

**Parental Empowerment via Instructional Technology
in the Context of Learning Arabic as a Second Language**

by

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Abstract

Parents often show disempowerment in relation to supporting their children with schoolwork (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005; Hornby & Lafaele, 2011; Peña, 2000; Thomsen, 2011). In the case of Arabic learning, parents typically cannot involve themselves in their children's Arabic learning due to linguistic and communicative barriers. Teachers and schools have attempted to use instructional technology to connect with parents, empower them, and increase their involvement in their children's schooling (Beecher & Buzhardt, 2016; Kong, 2017; Lepping, 2013; Schneider & Buckley, 2000; Selwyn, Banaji, Hadjithoma-Garstka, & Clark, 2011; Thompson, Mazer, & Grady, 2015; Tindle, East, & Mellard, 2015).

To determine the extent to which instructional technology can empower parents in the context of Arabic language learning for elementary students, a year-long action research study was conducted in which an online Arabic learning intervention was introduced to parents and students with the aim of overcoming linguistic and communicative barriers to empowerment. The online Arabic learning intervention was composed of three elements: (1) an Arabic learning management system (LMS), (2) interactive Arabic homework, and (3) an Arabic learning module for parents. Data was collected from participants through surveys, semi-structured interviews, and logged LMS data and analyzed qualitatively to understand parental experiences using the instructional technology and its impact on their sense of empowerment.

While parents generally appreciated the Arabic learning intervention and acknowledged its potential in empowering them, they did not sufficiently engage with it to an extent that could have made a significant impact on their sense of empowerment.

The lack of engagement is discussed in relation to structural, communicative, philosophical, and motivational factors. Specifically, it was found that the successful implementation of an online Arabic learning intervention with high student engagement in the elementary context rests on a minimum level of parental involvement in order to provide young students with a source of external motivation and other-regulation.

In attempting to empower parents using instructional technology, a paradox emerged: to empower parents, their active involvement in using the technology was necessary; yet parents could not involve themselves if they didn't feel sufficiently empowered. The extent to which a technological Arabic learning tool can empower parents is therefore dependent on how invested parents are in using it.

The study also found that the structure of the technological Arabic learning tools used to empower parents also served to disempower them because it burdened them with added home responsibilities and tasks necessary for empowerment such as: overseeing their children's online Arabic learning at home, directly partaking in completing online Arabic homework their children, engaging in their own online Arabic learning via an online module, and regularly visiting and logging on to the online Arabic LMS to check for updates about their children's Arabic language learning. Ultimately, the instructional technology used in the study demanded active and arduous parental involvement as a prerequisite for parental empowerment, which was too much for most parents and therefore undermined the empowerment process.

Lastly, the study findings challenge our notion of parental empowerment and its feasibility in the context of supporting children with Arabic language learning, and it urges researchers and teachers to design more family-centered and inclusive parental

empowerment programs. The study offers some specific suggestions for teachers wishing to implement Arabic online or blended learning interventions for their students and parents.

Preface

This thesis is an original work by Belal Sweileh. No part of this thesis has been previously published. The research project, of which this thesis is a part, received research ethics approval from the University of Alberta Research Ethics Board, Project Name “*Instructional Technology, Parental Empowerment, and Arabic Language Learning*”, No. Pro00050582, Approval granted on November 12, 2014.

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Introduction and Rationale

Educational action research refers to teacher-led research “about topics of interest within their own classrooms and/or schools” (Massey et al., 2009, p. 47). Like most areas of educational action research, my research focus originates from a personal problem that I wished to overcome in the classroom. Over many years of teaching Arabic Language and Culture courses in the elementary school setting, I have heard the same concern from parents: “*We want to help our child learn Arabic at home, but we do not know Arabic.*” It was clear to me that most parents really desire to support their children’s Arabic learning but did not have the knowledge or tools to do so. This concern is quite understandable as parents desire to help their children and, if provided the means to assist them, they will do their utmost to support them. Weiss, Kreider, Lopez, and Chatman (2005) echo this belief about the importance of empowering parents: “that by being empowered, parents will become more engaged” in their children’s learning (as cited in Thomsen, 2011, p. 22).

Additionally, I have noticed that over the summer my students tend to forget much of the Arabic they learned during the previous school year, and when they come back the following September, a lot of time is spent reviewing previously-taught fundamental concepts of the Arabic language. At times, it feels like I must start again with the basics at the beginning of every school year. This phenomenon can be attributed to two main reasons:

- 1) Lack of Arabic language re-enforcement at home: One of the main factors for developing second¹ language competency is vocabulary acquisition – especially
-

¹ In the literature, various terms are used to distinguish programs in which learners study a target language; some of the most common terms are: second language (SL) programs, foreign language (FL) programs, and heritage language (HL) programs. For example, Richard-Amato (2010) uses the term “second language program” to refer to programs in which learners study a language that is dominant in their community, while “foreign language programs” are programs where the target language is not dominant in their community (pp. 356-357). According to these two definitions, the Arabic Language and Culture program at my school would be considered a foreign language program since Arabic is not the dominant language of the local community; however, labeling Arabic as “foreign” language would be inaccurate since none of the families in my program would view it as such - rather, it is an integral part of their Islamic faith and culture. Moreover, depicting Arabic as a “second” language is equally inaccurate since it is actually a third or fourth language for many of my students – and a first language for the native Arabic-speaking students in my program. From a cultural and religious perspective, many families in my program would agree that Arabic is part of their Islamic heritage; that is, it may be more accurate to classify my Arabic language program a “heritage program”, where learners are “interested in establishing and preserving bonds with each other and the tradition of their cultures that are often centuries old [and passing] them on to their children and [stimulating] their children’s interest in doing the same generation after generation” (Richard-Amato, 2010, p. 420). Nonetheless, this label is also misleading

of high frequency words – and learners can attend to key vocabulary through four means: “direct teaching, direct learning, incidental learning, and planned meetings” (Nation, 2001, p. 16). Most of my students are non-native speakers of Arabic and they do not receive Arabic language re-enforcement at home – perhaps aside from the small fraction of the day in which they read Quran or hear it in prayer. While these activities may potentially contribute to the “incidental learning” of vocabulary, it is too infrequent to sustain any significant acquisition of vocabulary. Although my students may have opportunities to be exposed to and learn vocabulary in class through direct teaching and planned vocabulary exercises, they do not engage in direct independent learning of vocabulary or self-study at home through flash cards exercises, memory games, or dictionary use. As such, my students have a limited repertoire of Arabic vocabulary and show little reading or listening comprehension.

- 2) Insufficient instructional hours: In the Arabic Language and Culture program, my students receive only approximately 95 hours of instruction a year, which is far less than the 1000 hours per year needed to achieve high levels of mastery (Eaton,

because heritage programs are typically intended for students who missed the chance to learn their mother-tongue or native language while young, and many of the families in my program are not of Arabic origin. Due to the problematic nature of all these labels, I will freely use all of them interchangeably when referring to the Arabic program in my school – and when referring to the general teaching of languages in a classroom setting. Additionally, I will refer to Arabic as the “target language” alongside the previous terms.

2012). It was clear to me that, if my students were going to achieve any acceptable level of Arabic language competency, formal instruction in school must be supplemented with “deliberate practice through self-regulated informal learning” beyond school walls and regular instructional hours (Eaton, 2012, p. 6).

Each year, I informally tried to address the problems above – the lack of Arabic support for parents, the absence of Arabic language re-enforcement beyond school, and the insufficient formal hours of Arabic instruction in class – by posting Arabic learning resources online hoping that this would (1) provide parents with tools that could help them support their children’s Arabic learning at home and (2) provide additional opportunities for self-regulated, informal Arabic learning through an online medium after school or during the summer months. With every attempt, I received much positive feedback from parents: they told me that their children loved practicing their Arabic online and they asked me to continue this endeavor and to offer them even more support and guidance. To me, this was good news.

Nonetheless, I wanted to explore this matter further in a formal manner through conducting action research as I knew that it would allow me to intentionally focus on this issue, guided by relevant literature in the field. Upon consulting the literature, I was surprised to discover that there is little research in the area of second language education about parental empowerment but ample research on parental involvement in schools. While the relationship between parental empowerment, parental involvement, and student achievement is intuitive (i.e. if we empower parents, they will become more involved in their children’s education and their children will be more likely to succeed academically), rarely do we see second language researchers speak about empowering parents to

increase their involvement (Thomsen, 2011). Specifically, in the field of second language education, the discourse surrounding parental involvement, more often than not, is aimed towards increasing parental advocacy for second language programs and not empowering parents to support their children academically (Antonek, Tucker, & Donato, 1995/2008; Ralph, 1995/2008; Rosenbusch, 1987; Thomsen, 2011). Very rarely do we see second language researchers suggesting that parental involvement should take on a direct pedagogical role: and even then, the advice that scholars offer teachers for involving parents in their children's second language learning are only feasible for parents who are native speakers of the target language (Ralph, 1995/2008; Rosenbusch, 1987).

It follows that for parents in my second language program, who predominantly do not speak Arabic but are nonetheless the program's greatest advocates, the literature offers teachers very little guidance to support or empower them. As a second language educator, I found this discovery quite alarming and disheartening: are there not ways that a teacher like myself can support my parents who are sincerely seeking my help? Consequently, conducting an action research project with a focus on parental empowerment and Arabic language learning became even more directly relevant to me, and I started to wonder:

How can I best empower parents who wish to support their children with Arabic language learning at home? And can instructional technology - which I have used somewhat successfully in my past teaching - play a role in empowering parents in this way?

What follows is a detailed articulation of my journey to explore possible answers to the questions above. As action research is emergent in nature, the wording of my research question changed with time. Its final form appears on page 79.

Literature Review

What is Empowerment?

The term “empowerment” stems from the word “power”, which could be generally thought of as the ability to act and impact. It is commonly known that powerful people influence – they make things happen - while people who deem themselves “powerless” do not think their actions will make a difference or amount to anything; as Keiffer (1984) states: “powerlessness can be seen as the expectation of the person that his/her own actions will be ineffective in influencing the outcome of life events” (as cited in Lord & Hutchison, 1993, p. 6). Hence, being powerless (or disempowered) is associated with lacking control over one’s affairs or destiny: powerless individuals feel trapped and immobilized by their current state. Empowerment leads to optimism and action and is therefore strongly tied to personal agency: with personal empowerment, individuals in society can (and will) act freely, make choices for themselves, actively seek and utilize opportunities and resources that could positively impact their own wellbeing, and set their own life trajectories. To “empower” would thus entail taking one from a state of inability, inaction, and futility to one of ability, action, control, influence, and hope.

