology and media to enhance learning; developing assessments that reflect teaching goals; aligning program effectiveness assessments with standards; collecting a variety of types of evidence of student learning; using program effectiveness assessment on a regular basis to modify and improve instruction; designing assessment tasks that simulate real-life use of language; providing multiple ways for students to fulfill class expectations; and using students' self-assessment to enhance instructional strategies.

5. As a result of an overall post-program evaluation of the activities, it was found that a majority of the participating teachers demonstrated positive attitudes toward the quality of program by indicating that: the goals of the program were clearly stated; the goals of the program were achieved; the administrative leadership provided a strong level of support for the program; the teacher trainers were interested in helping to become better language instructors; the teacher trainers had adequate language proficiency in the target language; the teacher trainers were knowledgeable about language education and were a good resource for information about program implementation, and teaching materials; being in a comfortable environment to express opinions on decisions that may have an effect on the program; being kept informed about

issues that may have an effect on the program logistics; changes in the program were communicated in a timely fashion; the program had adequate language materials including textbooks, dictionaries, and videos; planning to become certified to teach the native language; being interested to participate in another summer teacher training program; would like to teach in a summer language workshop; as a result of participation in this program, being confident in teaching the native language; and the program had adequate instructional resources including computers, overhead projectors, supplies, and other teaching materials.

General Conclusion

The following conclusion is derived from a variety of the findings on the basis of perceived evaluation of the quality of the program by participating teachers and students.

Taken as a whole, based on the finding of the study, it can be concluded that both students and teachers were highly satisfied with the quality of the program activities by indicating that:

a. the program director, the teaching faculty, and other staff members possessed appropriate knowledge and skills and performed in a professional manner to handle the tasks they have been assigned to;

b. the textbooks and other teaching materials were helpful in better understanding the course content;

c. the hands-on activities such as building bridges, making virtual museums, arts and crafts of Arabic culture, and increasing knowledge of vocabulary through pictures and objects were very interesting learning experiences;

d. the goals of the program were clearly stated and were achieved by the end of the course;

e. participation in group presentations, classroom discussions, and brainstorming practices were very informative learning experiences; (f) the field trips and other outdoor activities were very constructive in promoting motivation for learning activities;

f. effectively using technology and the multimedia resources such as videos, computer facilities, Internet access, dictionaries, and

overhead projectors were very useful in facilitating to develop necessary knowledge and skills of the program participants; and

g. the post-program evaluation was designed adequately to collect necessary information for future program modification.

Contribution of the Study

Certain groups and individuals can also benefit from the findings of the study. First of all, the positive attitudes of the participating teachers toward the quality of STARTALK training program in this study can motivate other institutions of higher education to conduct similar training programs for Arabic language teachers. Second, school systems can initiate similar training programs for Arabic teachers in their school districts to help improve the quality of teaching Arabic. Third, like many other studies related the topic, this study also has its own contribution to the field of professional development training program. Fourth, the findings of this study may also be useful for future researchers and the practitioners of other less community taught languages. Lastly, the findings are consistent with most of the literature reviewed for the study.

Suggestions for Improving the Quality of the Program

The following suggestions are based on the comments made by the participating teachers and students and can be used for modification and enhancement of the program effectiveness.

Teachers' suggestions. The following suggestions are made by the participating teachers for improving the quality of the teacher training program.

- Perform more hands-on activities, and increase the number of Arabic language teachers to expand the program for other interested teachers.

- Have the Arabic language teachers work online during their free time to enhance their knowledge and skills about the program activities.

- Provide opportunities to the Arabic language teachers to visit Middle East countries and learn how they teach language to their students.

- Invite more guest speakers from other institutions of higher education to help enhance the knowledge and skills necessary for the Arabic language teachers.

- More emphasize should have been placed on providing online opportunities to continue working with program directors and to further knowledge in the field.

- Teachers need to attend more programs like STARTALK to share their ideas with the trainers in order to learn more about teaching strategies designed for language learners.

- There is a need to provide opportunities for the Arabic language teachers to visit Middle East countries and learn how they teach language to their students.

- Higher education institutions are encouraged to keep working on the STARTALK program to provide more hands-on activities, and increase the number of participants to expand the program for other interested teachers.

- It would be ideal to provide opportunities for Arabic language teachers travel to a country where the language is being taught and have them participate in a summer program abroad.

- More Arabic speaking teachers should be invited to participate in future teacher preparation workshops and to improve the quality of their teaching effectiveness.

Students' suggestions.   The following suggestions are made by the participating students for improving the quality of the students' program activities.

- Allocate more time for a number of hands-on activities such as building bridges, making virtual museums, arts and crafts of the Arabic culture, and field trips.

- Start the program early in the morning so students can use the rest of the day for practicing and finishing their homework and other assignments.

- Plan to start the program early in the summer so students can enjoy the rest of the summer with their families and be prepared for the beginning of the academic year.

- If it is possible try to enroll students of the same grade so the age difference does not cause any waste of time for both students and instructors.

