Language development and impairment in Arabic-speaking children: Introduction to the special issue

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Language and literacy in the Arab World--Teaching English as an Additional Language

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Introduction to the Special Issue on Language and literacy in the Arab World--Teaching English as an Additional Language

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Language and literacy in the Arab World is both a very important and very complex issue. It is important because of its implications on economic and social development. It is also important for research and theory given the complex linguistic and educational situation in the region. In fact, partly because of the complexity of the linguistic situation (Zuzovsky, 2008), the performance of Arab students in international literacy tests is very low even among the richest countries. The high rates of illiteracy are also partly blamed on the complexity of this linguistic and educational situation (e.g. Maamouri, 1998).

The present issue contributes to this important topic mainly from one perspective: teaching English language and literacy as an additional language. It was initially meant to cover all literacy issues, including first language literacy, but the submissions all centered on teaching English as an Additional Language. I, therefore, felt the need to add the subtitle "Teaching English as an Additional Language", hoping that future issues will reexamine this broad topic from other perspectives.

The first paper, however, is general enough, as it outlines the challenges that the complex linguistic situation in the Arab World has on language and literacy development both at the individual and societal level in general. In this

paper, Lotfi Sayahi uses the example of the Maghreb, with a particular focus on Tunisia, to discuss the complex linguistic and educational context in the Arab World. In the Maghreb, like in almost all Arab countries, there is a co-existence of diglossia and bilingualism that cause a challenge to providing a smooth, successful access to education for the majority of students.

The other three papers discuss teaching English as an additional language with a focus on the teacher. In the second paper, Sahbi Hidri reports on a study in which he examined the assessment conceptions of both university and secondary school teachers of English as an Additional Language using the four-factor survey inventory by Brown (2006). The four factors are *Student Accountability* (assessment makes students accountable for their learning), *School Accountability* (assessment makes teachers and administrators accountable), *Improvement* (assessment helps improve teaching and learning) and *Irrelevance* (assessment is irrelevant to teaching and learning). The results differed from findings of similar previous studies in terms of the connection between the factors and indicators of the inventory. The results also showed that despite the lack of attention given to assessment and teacher training on assessment, teachers perceived assessments in a positive way and associated them with accountability and improvement.

The third paper by Sawsan Al-Bakri is also on teachers' beliefs. It reports on the results of a case study that examined the beliefs of university teachers of English in Oman on written corrective feedback and their connection to practices using interviews and analysis of the instructors' feedback on students' assignments. The results showed that there were a few discrepancies between teachers' beliefs and practices, which were also affected by the educational

context. The article also discusses the challenges teachers face in correcting students' written work and gives recommendations for teaching.

The last article by Sana Tibi and her colleagues is a case study that examines how prepared English as an Additional Language pre-service teachers are for the job with a focus on their perception of their own capabilities (self-efficacy) and its relationship with performance and previous learning experience. The authors collected their data using an interview and a writing test. The interviews examined the participants' learning history as well their perceptions of their capabilities with a focus on reading and writing. The participants' written samples were used to examine the role of self-perceptions on performance. The results showed low levels of self-efficacy, which the authors attributed to the inadequate learning experiences of the learners.

As a final note, I would like to thank the authors for their contributions as well as the reviewers for their professional timely feedback.

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