While it is easy to understand empowerment by picturing the transformation of individuals who experience it, defining empowerment in a purely positive sense is far from a simple task. As Rappaport (1984) said:

Empowerment is easy to define in its absence: powerlessness, real or imagined; learned helplessness; alienation; loss of a sense of control over one's own life. It is more difficult to define positively only because it takes on a different form in different people and contexts (p. 3)

Indeed, researchers have often approached the study of empowerment by exploring sources of disempowerment (or powerlessness) in individuals, such as: social isolation and loneliness; unresponsive societal services and systems; oppression; poverty; abuse; disability; racism; sexism; neighborhood disorder, threat, and fear (Gutiérrez, 1990; Lord & Hutchison, 1993; Pobl & Winland-Brown, 1992; Ross, Mirowsky, & Pribesh, 2001) – to name a few. Since individual disempowerment differs from person to person and typically stems from a unique combination of the above factors – all of which are deep-rooted, multidimensional, and interconnected societal problems with no straightforward solution - it follows that personal empowerment is correspondingly complex and idiosyncratic, rendering attempts at its definition highly problematic.

Nonetheless, we can still set some criteria for plausible definitions of empowerment. Firstly, empowerment does not occur by simply providing others with “power” as if it were some tangible commodity passed down from the *powerful* to the *powerless* in a unidirectional flow: for, the concept of “power” and the reality of power relations and dynamics in societies are far too complex to permit such a simplistic understanding of empowerment (Vincent, 1996). For example, Kelly (1992) uses two definitions of power to conceptualize empowerment: the traditional definition of power as a dominating force (i.e. “power over”) and the feminist definition as a generative force (i.e. “power to”), and suggests that empowerment involves building one’s inner *generative* power to resist external forces of *domination* and oppressive obedience in society (as cited in Rowlands, 1995, p. 101-102). Along the same lines, Taliaferro (1991) states that “true power cannot be bestowed: it comes from within” (as cited in Rowlands, 1995, p. 104). Therefore, in defining empowerment, we cannot reduce it to merely

transferring wealth, tools, skills, knowledge, or other material or non-material resources to the powerless even though the aforementioned supports are arguably sources of power.

Additionally, since the exercise of personal agency depends on one's perceived self-efficacy – the “conviction that one can successfully execute the behaviour required to produce the outcomes” (Bandura, 1977, p. 193; Bandura, 1990), empowerment arguably has an inner cognitive dimension. That is, feelings of empowerment and disempowerment are largely determined by whether individuals *believe* themselves as being either powerful or powerless, respectively. It follows that a definition of empowerment must also consider cognitive factors that drive personal behaviour such as self-esteem, self-image, self-confidence, self-efficacy, motivation, and the like.

Moreover, because individuals never act in isolation, empowerment must be spoken of in ecological terms (Lord & Hutchison, 1993). Due to the interdependent nature of human organization and social dynamics, empowerment necessarily takes place in the context of the individual's interconnected social relations and networks and under the constraints of existing societal systems and structures. In addition to self-efficacy, the process of empowerment must also address “collective efficacy”, which is not simply the net sum of individual self-efficacies in society (Bandura, 2000).

Any proposed definition of empowerment must speak to the material, cognitive, political, social, and ecological mechanisms for empowerment; and according to Zimmerman (2000), mechanisms of empowerment may include: “individual competencies and proactive behaviors, natural helping systems and organizational effectiveness, and community competence and access to resources” (p. 46). However, due to the multitude of facets and factors that a comprehensive definition of

empowerment must include, generating a single precise definition applicable to all individuals is not feasible; however, general definitions can be given.

For example, Rappaport (1984) gives the following succinct definition for empowerment: “[It] is viewed as a process: the mechanism by which people, organizations, and communities gain mastery over their lives.” (p. 3). Similar to Rappaport’s (1984) definition is Holcomb-McCoy and Bryan’s (2010) brief definition of empowerment: “the process of increasing personal, interpersonal, or political power so that individuals, families, and communities can take action to improve their situations” (p. 262). While the above definitions clearly mention various levels (or dimensions) of empowerment - namely the individual/family, organizational, and social/ecological/communal – this definition does not concretely nor definitely depict how empowerment takes place: that is, what exactly constitutes the process of empowerment at these various levels? Zimmerman (2000) attempts to answer this question as he explores the process and outcomes for empowerment at these three distinct - yet interrelated - levels, and he successfully highlights the complexity of empowerment theory by saying:

Empowerment is an individual-level construct when one is concerned with intrapersonal and behavioral variables, an organizational-level construct when one is concerned with resource mobilization and participatory opportunities, and a community-level construct when socio-political structure and social change are of concern (p. 59).

Hence, it seems that when defining empowerment, it is possible to offer brief general descriptions of empowerment outcomes (e.g. to “gain mastery over their lives” or “take action to improve their situations”), but the inner details of the process vary depending

the entity undergoing empowerment as well as its context. Rappaport (1984) fittingly reminds us that the empowerment process is highly eccentric:

the content of the [empowerment] process is of infinite variety and as the process plays itself out among different people and settings the end products will be variable and even inconsistent with one another (p. 3).

Methodologically speaking, the idiosyncratic nature of empowerment suggests a bottom-up approach to empowerment research. Rappaport (1984) emphasizes that our understanding of empowerment is emergent, and that we must not try to codify its definition, means, or measurement:

empowerment is a process knowable only in the form it takes. However, we must not reify empowerment in the measurement of the end product or the process, or in the particular intervention or means by which it comes about. The way it is measured is not the thing in itself. Nevertheless, each measurement, intervention, and description in a particular context adds to our understanding of the construct (p. 4).

In other words, rather than rigidly defining empowerment *a priori* and taking that narrow lens as a starting point for further study of the phenomenon, it would be more fruitful to approach each individual case of empowerment without any preconceived notions and build our theory of empowerment *a posteriori*. Only through an inductive study of various cases of empowerment in diverse settings can our understanding of empowerment grow.

Parental Empowerment: History, Definitions, and Models

The concept of parental empowerment is a natural extension of personal empowerment into the family context. According to Singh et al. (1995), parental (or family) empowerment is “a process by which families access knowledge, skills, and resources that enable them to gain positive control of their lives as well as improve the

quality of their life-styles” (p. 85). Considering that personal empowerment is central for enabling individuals to access societal resources and services and make willful choices to improve their own well being, such empowerment becomes even more critical for parents (or adults with parental roles) because they are additionally responsible for the well being of children in their care.

Parental empowerment, as a topic of discourse, finds its origin in the area of delivering human services to families: that is, “education, health, mental health, and social services” (Davis, 1993, p. 5). Shepard and Rose (1995) mention that attempts at parental empowerment have specifically grown out of the history of early home intervention programs, which aimed at supporting and improving the lives of at-risk pre-school children. Initially, during the 1960s, these early intervention programs were based on a “deficit” (or “needs”) model and had preventative agendas: that is, at-risk families were viewed as being unable to offer their children the skills, support, resources, and encouragement to prepare them for school and only dedicated intervention from expert practitioners could cure the situation (Cochran & Dean, 1991; Shepard & Rose, 1995). Monolithic, convergent, top-down administration of professional interventions characterized the realm of preventative social work: for no attention was paid to possible non-expert solutions or naturally existing support systems (e.g. family networks, circles of friends, neighbors, religious and faith communities, student groups, and civic organizations) that individuals utilized to adapt, cope, and deal with everyday hardship (Rappaport, 1981; Zimmerman, 2000). However, researchers came to realize that a preventative needs-based approach to social service actually disempowers parents

because it nurtures in them a sense of inadequacy and over-dependence on professionals and practitioners for support (Carpenter, 1997; Rappaport, 1981; Shepard & Rose, 1995).

With time, early intervention programs evolved to assume “strength” (or “empowerment”) models, which recognized the inherent strengths of parents and deemed them capable of seeking available resources and making meaningful and positive decisions on behalf of their families (Shepard & Rose, 1995). Zimmerman (2000) characterizes an empowerment approach to social work as follows:

[It] goes beyond ameliorating the negative aspects of a situation by searching for those that are positive. Thus, enhancing wellness instead of fixing problems [...], identifying strengths instead of cataloging risk factors, and searching for environmental influences instead of blaming victims characterizes an empowerment approach (p. 44).

Rappaport (1981) praised empowerment as an approach that paradoxically reverses and redefines the relationship between professional service workers and the population they serve, allowing for divergent ways of viewing and addressing social problems:

Social problems, paradoxically, require that experts turn to nonexperts in order to discover the many different, even contradictory, solutions that they use to gain control, find meaning, and empower their own lives. From such study, which will require genuine collaboration fueled by a sense of urgency, we may be able to help develop programs and policies that make it possible for others to find niches for living and gain control over their lives (Rappaport, 1981, p. 21).

Moreover, according to Carpenter (1997), empowerment models are “family-centered” and consider an “ecological” view of human development, which means that they honor the needs, perspectives, and contexts of families and they realize that families have their own unique social networks that they can tap into to support their children. By adopting an empowerment model, early home intervention programs began to: (1) approach families on equal footing with feelings of mutual respect, dignity, trust, and care, and (2) acknowledge the parental role in seeking and utilizing existing natural supports and

solving problems for themselves (Shepard & Rose, 1995). Taken together, a focus on empowerment effectively shifted the locus of control and power in the parent-professional (or parent-practitioner) relationship towards the parent.

With research accumulating on the topic on parental empowerment, many definitions have emerged - each emphasizing a different facet of parental empowerment. For example, Pizzo's (1993) definition of parental empowerment is closely tied to the access and utilization of physical and non-physical resources:

[Parental empowerment is the] acquisition (or re-acquisition) and use of the resources that parents need to nurture and protect children, including adequate income, goods, and services (e.g., housing, medical care); a supportive network of other adults; time; legal authority; and personal skills and attributes (e.g., a deep understanding of one's children's unique strengths and needs, a sense of mastery over one's life) (p. 9).