- The program activities should have been started early in the summer so students can enjoy the rest of the summer with their families.

- This program should have been better started early in the morning so we can use the rest of the day for practicing and finishing our homeworks.

- The program needs to be offered more often with a number of hands-on activities such as building bridges between countries as well as more field trips.

- Some of the group presentations were unorganized because: the students were at a very different level of Arabic language proficiency, and the group presentations were very short.

- The location of offering the course was too far away from our place of residence. A proper means of transportation may help resolve this

issue   of   concern.

Suggestions Based on the Literature. The following suggestions are drawn from a variety of the literature related to improving the quality of STARTALK programs.

- State governments and local education agencies should establish policies and procedures to expand foreign language programs and enhance their effectiveness.

- National and professional organizations should provide technical assistance in formation and common core standard development for foreign language programs.

- Federal government should provide incentives to institutions of higher education and professional agencies to improve the quality of the foreign language education.

- Institutions of higher education should conduct research studies and development projects to improve language education effectiveness.

Suggestions for Future Research

The following provides a number of suggestions to other researchers who may be interested in conducting studies related to the topic.

1. This study was limited to a group of students from different grade levels. Knowing the fact that homogeneity of the subjects plays a significant role in the study results, future studies should consider enrolling students at the same academic levels.

2. This study was conducted at only one university and thus results may be different due to localities and certain demographic factors. Other institutions of higher education are, therefore, encouraged to conduct similar studies at their own locations.

3. After a series of studies dealing with a variety of successful teaching strategies, it would seem that focus of attention should be directed

toward preparing teachers rather than conducting studies for students' performance.

4. The number of students participating in this study was limited to 30 cases and thus their evaluation of the program activities may not be generalizable. Future studies are, therefore, recommended to include more students in the program; even if it would be necessary to expand the program to a greater number of classes.

Appendix A

Personal and Professional Characteristics of the Participating Teachers

Personal and Professional Characteristics of the Participating Teachers		2011	2012	2013
Gender:	Female	75%	89%	80%
	Male	25%	11%	20%
Age group:	20-39	53%	58%	50%
	40-69	47%	42%	50%
Native language:	Arabic	95%	95%	90%
	Other	05%	05%	10%
Cultural and ethnic background:	Middle Eastern	71%	62%	80%
	White	24%	19%	10%
	Other	05%	19%	10%
Language currently teaching:	Arabic	95%	80%	95%
	Other	05%	20%	05%
Certified in teaching Arabic:	Yes	15%	30%	21%
	No	15%	05%	32%
	Not yet and planning	70%	65%	47%
Certified in teaching other languages:	Yes	15%	30%	21%
	No	35%	05%	32%
	Not yet or pending	50%	65%	47%
Years of teaching Arabic:	Less than a year	26%	15%	19%
	1-4 years	37%	40%	33%
	5-9 years	21%	10%	29%
	More than 9 years	16%	35%	19%
Highest degree attained:	Master's degree	35%	42%	53%
	Bachelor's degree	50%	16%	05%
	Some college education	10%	37%	37%
	High school diploma	05%	05%	05%
Trained in language teaching:	Have a degree in language education	05%	14%	23%
		08%	12%	08%
	Have a degree in specific	08%	24%	17%

	21%	24%	26%
language Have taken courses at university level Have attended short-term workshops Have attended STARTALK training before	58%	26%	26%

Appendix B

STARTALK Program Evaluation by the Participating Teachers

Program Evaluation by the Participating Teachers	2011	2012	2013	Total
The institution where we are housed supported our program.	3.8	4.0	3.7	3.8
The administrative leadership provided a strong level of support for the program.	3.8	4.0	3.9	3.9
We were comfortable giving our opinions on decisions that shape the program.	3.7	3.9	3.9	3.8
We were kept informed about issues that may have an effect on program logistics.	3.7	4.0	3.7	3.8
Changes in the program were communicated to us in a timely fashion.	3.6	3.9	3.5	3.7
The goals of the program were clearly stated.	3.7	4.0	3.8	3.9
The goals of the program were achieved.	3.7	4.0	3.8	3.9
The program had adequate language materials (e.g., books, CDs, dictionaries).	3.6	3.9	3.6	3.7
The program had adequate instructional resources (computers, projectors, supplies).	3.6	3.9	3.6	3.7

The teacher trainers were interested in helping me become a better language teacher.	3.8	4.0	3.8	3.9
The teacher trainers were knowledgeable and skillful in their field of expertise.	3.8	4.0	3.8	3.9
We had sufficient opportunities to practice new skills we learned in the program.	3.8	3.9	3.8	3.8
I would like to participate in another summer STARTALK teacher training program.	3.9	4.0	3.9	3.9
I would like to teach in a STARTALK summer language workshop.	3.7	3.8	3.7	3.7
After participating in the program, my confidence in teaching language increased.	3.8	3.9	3.7	3.8

Note: The ratings are based on a scale of 1 for strongly disagree to 4 for strongly agree.

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