Cochran and Dean (1991), however, give a family-centered, ecological definition of parental empowerment as follows:

[Parental empowerment is] an intentional, ongoing process centered in the local community, involving mutual respect, critical reflection, caring, and group participation, through which [parents] lacking an equal share of valued resources gain greater access to and control over those resources (pp. 266-267)

Delgado-Gaitan's (1991) definition of parental empowerment encompasses Cochran and Dean's (1991) definition but outlines its process more concretely, stressing the importance of parental self-awareness, action, and responsibility:

[Parents] become aware of their social conditions and their strengths; they determine their choices and goals. Action is taken to unveil one's potential as a step to act on one's own behalf. Implicit here is consciousness of and responsibility for one's behavior and willingness to take action to shape it as desired through a social process (p. 23).

Unlike Pizzo's definition above, the latter two definitions emphasize that parental empowerment is a process – not a static state – and that it involves changes in three key

realms: (a) individual (i.e. increased self-confidence), (b) social (i.e. reaching out to others and expanding existing social networks), and (c) advocacy (i.e. involvement in societal institutions and to access supports and resources that will positively impact their children's well-being) (Cochran and Dean, 1991, p. 262). The later definitions of empowerment counter the idea that simply providing parents with tools and resources is enough to empower them: it is active multidimensional experiential journey that empowers, not the passive unidirectional flow of supports and resources from those with power to those without.

Along with various definitions of parental empowerment came various models and conceptual frameworks – some dealing with empowerment as a state and others dealing with empowerment as a process. One of the earliest state-models of parental empowerment was a two-dimensional framework theorized by Koren, DeChillo, and Friesen (1992), which could be seen as a dynamic state-model for parental empowerment that “reflect[s] how empowerment may be experienced or expressed at a given point in time” (p. 309). The most recent conceptual framework for parental empowerment – as a state - is that developed by Kim and Bryan (2017), which puts great emphasis on cognitive and behavioural indicators of empowerment.

As for models representing the *process* of parental empowerment, some characterized empowerment as a linear and sequential process. For example, Shepard and Rose (1995) believed parental involvement could gradually empower parents, so they developed a hierarchical model for parental empowerment that takes parents through sequential levels of involvement: (1) basic communication (e.g. two-way communication between parents and school), (2) home improvement (e.g. skill development and home

learning), (3) volunteering, and (4) advocacy. The assumption behind this model is that: (a) parents will feel more confident in their abilities to support their children and make positive choices for their families if they are able to take part in such activities, and that (b) parents naturally progress through these levels of involvement in a linear step-wise fashion.

Non-traditional role-based paradigms for the process of parental empowerment have also emerged, emphasizing the roles that parental can play during the process of empowerment, such as: parent-as-consumer (Woods, 1992); parent-as-co-educator (Camilleri, Spiteri, & Wolfendale, 2005; Delgado-Gaitan, 1991); parent-as-leader (Camilleri et al., 2005; Delgado-Gaitan, 1991; Wright & Wooden, 2013); parent-as-learner (Camilleri et al., 2005; Hunt & Robson, 1999); parent-as-tutor (Janiak, 2003); parent-as-advocate (Delgado-Gaitan, 1991); parent-as-governor-of-school (Nakagawa, 2003); parent-as-creator (Hunt & Robson, 1999); parent-as-curriculum-designer (Wright & Wooden, 2013), and parent-as-researcher (Carpenter, 1997) – the latter drawing its philosophical basis from the field of action research. In many of these cases, the parent-as-collaborator role characterized the interactions parents had with each other (Delgado-Gaitan, 1991; Hunt & Robson, 1999; Wright & Wooden, 2013). Additionally, one common trait many of these roles share is the bottom-up approach to improving conditions for parents and their children, which is typical of empowerment approaches for social and communal change.

Parental Empowerment in The Field of Education

Parental empowerment, as it relates to education, is defined as a process through which “parents gain greater influence on their families, schools, and communities; greater access to networks, resources, and information; and greater skills and agency in facilitating effective schooling of their children and bringing about change in their children’s schools” (Kim & Bryan, 2017, p. 169). While the call for parental empowerment manifested itself in various ways in the field of education, I will limit my discussion to one particular manifestation: parental involvement in schools.

Parental involvement in education is seen as a vehicle for empowerment because it sets parents on an experiential path of learning and mastery allowing them to take control of their child’s educational well-being and positively impact it. Shepard and Rose (1995), who constructed a hierarchical empowerment model for parental involvement, explain the empowering effect of parental involvement in education as such: “As one ascends the hierarchy [of parental involvement], parents acquire the knowledge, skills, confidence, and trust in others necessary for empowered control over their lives” (pp. 375-376). They further add that parental involvement sets the cognitive mechanisms of empowerment into motion by generating “an increasing sense of trust in self and others, an enhanced awareness of viable resources, and an ever evolving sense of purpose and responsibility to the larger social milieu as well as one’s own family (Shepard & Rose, 1995, p. 377). The essential idea surrounding parental involvement and parental empowerment is that when parents feel that their involvement has made a difference in the lives of their children, it reinforces their own self-esteem and sense of self-efficacy, which in turn, drives them to become even more involved in their children’s education on

a greater scale and take additional steps toward securing their children's well-being (and their own), or as Camilleri et al. (2005) describes: it "start[s] a cycle of self-affirmation that would lead to social and economic inclusion and lifelong learning" (p. 74). Without opportunities to be involved in their children's education, parents might believe that they are unable to support their children in any capacity.

Ample literature explores parental involvement in education to support the formation of home-school-community partnerships. For example, scholars have discussed the reasons behind parental involvement (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005; Pomerantz, Moorman, & Litwack, 2007), the factors influencing it (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005; Hornby & Lafaele, 2011; Peña, 2000), its role in supporting student learning and school improvement (Epstein, 1995; Epstein, 2011; Griffith, 1996; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1995; Thomsen, 2011), and its appropriate amount (Pomerantz et al., 2007). Practically speaking, these studies generally aim to describe various ways that parents can get involved in school as well as generate strategies that schools and teachers can use to encourage parental involvement. Joyce Epstein – best known for her work on school, family, and community partnerships - identifies 6 general ways parents can get involved in their children's education: (1) parenting, (2) communication, (3) volunteering, (4) learning at home, (5) decision making, and (6) collaborating with community; and for each type of involvement, she outlines many sample partnership "practices", concrete tips for successful design and implementation (which she calls "challenges" and "redefinitions"), and expected "results" on students, parents, and teachers. (Epstein, 2011, pp. 395-402). Similarly, Hoover-Dempsey et al. (2005) provides a long list of strategies to "increase schools'

capacities for inviting parental involvement” (p. 118) and to “enhance parents’ capacities for effective involvement” (p. 120).

While parental involvement can indeed empower parents, parental empowerment is arguably a necessary condition for parental involvement. Because many of the educational studies on parental involvement investigate barriers that impede parents from becoming involved in schools, there is a sense that such studies aim to explore means of empowering parents to overcome the obstacles hindering their involvement in their children’s education. For example, socioeconomic factors are frequently mentioned as impeding parental involvement in schools: as Thomsen (2011) explains, “Struggling parents do not have anything left to give” (p. 22). Moreover, cultural factors are reported to cause parents to feel unwelcome in schools or that their involvement is unwanted; however, successful schools are known to establish strong partnerships with the home by making parents feel welcome in the school, requesting and valuing their input, and keeping them informed of their children’s progress (Delgado-Gaitan, 1991; Thomsen, 2011). Researchers, like Epstein, have also stated that parents even need direct guidance from teachers about how to assist their children academically (as cited in Antonek et al., 1995/2008). In fact, entire conceptual frameworks have been constructed to model barriers impeding parental involvement (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011) as well as factors influencing parental involvement in schools (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005). The implicit message in these studies is that by providing socio-economic, cultural, affective, and academic supports to parents, schools can help empower parents and increase the likelihood of their involvement in their children’s schooling.

The importance of parental empowerment in education is closely tied to the importance of parental involvement as a means of increasing student achievement. In educational literature, researchers generally agree that when parents are involved in their children's education, their children's academic achievement improves (Griffith, 1996; Janiak, 2003; Kim & Bryan, 2017; Smith, Wohlstetter, Kuzin, & De Pedro, 2011; Thomsen, 2011; Walberg & Wallace, 1992). Additionally, if we consider that many parents may not feel confident or comfortable being involved and supporting their children with school for a variety of reasons (e.g. their own negative beliefs about their own abilities to help their children; their level of education; their children's level of intelligence; their own role in their children's education; and the value and desirability of their own involvement) (Hornby & Lafaele, 2011), the importance parental empowerment becomes evident: for parents to be involved in schools, their empowerment is necessary, and it follows that, without empowering parents, they will have little impact on improving their children's academics.

Parental Empowerment in the Field of Foreign Language Education

While second language researchers have not discussed parental empowerment in the same fashion, they have addressed parental involvement from multiple angles. For example, academic literature in the field of second language learning has examined the importance of parental involvement in schools (Thomsen, 2011), its effect on student attitudes and motivation towards the target language (Jones, 2009; Sung & Padilla, 1998), and its impact other aspects of student language learning such as vocabulary acquisition (Brannon & Dauksas, 2012) and reading comprehension (Midraj & Midraj, 2011). Some

researchers have explored the importance and influence of family capital on creating a home environment conducive to second language learning (Li, 2007). Additionally, scholars have offered educators various strategies to motivate parents in second language programs to become more involved (Curtain & Dahlberg, 2016; Ralph, 1995/2008; Rosenbusch, 1987). Some schools have even attempted to train parents to teach their native-languages to students (Cooper & Maloof, 1999). All these studies suggest that (a) parental involvement indeed supports and improves student second language learning and that (b) teachers have a key role to play in motivating parents and sustaining their involvement (Ralph, 1995/2008).

Despite all this, it is rare to find academic studies in the field of second language education that stress the importance of *empowering* parents to increase their involvement in schools to support their children with second language learning. That is, if parents do not feel empowered (or confident or able) to support their children with second language learning, will they become involved? Is parental empowerment not seen as a *pre-condition* for parental involvement in foreign language programs?

More specifically, attempts at empowering parents *in* the second language - by providing them with various linguistic scaffolds, learning tools, and education programs aimed at strengthening parents' baseline linguistic skills in the foreign language so that they feel more able to support their children in their second language learning - are arguably non-existent in academic discourse. More common are studies which emphasize the importance of maintaining clear lines of communication with parents to gain them as strong advocates from the second language program (Antonek et al., 1995/2008; Ralph, 1995/2008; Rosenbusch, 1987; Thomsen, 2011). Ralph (1995/2008), for example, gives

four strategies for motivating parents and increasing their involvement in second language programs:

- 1) orientating parents to second language programs through "open house" events and the like and presenting the advantages of learning a second language to parents;
- 2) presenting the pragmatic benefits of learning a second language to parents by referring to current events;
- 3) building bridges between school and home to support children's second language growth by keeping parents informed and involved in their children's learning; and,
- 4) involving parents in cultural projects such as preparing ethnic food, teaching art projects, conducting dance programs and assisting in cultural ceremonies.

Among the strategies offered by Ralph (1995/2008), only the third one speaks to involving parents in their children's language learning – albeit in a remote sense – and none of them suggest that teachers should linguistically empower parents with the knowledge of the second language to promote their involvement. Rarely will one find academics recommending that schools attempt to close the gap in parents' knowledge of the second language via parent education courses –whether they be online or in-person - or by supplying parents with other means of improving their second language competency. It seems that it is more common for researchers to advise schools to send regular newsletters home, create program websites, and conduct open houses and parents meetings to win parents over as committed advocates for the foreign language program.

Why is it that scholars in the field of second language education do not address the topic of parental empowerment? Why is the discourse surrounding parental involvement in the context of second language teaching and learning detached from parental empowerment? I will argue that parental involvement in this field is rarely discussed from the angle of empowering parents for the following reasons:

- 1) There appears to be an implied assumption that parents of children enrolled in second language programs are already skilled in the language being studied. Therefore, most literature that discusses the parental role in second language programs restricts their role to enriching and reinforcing the student's second language experience at home and does not consider that some parents cannot provide their children with such experiences and may actually need language support themselves.
- 2) With schools emphasizing connecting school with home, creating effective partnerships with stakeholders (Epstein, 1995; Epstein, 2011), and advocating second language programs (Curtain & Dahlberg, 2016; Ralph 1995/2008), parental empowerment is only seen as valuable to teachers and schools when it supports program advocacy. In effect, parental empowerment is rarely studied from a pedagogical perspective and it mainly appears in literature as a list of suggestions or strategies to keep parents aware of the second language program philosophy, curriculum expectations, and daily classroom activities.

Are all parents in second language programs native speakers of target language?

It may seem odd to suggest that researchers in the field of second language learning believe that parents of children in second language classes know the target language quite well; for, does it not go without saying that parents, who enroll their children in second language programs, may not necessarily know the target language of instruction? While second language learning researchers may acknowledge on the surface that a parent's competency of the second language can vary; the practical suggestions that they offer teachers, who wish to involve their parents in supporting their children's second language learning, indicate otherwise.

Rosenbusch's (1987) report outlining the parental role in their children's foreign language learning is a prime example of the hidden bias found in most academic literature on parental involvement in the field of second language learning. If we closely examine Rosenbusch's (1987) suggestions for involving parents in their children's second language learning - as well those suggestions offered by many other researchers in the field of second language teaching and learning (Curtain & Dahlberg, 2016; Ralph, 1995/2008; Richard-Amato, 2010) - they appear to be strictly of relevance to parents who are either native speakers of the target language or have second language proficiency sufficiently high enough to support their children's language learning at home.

In her report, it is worth noting that Rosenbusch (1987) cautions readers that the suggestions provided therein consider the standpoint of "parents who may, or may not, have some familiarity with the language, but who are not bilingual" and she clearly acknowledges that "parents can be effective active supporters of their children's foreign

language learning without themselves having skill in the foreign language” (p. 3).

However, she then suggests that parents can "read stories, poems, picture dictionaries, dialogues, skits, and folk tales to their children", "sing songs", "play active games and board games", "explore folk art in books and museums", "read interesting [news and magazine] items" with their children, and even "give commands to [pets]" in the foreign language (Rosenbusch, 1987, pp. 3–4). These ideas – as great and effective as they may be for reinforcing the target language outside of school – are utterly difficult (if not impossible) for parents implement if they do not speak the target language. Moreover, other suggestions such as asking parents to enroll their children in "a foreign language camp", "host [a foreign-language] exchange student", or "visit a country with [their] children where the foreign language is spoken" are far too logistically or financially demanding for most families, and they may not make any sense if family members do not have a strong tie to the culture in which the target language is spoken to begin with (Rosenbusch, 1987, p. 4). Other researchers in the field advise parents to go on "Walk 'n Talk" and list and speak about things they saw, heard, smelt, or felt in the second language (Ralph, 1995/2008, p. 35): again, this recommended rich language task is extremely difficult to implement for parents who do not speak the target language.

From the discussion above, academic literature that discusses the parental role in second language education seems to be relevant only to parents, who are native speakers of the second language, and therefore incorrectly suggests that most parents who enroll their children in second language programs are in fact quite competent and fluent in the target language.

Little direction given to teachers to empower parents needing language support

While foreign language teachers may indeed realize the importance of calling on parents to be involved in school, they are quite reluctant to do so because the parents themselves lack the means to support their children in the second language. What compounds this problem further for foreign language teachers is the absence of material on parental empowerment in commonly used second language methodology textbooks. A quick survey of popular teacher manuals on foreign language methodology (Curtain & Dahlberg, 2016; Richard-Amato, 2010; Shrum & Glisan, 2016) reveals that parental involvement is seldom discussed and, if at all, the strategies offered to foreign language teachers only relate to building bridges with the home environment through program advocacy and increased parental awareness.

For example, in the latest edition of their handbook for second language teachers, *Teacher's Handbook: Contextualized Language Instruction*, Shrum and Glisan (2016) do not discuss the topics of parental involvement, empowerment, or homework at all.

Richard-Amato (2010), in her well-known 600-page second language methods textbook, *Making it Happen: From Interactive to Participatory Language Teaching: Evolving Theory and Practice*, fares better and dedicates a full page to the topic of parental involvement but addresses it in a very cursory fashion with little about how to empower parents so that they can support their children's second language learning at home.

Richard-Amato (2010) says:

Families need to be encouraged to become partners in the education of their children through simple acts as reading aloud with them in whatever language feels most comfortable and helping them with homework. [...] [They] can often become important resources in [...] second language classes by sharing their own

knowledge; it helps other students and the teacher better understand the [student's] home and social environment [...]. In all classes, if family members are fluent in languages being taught, they can be recruited as tutors or teaching aides. Moreover, they often can be effective guest lecturers or facilitators of discussion on topics or issues of relevance (p. 170).

Despite the importance of the words above, they do little to empower a foreign language teacher to support parents who do not speak the language at home.

In another popular foreign language methodology textbook titled *Languages and Learners: Making the Match: World Language Instruction in K-8 Classrooms and Beyond* (Curtain & Dahlberg, 2016), the subject of parental involvement receives slightly more coverage. It is mentioned four times in the book; nevertheless, it is mostly approached from the angle of classroom management, building public awareness, and advocating for the foreign language program (e.g. by sending newsletters home, creating class websites, making phone calls, etc.) (Curtain & Dahlberg, 2016). However, the authors do give two good examples of how parents can support student assessment through the use of Can-Do activity cards and interactive homework (Curtain & Dahlberg, 2016):

- 1) Can-Do activity cards describe language tasks that students can demonstrate to their parents; they are sent home and after each activity is successfully done, parents sign the card, and send it back with the student (Curtain & Dahlberg, 2016, pp. 278-279). Nonetheless, this discussion only occupies two short paragraphs of the text and is of limited value to parents who do not have the basic knowledge to evaluate their children's performance in the foreign language.

2) Interactive homework is a tool that can potentially turn parents into collaborative partners who learn with their kids. Curtain and Dahlberg (2016) depict it as such:

Interactive homework is another powerful tool for connecting home and the classroom. Students take home examples of their work in class, with the expectation that they will share it with some adult in their lives who will sign it, comment on it, and return it to school. The practice gives parents a much better gauge of what their students are learning than if they periodically ask, “What did you learn in Japanese today?” or “How do you say ____ in French?” (p. 303)

As described above, the authors seem to suggest that interactive homework is limited to building parental awareness and communicating the second language curriculum with the stakeholder. However, they do not exclude the possibility that such homework could serve a pedagogical purpose and “be a means of extending the students’ amount of exposure to their new language” (Curtain & Dahlberg, 2016, p. 61), but they fail advise teachers on how to ensure that students complete their homework with their parents. In fact, it seems that the topic of using homework to support second language learning is widely neglected in this textbook.

Additionally, in the area of teaching Arabic as a second language, there is even less guidance for teachers who desire to support and empower parents. For example, in the very first published handbook for Arabic-as-a-second-language teaching professionals, *Handbook for Arabic Language Teaching Professionals in the 21st Century* (Wahba, Taha, & England, 2006), which prides itself as being “arguably the first book even written on the topic of teaching Arabic as a foreign/second language [...]

dealing with the field [...] from many different perspectives” (p. xxiv), the parental role is nowhere to be found in any of its nine sections.

The lack or absence of mention of the topic of parental involvement in notable second language teacher handbooks and methodology textbooks is not a new phenomenon. Close to twenty years ago, it was argued that the case of homework – an issue closely tied to parental involvement – was never showcased or discussed in foreign language literature (Antonek et al., 1995/2008). Although the authors did not address why homework is not discussed, it can be speculated that the dominant understanding among academics in the field was that parental involvement in second language learning was not relevant to teaching pedagogy and was only necessary to ensure good relations with the home environment and advocate second language programs. As such, authors of second language methods textbooks may not have thought it necessary to include the topic of parental involvement or homework in their text or to expand the scope of discussion beyond areas of classroom management, public relations, communicating the curriculum to stakeholders, and program advocacy. This understanding continues to disempower foreign language teachers and parents alike: neither teachers are aware that empowering foreign language parents is crucial nor are parents given the tools and language supports needed to help their children at home.

Empowering parents in foreign language education: Two case studies

In the literature on foreign language education, few cases are mentioned which document how parents were empowered or given tools to aid them in supporting their children with their foreign language learning (Antonek et al., 1995/2008; Goren, 2003). The first example, reported by Goren (2003), describes how foreign language teachers at

a Montessori school came up with three ways to bridge the gap in parents' knowledge of Spanish so they could incorporate families into the second language learning with their children at home: (a) they ran an introductory Spanish conversation course, (b) created prerecorded language-tutor tapes accessible by phone, and (c) made available a library of instructional materials for parents to use at home. At the beginning of her report, Goren (2003) acknowledges that Montessori parents are historically known to be actively involved in their children's education; however, despite this reputation, the teaching staff did not limit themselves to traditional means of reaching out to parents through phone calls, invitations to schools, and newsletters sent home. Realizing that "parents often lack the knowledge that would enable them to take an active role in supporting [foreign language] learning," the staff endeavored to empower parents with knowledge of Spanish so they could start to actively help their children with Spanish (Goren, 2003, p. 1).

According to Goren (2003), these strategies did indeed empower parents and positively impacted relationships with their children: firstly, parents said that they benefited from learning a base level of Spanish in a classroom setting to allow them to interact with their children at home; they also appreciated access to prerecorded language-tutor tapes through phone hotline and said that these re-enforced both their own learning and their children's and offered them opportunities to review lessons and expand what was being learned in class; and finally, parents deeply appreciated the language supports provided because these allowed them to help their children on a more intimate and meaningful level. Goren (2003) rightly argues that, "to provide meaningful support for their child's second-language learning, parents [should] obtain a basic level of competence in the language being offered" (p. 1). In essence, this report highlights the

benefit of parents taking on a more active role in their children's education by learning the foreign language alongside their children and not merely cheering them from the sidelines.

The second case study was led by Antonek, Tucker, and Donato (1995/2008), where children in a Japanese Foreign Language in the Elementary School (FLES) pilot program were given interactive homework² so that parents could become more involved in their children's Japanese learning (Antonek et al., 1995/2008). The study was initiated in response to parental feelings of confusion and weakness with respect to their children's Japanese learning. Prior to the study, parents had been asked about their attitude towards the Japanese FLES program and they expressed their inability to accurately assess their children's performance in Japanese (Antonek et al., 1995/2008). It seems that the authors believed that if they could encourage parents to do Japanese homework alongside their children, parents would become more familiar with the Japanese FLES curriculum and their negative feelings towards the program would disappear.

Although the study by Antonek et al. (1995/2008) was not conducted with the intention of parental empowerment - as was Goren's (2003) - but to make parents more familiar with the FLES program and win them over as program advocates, its findings eventually drew the researchers to the importance of empowering parents with linguistic supports, especially when assigning interactive homework to students. For example, midway through the study, when researchers discovered that many parents considered the Japanese interactive homework assignments too long and difficult, rather than giving

² In the context of foreign language teaching, "interactive homework" - an adaptation of Epstein's "Teachers Involve Parents in Schoolwork" (TIPS) process

students and parents more linguistic scaffolds to do the assignments successfully (i.e. empowering them), they shortened the interactive homework assignments and reduced their scope to skills students were already familiar with – effectively dumbing them down (Antonek et al., 1995/2008). However, the feedback received from parents via end-of-year questionnaires indicated that parents actually felt disempowered due to their lack of knowledge of the foreign language and that the assignment length may have been a secondary issue: as the authors report, many parents commented on their inability to properly pronounce words and phrases in Japanese and some were frustrated about being constantly corrected by their children and reminded how bad they were in the foreign language and requested audiotapes that could support their own pronunciation (Antonek et al., 1995/2008, p. 216). Even the authors admitted that “audio tapes keyed to the assignments would have certainly helped to relieve frustration at interactive homework time” (Antonek et al., 1995/2008, p. 216). Towards the end of the study, the authors acknowledged that parents need as much foreign language support as possible and gave the following recommendations to foreign teachers wishing to assign interactive homework to their students and parents:

Make every effort to assist the parents assist the child. Foreign language represents a subject area different from others whose contents are taught through a language already known to the parent. Provide clear, easy to use pronunciation guides. This year we are sending parents audiotapes of Japanese stories and songs and parents are responding quite favourably to this tool. (Antonek et al., 1995/2008, p. 218)

Not only would the above recommendation have empowered parents wanting to improve their own Japanese pronunciation or who simply wanted a reference that would help them assess their children’s pronunciation, it would have been equally helpful for parents who were frustrated because the interactive homework was too difficult for their children,

beyond their level of comfort, and impossible to complete without teacher support (Antonek et al., 1995/2008).

The above recommendation, which Antonek and her colleagues (1995/2008) made, is similar to the strategy Goren (2003) spoke about in her report. It seems both groups of researchers tried to get parents more involved in foreign language programs and they reached a similar conclusion: to better motivate parents to support their children's foreign language learning, teachers must empower them with knowledge of the foreign language. Perhaps when researchers and foreign language teachers move beyond viewing parents as program advocates to actual partners in their children's language learning - in the literal sense – only then will we fundamentally shift the way parental involvement is envisioned, studied, and presented in the academic literature and in foreign language methods texts: from an advocacy and public relations model to that of empowerment.

Technology, Parental Empowerment, and Second Language Learning

In academic literature, the relationship between technology and parental empowerment is not straightforward. The application of technology for the purpose of parental empowerment has never been uniform: the type of technology utilized for empowering parents has varied from time to time, family to family, and from one field of education to another. For example, the way health professionals have used technology to empower parents of children with disabilities in early childhood differs from how schools have attempted to empower homeschooling parents. The differing understandings of parental empowerment as well as the various purposes behind it inform the manner by

which groups introduce technology to empower parents. Moreover, online technological tools vary in their ability to positively impact parental knowledge, attitudes, and behavior depending on their context and use, so “the question [for practitioners] becomes: for whom and under what circumstances does online support lead to better outcomes [for parental empowerment]?” (Hall & Bierman, 2015, p. 30).

In this section, I will attempt to describe the various technological interventions that have been employed to empower parents, but I will organize my discussion around a few common themes, which represent the major aims of parental empowerment: (1) control, (2) communication, (3) community, (4) modeling and just-in-time learning, and (5) feedback. Then I will briefly discuss how technology has been utilized to empower parents in the field of second language learning.

Technology and Parental Empowerment

1) Control

Offering parents control (or a perceived sense of control) is one main objective of utilizing technology to empower parents. One of the earliest examples of using technology to empower parents goes back to mid 90s, where major Internet software companies worked together to offer families “parental control” options: three leading Internet software companies, Microsoft Corporation, Netscape communication, and Progressive Makers together formed the Information Highway Parental Empowerment Group to lead efforts and set industry standards allowing parents, educators, and other adults to control the Internet content their children access online by filtering out inappropriate content (Information Highway Parental Empowerment Group, 1995). In this case, parental empowerment was associated with parents having perceived control

over matters that impact their children's wellbeing online, and technology provided tools for exercising control over their children experience in the new medium.

Similarly, many of today's parents desire more control over their children's education and want to take their children's learning into their own hands, overseeing it personally at home and providing them with individualized support. According to the Project Tomorrow's Speak Up 2010 report, parents want teachers and schools to leverage emerging technologies to personalize their children's learning and facilitate more interactive home-school partnerships:

Today's parents are putting a much higher premium on having an interactive, collaborative relationship with their child's teacher which affords them the opportunity to potentially personalize the learning process for their child. They want information that helps them take on the new role of co-teacher at home; a role that is much more curriculum and instructionally based and less focused simply on homework supervision (Project Tomorrow, 2011, p. 13).

Such parents desire online school portals and learning management systems (LMSs) that provide: access to curriculum and learning materials at home; information about upcoming learning tasks, homework assessments, and progress; notifications about missed assignments; news about in-class learning; collaboration tools to facilitate interaction and communication between students, parents and teacher; and podcasts and videos from teacher (Project Tomorrow, 2011). However, for such tools to be effective in empowering parents, it is critical to train parents to use them (Curtis, 2013; Tindle et al., 2015). It is worth noting that academic literature links increased parental time on online school portals LMS to student success; hence, the easier it is to use an LMS, for example, the more likely parents are to log on, utilize it, and support their children's online learning (Curtis, 2013). For this reason, some LMS vendors have even embarked on

creating special curriculums to support parents in their role of helping their children with online learning (Tindle et al., 2013).

Moreover, parents who desire more control over their children's learning but are not able to spend time supporting them at home can choose to put their trust in intelligent technological learning systems to carry out that supportive role. In recent years, various vendors (such as DreamBox³ and Knewton⁴) and non-profit organizations (such as Khan Academy⁵) have developed online adaptive learning systems that provide students with individualized learning paths and differentiated learning experiences and assessments (Curtis, 2013). Such intelligent adaptive learning and testing systems provide minute control over the learning trajectory of students and can especially empower parents of struggling students or those with disabilities, who have generally not had much success at school and who require self-paced instruction tailored to their specific learning needs (Curtis, 2013; Lepping, 2013). Such digital blended-learning technologies are being funded to empower parents and teachers: for example, The Broad Foundation has poured millions of dollars into nonprofits such as Khan Academy to support the research, development, and implementation of blended learning platforms that offer students personalized learning opportunities (Lepping, 2013).

Hence, in relation to offering control, instructional technologies can play two seemingly opposite functions: some technologies offer parents more control over their

³ www.dreambox.com

⁴ www.knewton.com

⁵ www.khanacademy.org

children's education, while other technologies receive that control and authority from parents. For example, LMSs and online school portals can offer parents the tools and communication channels to keep them informed and better equipped to take charge of their children's learning, while intelligent adaptive learning and testing systems allow parents to delegate their control over their children's learning to an external technological entity that can play the personalized teaching role. Nonetheless, in both scenarios, parents feel empowered because their sense of control is enhanced. That is, whether technology empowers parents to take on the teaching role themselves or offers them the choice to delegate that role to an external system, the outcome is the same - they still feel more control over their children's educational affairs.

2) Communication

Communicative technology tools that connect school with home can engage parents to become more involved in their children's learning. For example, school learning platforms and parent portals can carry out the following communicative functions to facilitate parental engagement: (1) communicating and over communicating with parents about school-related issues (e.g. posting online newsletters; streaming of school events; uploading pictures and videos of field trips, sending quick reminders to parents); (2) informing parents of their children's weekly homework tasks so that they can involve themselves in homework; (3) showcasing student work to parents to stimulate meaningful parent-child discussions about learning at home; and (4) reporting behaviour, attendance, and attainment progress to parents through friendly and comprehensible visual progress bars (Selwyn et al., 2011). As explained earlier, such communicative technologies can empower parents by keeping them in the loop and

increasing their sense of control over their ability to support their children's learning at home. This is especially relevant for homeschooling parents whose empowerment and involvement are key to their children's success in online learning: while such parents may not be masters at delivering or explaining subject matter content to children, using communication tools to simply remind parents of their strengths, the importance of their role, and the need to enforce learning expectations (e.g. setting up learning and study routines at home) may be enough to empower parents to support their children with virtual learning (Currie-Rubin & Smith, 2014).

It must be stressed that using communicative technology for passive one-way communication with parents may not lead to true parental engagement. While many technological applications exist that enable teacher-parent communication, not all are equally effective: "parents need to be able to *actively* interact with their children's teachers [through the technological application], not just passively receive information, in order to provide the type of support at home that increases children's positive outcomes" (emphasis mine; Beecher & Buzhardt, 2016, p. 62). For example, in their study of parental engagement using online learning platforms in the United Kingdom, Selwyn et al. (2011) stated that the learning platforms utilized by schools in the study were characterized by one-way communication and sought to traditionally frame and regulate parental engagement and participation to support their children's learning:

The majority of these case study schools were using Learning Platforms to augment the 'top-down', broadcast delivery of information, communication, and resources to parents, with limited opportunities provided for reciprocal contact. [...] Learning Platforms appeared to be most often enrolled into the existing one-way 'involvement' of parents in their children's schooling, rather than a more 'democratic' empowerment of individual parents per se (p. 321).

The authors added that although these learning platforms were found to connect “remote” parents to school, many parents did not actively participate in using them and some parents didn’t appreciate them and thought that more two-way communication was needed (Selwyn et al., 2011). While the lack of parental engagement with the learning platforms might have been a reflection of a more general problem such as parental apathy or lack of time, one should also acknowledge that bombarding parents with too much information through the learning platform doesn’t alleviate this issue either. Even vendors of learning platforms emphasize the need for more communicative and interactive channels in their products, where parents can actively communicate with teachers and share input regarding their children’s learning style, motivational characteristics, and behaviours so that teachers can construct a more accurate student profile - this comes from the realization that actively involving parents and seeking their input keeps them motivated and engaged in supporting their children’s online learning (Tindle et al., 2015).

Limiting oneself to passive one-way communicative technologies to relay academic expectations to parents reflects the belief that parental empowerment is not democratic but tied to parental self-empowerment and responsibility, or “‘responsibilisation’ – i.e. the idea that parents are obliged to actively support schools in their endeavours” (Selwyn et al., 2011, p. 322). That is, one-way communicative learning platforms only tell parents how to be and do not allow them to contribute to the educational act in other meaningful ways. True engagement arises when communication is two-way and interactive between school and home, where teachers and parents are both active participants in supporting the learning act: sharing ideas and suggestions, raising

viewpoints, giving constructive criticisms, and negotiating educational plans and realities. For communicative technologies to be empowering, they should allow teachers and parents to interact with one another and jointly shape the educational realities in schools. Hall and Bierman (2015) made similar claims about the effectiveness of utilizing a combination of one-way and two-way communication technologies to empower parents and maximize the impact of parental interventions in the field of telehealth.

It is worth noting, however, that not all communication mediums are equal as some may be more effective, engaging, and popular than others. Internet communicative technologies, for example, have become so pervasive nowadays, and many researchers have hailed them for their potential to traverse geographical boundaries and enhance accessibility to interventions aimed at empowering parents (Hall & Bierman, 2015); yet parental interventions delivered online do not necessarily offer optimum parental engagement. Hall and Bierman (2015) report that academic studies in the field of telehealth have *not* shown that computer/technology-assisted parental intervention programs are superior to face-to-face (or non-technology-assisted) parental intervention programs, and only around half of parents typically prefer receiving information electronically. In fact, attrition problems in technology-assisted health-related parental interventions are witnessed for Internet-only delivery modes, whereas optimum parental engagement occurs when technology augments existing face-to-face interventions and does not replace them entirely:

Stronger effects in terms of both engaging parents and promoting positive outcomes for parents and children may emerge in blended intervention approaches that use technology along with synchronous communication support from professionals (e.g., video chat, phone calls), instructional design features that enhance interactivity, and audio and visual displays that may assist low-literacy parents. [...] Technology-assisted program delivery [including] some

interactive features (e.g., video examples, audio narration) but without synchronous communication with personal contacts [...] often struggled to keep parents engaged, experiencing high non-completion rates (Hall & Bierman, 2015, p. 29).

On the other hand, with the advent of the “smartphone era”, in which owning a smartphone is commonplace, parents prefer using such devices to communicate with teachers due to their accessibility, convenience, and ease of use (Rudi, Dworkin, Walker, & Doty, 2015; Thompson et al., 2015). Realizing this trend, many teachers have also begun to leverage mobile technologies and applications for school-home communication (Beecher & Buzhardt, 2016). One of the more popular mobile apps is Remind⁶, which allows teachers to send quick messages to parents, share pictures with them about school-related activities, or even engage in interactive two-way conversations with parents (Beecher & Buzhardt, 2016; Bobbitt, Inman, & Bertrand, 2013). Educational researchers now predict that mobile delivery may be a better option to close the digital divide and socioeconomic status gap and to provide accessible parental interventions (Hall & Bierman, 2015). At the same time, they stress the importance of carefully designing mobile apps to ensure their usability, feasibility, and engagement (Beecher & Buzhardt, 2016; Hall & Bierman, 2015).

It seems that the relationship between communicative technologies and parental engagement is complex: prevalent communicative technologies are not necessarily the most engaging for parents. When incorporating a particular communicative technology into interventions for empowering parents, the focus must *not* be on the technological tool itself but on how it can be used to facilitating learning and parental engagement.

⁶ www.remind.com

Ultimately, such technological interventions should be tailored to how parents use technology to maximize its uptake and usage.

3) Community

Current Internet technologies can create spaces for interactive supportive parent communities for discussing important issues regarding school improvement and their children's education and well-being: a huge step-forward from previous passive uses of communication technology. In the past, static Internet websites were primarily used for providing parents with information about schools to empower them to become actively involved in school choice (i.e. "parent as consumer" model) (Schneider & Buckley, 2000; Vincent, 1996; Woods, 1992). Since then, scholars have advocated a shift from a parent-as-consumer to a parent-as-citizen model of empowerment and have encouraged utilizing Internet websites and technologies to create electronic-based democratic parent communities, which encourage parents to become more actively involved in their schools communities to build strong schools and strong communities:

the revolutionary impact of the Internet can be harnessed only by reconceptualizing and broadening the role of parents in the educational process and then by designing school-based sites that support the role of parents as active and involved citizens who are critical to the success of schools and education (Schneider & Buckley, 2000, p. 52)

Essentially, such scholars claim that purely one-way informational sites, which model parents as consumers of information, will not yield truly democratic and actively participating school-parent communities; rather, technological online sites must ideally strengthen partnerships between school and home as well as communication between parents within these communities to empower parents to participate in deliberative democratic discussion and decision-making and to take a more active role in schools.

In the context of schooling, however, not many examples of utilizing online communicative technologies for establishing parent communities are mentioned in literature. Kong (2017) suggests that schools should use Web 2.0 tools to communicate with parents to solicit parental involvement and to initiate parent peer support networks surrounding the issue of safe and effective e-learning at home. He adds that due to the limited time that teachers have to support parents with ICT and e-learning, schools may want to leverage parent-teacher associations and have them organize their own online parental peer support networks, where parents can help one another with anything related to student e-learning (Kong, 2017). When parents are able to freely speak to one another about their experiences and issues with e-learning and share their strategies, only then can they feel empowered to carry out these strategies and implement effective e-learning policies at home.

4) Modelling and just-in-time learning

In parent education programs, online technological tools allow parents just-in-time access to multimedia-rich resources and models of skills that they may need at home after the face-to-face learning has ended (O'Donovan, 2005; Kong, 2017). For example, in her feasibility study for implementing e-learning programs for parents of children with autism in Ireland, O'Donovan (2005) found that parents wished that skills and behaviours related to dealing with their autistic children be visually presented and modelled to them, and they also desired to review and replay these presentations when needed after the fact. Sometimes parents need access to teaching materials after live workshops are over, and e-learning multimedia technologies can facilitate this sort of just-in-time delivery of learning content; O'Donovan (2005) explains:

Visual elements and playback facilities are of huge importance in helping parents to assimilate the learning [...]. [Parents] want to use audio-visual elements to reinforce their home learning, and would like support at home when they do so (p. 28).

Since multimedia technology can be daunting to many parents and learners, it may not be wise to introduce it all at once lest they become overwhelmed and abandon the use of the e-learning platform altogether. O'Donovan (2005) suggests introducing e-learning programs in a stepped (or staged) manner for better adoption by learners/parents: (1) basic e-learning consisting of email for communication, printed course materials, and CD/DVD recordings of materials sent home for review; then (2) introducing online forums for communication between learners and instructor, and (3) database-driven LMS containing downloadable resources and videos, which model necessary skills and behaviours that parents need to support their children. In an effort to make LMSs and learning platforms more seamless for parents to use, vendors have started integrating centralized hubs into their products, which host online resources and ideas that may help parents with their new supportive role in the online environment (Tindle et al., 2015).

5) Feedback

With the current advancement in Internet and communicative technologies, parents are now able to receive immediate visual feedback from teachers and schools that can empower them to make decisions regarding their children's education and well-being. In the realm of online and blended learning, many LMSs, learning platforms, and parent portals can convey student progress information to parents visually and in a user-friendly and comprehensible manner so that they can decide how to stay informed about their children's online learning (Currie-Rubin & Smith, 2014; Selwyn et al., 2011). As Curtis (2013) mentions, parents demand transparency from schools about how their

children are doing in order to support them when they need help and they do not only want to hear about learning difficulties when it is too late; and online learning platforms that give parents regular feedback and reports on student progress (e.g. grades, time spent on LMS, recordings of students interaction during live online sessions) may help maintain transparency in communication with parents. Realizing the importance of providing empowering feedback to parents, vendors of blended learning platforms have designed special “parent portals” within their learning platforms, where parents can monitor their child’s online learning, progress and grades using visual dashboards and progress indicators that are parent-friendly and highly informative (Tindle et al., 2015). Additionally, many blended learning systems that personalize learning, such Khan Academy, offer parents feedback and reports on their child’s learning progress (Lepping, 2013).

Empowering parents using technology in the context of second language learning

In literature on second language learning, there is no mention of employing technology for empowering parents to support their children with language learning at home. This finding is anticipated considering that second language learning literature also neglects the more general topic of parental empowerment – as was discussed in a previous section of this literature review. Nevertheless, literature on second language learning does discuss the topic of *student empowerment* using technology at great lengths in academic journals and second language methodology textbooks. Why is there a focus on using technology to empower students in learning the second language and not parents? At a time when schools are advocating parental involvement and are developing

and employing technological tools to increase their participation, why are second language researchers neglecting this exciting area of study? Could it be that researchers believe that empowering parents using technology in the context of second language learning is an unfruitful endeavour?

While not explicitly articulated as such in the literature, it could be that parents are generally too busy - with the day-to-day struggles of being parents - to benefit from most technological interventions that schools or teachers setup for them. This unspoken belief has been uttered by some industry members specializing in the development of learning platforms for students and parents in virtual and blended learning contexts: realizing that the success of online and blended learning demands much commitment and active involvement from parents, some learning platform vendors reported focusing their efforts and resources on designing dedicated literacy software that makes students more independent and reduces their reliance on their parents, thereby minimizing the direct role they must play in supporting their children's online learning (Tindle et al., 2015). Moreover, learning platform vendors have identified parental engagement and participation as the largest challenge they face: "a lot of parental resources exist, but they do not access them as often as the vendors would like" (Tindle et al., 2015, p. 6). Just as learning platform vendors have identified multiple barriers that impede parental involvement in online learning, such as language barriers and heavy workloads, and have therefore started to focus their efforts on developing technologies that empower students, second language researchers may have similarly realized that parents face too many obstacles to fully benefit from technological interventions that aim to empower them and thus decided that empowering students with technology was a better pursuit.

In the field of foreign language learning, student empowerment revolves around the concepts of student autonomy, responsibility, self-regulation, and engagement. For example, Shrum and Glisan (2016) believe that language learners are empowered when they begin taking on a more active role in their own learning and engaging in self-assessment activities that assists them in monitoring their progress, setting their own learning goals, seeking assistance when needed, making decisions and exercising strategies that will help them reach their target level of mastery, and participating in their own social learning communities (p. 397). Similarly, Curtain and Dahlberg (2016) link student empowerment to a sense of autonomy and confidence and they often discuss it in the context of student-centered learning. In fact, Richard-Amato (2010) argues that student empowerment can only happen in language classrooms with transformative discourses and emergent participatory language pedagogies, which encourage students to be actively engaged in: (1) initiating topics and asking questions pertaining to their learning interests, (2) moving to other topics of interest, (3) independently exploring problems and content areas or with the assistance of peers or the teacher, and (4) reflecting on their own learning. Essentially, scaffolded dialogue leading to dialectical student-teacher relationships, where student and teacher negotiate form and meaning, is what empowers students. Only with such a relationship will students take “greater responsibility for their own learning through planning, critical exploration, decision making, and reflective thinking” (Richard-Amato, 2010, p. 96). It seems that all of the authors above situate student empowerment within student-centered pedagogy and constructivist social learning, where knowledge is constructed from one’s experience and interactions with peers, the teacher, and the surrounding world. As such, second language

learning that empowers students must be dialogical, collaborative, contextualized, personally meaningful, and linked to social inquiry.

Homework

Considering that this study deals with parents supporting their children's second language learning at home, the topic of homework and its place in second language learning will be explored in this section of the literature review. I will also discuss student motivation and self-regulation in relation to doing homework in the elementary setting since my study deals with this particular age group.

An short overview of the homework debate

Homework is a contentious issue that is widely discussed in political and popular spheres. When raised, many questions emerge: What is the purpose of homework? Is it effective in raising student achievement? How much is too much? What makes homework more effective? Should we even be giving homework? To what extent should educational institutions dictate how students and families spend their time beyond formal learning hours? Historically, homework has been linked to the world of work: students are tomorrow's leaders; schools are in charge of producing a skilled workforce; and a nation's educational system is always blamed for economic downfalls (Buell, 2004). Therefore, heated debates over homework have typically been - and continue to be - fueled by political events (e.g. labor movements demanding reduced working hours; competition between the USA and USSR for supremacy during Cold War era; pushing for higher standards to maintain competitiveness and superiority in an increasingly

globalized world) and educational currents (e.g. progressive educators calling for more humane student-centered education) (Buell, 2004; Kohn, 2006b)

There are two main camps in the homework debate: those who welcome homework and those who want it abolished. Proponents of homework are mainly academics, the most notable being Harris Cooper who argues for academic and non-academic benefits of homework (Cooper, 2007), and policy makers who push for higher educational standards and academic achievement through homework (Buell, 2004). Conversely, opponents of homework comprise of academics, like Alfie Kohn, various professionals, and concerned parents – all collectively frustrated with homework’s negative effects on family life (Bennett & Kalish, 2006; Buell, 2004; Goodman, 2007; Kohn, 2006a, 2006b, 2007; Kralovec & Buell, 2000). Authors of many popular books on homework belong to the latter camp: with titles such as *Closing the Book on Homework: Enhancing Public Education and Freeing Family Time*, *The Case Against Homework: How Homework is Hurting Our Children and What We Can Do About It, Simply Too Much Homework! What Can We Do?*, and *The End of Homework: How Homework Disrupts Families, Overburdens Children, and Limits Learning*, these critically pedagogical books attempt to empower parents to take action and reclaim their precious family time from the oppressive shackles of homework (Bennett & Kalish, 2006; Buell, 2004; Goodman, 2007; Kralovec & Buell, 2000).

Teachers are inconveniently caught in the middle of the debate: on the one hand, they are often confounded by conflicting research findings regarding the effects of homework on academic achievement; on the other hand, they empathize with families who express resentment over homework, which they themselves assign. Nonetheless, as

teachers, we generally assign homework because we intuitively believe it benefits students. As a second language teacher, I assign homework because - like the majority of second language teachers - I believe that “homework is essential to [second] language teaching and learning” (Wallinger, 2000, p. 483).

The debate over homework is ongoing mainly because its proponents cannot present a compelling case for it: past homework research has been either poor or inconclusive (Cooper, 1989a, 1989b; Coulter, 1979; Kohn, 2006a, 2006b, 2007; Wallinger, 2000). Even Cooper - arguably the foremost authority on homework research - admits that most homework studies lack methodological rigor, are poorly designed, and are thus unreliable (Cooper, 1989a). Homework studies are often unreliable because: (1) it is difficult to control for variables that affect the setting and completion of homework, (2) few teachers and students are sampled in such studies, and (3) researchers depend on self-reporting and survey responses as primary data (Wallinger, 2000, p. 484).

Additionally, homework studies often rely on false assumptions. For example, Coulter (1979) states that such studies incorrectly assume that homework is completed as imagined by the teacher or researcher and do not consider the lived dynamic reality of homework completion. To overcome this methodological problem, Coulter (1979) suggests that “homework research should move into the home and classroom” to observe how parents, teachers, and pupils really interact with homework – while acknowledging the privacy issues that may prevent such obtrusive research from occurring (p. 28). Past homework studies are also inconclusive due to their correlational nature since their findings cannot definitely suggest causal relationships between variables under study: for example, if a particular homework correlation study were to positively link time spent on

homework to student achievement, it could mean that doing more homework increases student achievement, but it could also imply that the more academically successful students are those who spend more time on homework or that teachers generally assign more homework to better students (Kohn, 2006b).

Consequently, critics claim that homework's well-known harms outweigh its potential benefits since the reported benefits from research are dubious at best (Kohn, 2006b). In fact, some critics claim that academic benefits are non-existent. For example, Kohn (2006b) argues that homework's reported academic and non-academic benefits are entirely mythical: firstly, the existing research points to no evidence that homework offers any academic benefits to elementary or junior high school students; secondly, studies showing evidence for academic benefits for high school students are merely correlational and the reported benefits are minimal; and lastly, no studies have been done on homework's role in nurturing non-academic and character skills such as responsibility, self-discipline, time-management, work ethic, perseverance, patience, etc. (Kohn, 2006a, 2006b, 2007). Books against homework dedicate entire sections to educating parents regarding the dubious and inconclusive nature of homework research to empower them when speaking to their teacher or school about existing homework policy and practices (Bennett & Kalish, 2006; Buell, 2004; Goodman, 2007; Kohn, 2006b).

Nowadays, calls for "purposeful homework" are made from both sides of the debate. According to Sullivan and Sequeira (1996), "purposeful homework is meaningful, relevant, involving, creative, and of quality" (p. 346). Other synonymous terms are used in literature such as "meaningful homework", "quality homework" and "effective homework" (Battle-Bailey, 2004; Bembenutty, 2011; Bennett & Kalish, 2006;

Cooper, 2007; Kohn, 2006b; Wieman & Arbaugh, 2014), and they all refer to homework intentionally designed to benefit student learning. Even though opponents appear to reject all homework, they would probably welcome purposeful homework. In his chapter titled “Rethinking Homework”, Kohn (2006b) demands that we “change the default” status of homework’s quantity and quality: that is, the norm should be the absence of homework and it should only be assigned if proven necessary and purposeful (p. 165). In a way, homework opponents subtly acknowledge that traditional homework practices cannot be done away with entirely and believe it wiser to advocate for reasonable high quality homework instead. Educators and researchers also advocate for purposefully and carefully designed homework assignments, which are closely aligned to educational goals and consider the emotional, motivational, and individual learning needs of students. As Hunt (2014) mentions:

The challenge is to plan homework which is relevant to the learning objectives and extends or consolidates learning, but which is also motivating for students. Providing a choice of tasks, perhaps related to different levels, is one way of developing student autonomy. It is also important to tailor it to the needs of the students in your class, ... so that homework is within the ability of pupils, but provides opportunity for challenge so that all pupils can achieve something. Planning homework thus needs to be part of the overall planning process for lessons and modules/units of work.” (p. 89)

Purposeful homework thus must be intentional, pre-planned, and well thought-out:

“homework should be planned as part of a lesson continuum, and not given as an afterthought” immediately after the bell rings (Buckland & Short, 1993, p. 29).

Unfortunately, teachers often assign poorly designed homework of no educational value for students because they do not know how to design purposeful homework. The reality is that teachers do not receive formal educational training in designing quality homework (Bennett & Kalish, 2006; Kohn, 2006b). Moreover, best homework practices

are scattered in the literature and are too general to be practically applied to homework design. Cooper (2007), for example, provides teachers with a list of tips for designing and assigning effective homework based on “research-based best homework practices”:

follow the 10-minute rule; design more frequent but shorter assignments; vary the difficulty of questions within a single assignment; give students choice; tailor assignments to individual learning needs; be careful of demanding too much from parents; provide materials that help students with study skills; and grade periodically - not everyday nor for every assignment (pp. 102–103). Homework best practices mentioned by other researchers are similarly vague in their wording: make homework more interactive through instructional technology (Hunt, 2014); clearly communicate expectations to students (Beattie, 1987); design assignments resulting in a product for an audience other than the teacher (Hunt, Barnes, & Redford, 2009); make homework meaningful and significant to students (Beattie, 1987); design the homework yourself (Kohn, 2006b, p. 184); and involve students in research and creative tasks (Hunt et al., 2009). Although most of these suggestions would please homework opponents, they are merely general guidelines and do not depict how to practically design a quality assignment.

Homework in second language teaching and learning

Very little about homework exists in the literature on second language teaching and learning (Antonek, Tucker, & Donato, 1995/2008; Beattie, 1987; Lange, 1969). Aside from a few case studies that examine the effect of homework on student achievement (Antonek et al., 1995/2008; Hunt et al., 2009; Wallinger, 2000), there is little direction for teachers on how to design quality second language homework. Even

second language methods textbooks are devoid of this topic: many popular methods textbooks published in the United States do not contain a single chapter on homework, its importance, or how to effectively design and assign it for second language classes (Curtain & Dahlberg, 2016; Richard-Amato, 2010; Shrum & Glisan, 2016). Moreover, in a recently published handbook on the teaching and learning of Arabic, there is no mention of homework either in any of its volumes (Wahba et al., 2006; Wahba, England, & Taha, 2018). The absence of literature on incorporating homework into second language teaching and learning is not a new phenomenon; Lange (1969) lamented this very point around half a century ago:

The matter is complicated by the fact that very few statements in recently published secondary school FL learning materials suggest either to the student or teacher how out-of-class tasks may add to the learning of a foreign language. Statements regarding the use of pre-recorded discs for homework seem to be the only concise ones available. There is no doubt that the homework problem is an area in FL learning in the USA that could benefit from some concentrated effort. (p. 132)

In my research, I only found two publications from the United Kingdom addressing homework's role in second language learning: the first publication, *A Practical Guide to Teaching Foreign Languages in the Secondary School*, includes a chapter on supporting second language teaching through homework (however, the 7-page-long chapter only offers general advice about homework, hardly specific to second language learning and teaching) (Hunt, 2014; Pachler & Redondo, 2014); the second publication, *Night shift: Ideas and strategies for Homework*, published by the *Centre for Information on Language Teaching and Research (CILT)*, is more promising as it is specific to second language teaching and learning (Buckland & Short, 1993). The latter publication thoroughly depicts practical homework strategies that any second language

teacher can immediately implement to design and set assignments which strengthen the four skills (speaking, listening, reading, and writing) (Buckland & Short, 1993).

Nonetheless, it is still quite problematic that the only practical and relevant resource on second language homework that I found is almost twenty-five years old.

The lack of literature on second language homework is surprising given the central role of homework in facilitating second language mastery. Logistically, most second language programs offer inadequate instructional time to facilitate high levels of competency in the second language; hence students serious about achieving high levels of proficiency in another language must invest thousands of hours outside the classroom, engaged in deliberate practice and independent study (Eaton, 2012). Assigning regular and purposeful second language homework can support students' "deliberate practice through self-regulated informal learning (Eaton, 2012, p. 12). Although opponents would reject any homework solely aimed at increasing "time-on-task" and practicing skills (Kohn, 2006b, p. 103), most researchers agree that intentional practice is crucial to skill mastery (Eaton, 2012). Like any skill, linguistic skills cannot become automatic (and learners cannot reach linguistic competency) without sustained language practice.

In addition to providing time for language practice and reinforcement, homework can facilitate vocabulary retention, development of second language skills (reading, writing, listening, and speaking), and acquiring language-learning strategies. Firstly, second language homework recycles vocabulary and prevents their loss from memory (Center for Open Educational Resources & Language Learning (COERLL), The University of Texas at Austin, n.d.; Hunt, 2014). Townsend's (1995) quantitative study findings support this: she found that third graders whom she assigned regular vocabulary

homework had increased vocabulary acquisition and comprehension than third grades who did not receive regular homework. Furthermore, Buckland and Short (1993) depict how some homework tasks are far better at nurturing the four language skills than many classroom language-learning activities. For example, in rationalizing listening homework, the authors argue that the classroom is not ideal for listening comprehension exercises or developing skills and strategies:

Home is the ideal place to develop listening competence, since control over time allows for the amount of repetition appropriate to the individual's needs, which in turn can play a major part in developing confidence as well as skills and strategies..... Once they realise that repetition, although sometimes tedious, can greatly enhance understanding, some may actually wish to listen more! (Buckland & Short, 1993, p. 14)

Pronunciation (or reading) homework offers students an ideal environment away from teacher- and peer-pressure to experiment with oral pronunciation (or reading) of unfamiliar words in the second language (Buckland & Short, 1993, p. 7). Similarly, writing homework can “consolidate a specific aspect of grammar or vocabulary” as students attempt to carefully formulate correct sentences (Buckland & Short, 1993, p. 24). Buckland and Short (1993) also add that “an interesting way to reinforce new vocabulary and structures is to teach them to someone else” (p. 7); hence, asking students to teach their parents functional language and basic vocabulary in the second language could directly increase their child’s second language learning while involving parents in school. Lastly, providing feedback on listening homework exercises and discussing meta-cognition in-class can nurture self-reflection and awareness of language learning strategies (Buckland & Short, 1993, p. 15). These few examples demonstrate how homework can be tightly linked to language learning objectives and strategies and promote second language learning and self-reflection.

Student motivation and self-regulation in relation to elementary-school homework

Many instructors, who assign homework, assume that their students can do it independently simply because they thoroughly covered the learning material in class; however, successful completion of homework hinges on more than just knowing the subject content: it demands high levels of student motivation and self-regulation. While older students are more capable of doing homework independently, younger students often lack the intrinsic motivation and self-regulatory skills needed to carry it out without adult or peer support. Supporting younger students with homework becomes even more crucial in an online learning environment due to its solitary nature. This sub-section will address the complex issue of homework, self-regulation, and motivation in relation to young learners at the elementary level.

Self-regulation and homework

Self-regulation is a complex process through which learners actively engage in their learning using metacognitive, motivational, and behavioral mechanisms (Zimmerman, 1989). More precisely, it can be defined as:

an active, constructive process whereby learners set goals for their learning and then attempt to monitor, regulate, and control their cognition, motivation, and behavior in the service of those goals, guided and constrained by both personal characteristics and the contextual features in the environment (Pintrich & Zusho, 2002, p. 250)

In simple terms, self-regulation is what makes a student carry out learning tasks independently and with persistence. For instance, students who show self-regulation take responsibility for their learning and carry out learning tasks (such as studying and homework) without being reminded by others (Warton, 1997). Researchers generally

agree that students who can effectively use adaptive self-regulatory strategies do better academically than those who cannot (Bembenutty, 2011; Pintrich & Zusho, 2002; Ramdass & Zimmerman, 2011; Schunk, 2005; Schunk & Zimmerman, 2007; Tracy, Reid, & Graham, 2009).

Recognizing the importance of self-regulation for student academic success, researchers have investigated how best to nurture self-regulatory habits in students. For example, some scholars have studied self-regulation from a developmental perspective, seeking to unearth the cognitive and motivational factors that may affect the development of academic self-regulations in children (Paris & Newman, 1990; Pintrich & Zusho, 2002), while others have examined its relationship to various motivational variables in learners such as achievement goals (Wolters, Yu, & Pintrich, 1996), self-efficacy (Schunk, 1991), and sense of autonomy (Deci, Vallerand, Pelletier, & Ryan, 1991). Additionally, some scholars have explored self-regulation within specific contexts such as: parent-child homework practices and parental involvement (Bembenutty, 2011; Bembenutty & Zimmerman, 2003; Coutts, 2004; Hong, Milgram, & Rowell, 2004; Katz, Kaplan, & Buzukashvily, 2011; Knollmann & Wild, 2007; Ramdass & Zimmerman, 2011; Tam & Chan, 2009; Warton, 1997; Warton, 2001; Xu & Corno, 1998; Xu, Benson, Mudrey-Camino, & Steiner, 2010), training programs and instructional strategies for young students (Dignath, Buettner, & Langfeldt, 2008; Schunk & Zimmerman, 2007; Tracy et al., 2009), and distance and online learning (Dabbagh & Kitsantas, 2012; Joo, Bong, & Choi, 2000; Sun & Rueda, 2012).

Considering that homework has received much attention by researchers studying self-regulation, it seems that the study of homework is central to understanding academic

self-regulation. Homework is defined as work that students do during non-instructional time (Cooper, 2007). Because homework must be done independently without teacher support, it is of direct relevance to self-regulation research: “self-regulation researchers seek to answer the question, *how do students become self-directed in managing their learning?* [emphasis added]” (Ramdass & Zimmerman, 2011, p. 199). In other words, researchers are interested in understanding the self-regulatory mechanisms that facilitate the autonomous completion of homework and in devising ways to nurture such mechanisms in students. In the context of completing homework, key self-regulation processes may include: reminding oneself of the task; planning; time-management; arranging the working environment for maximum focus and attention; avoiding negative emotions, thoughts, or behaviours that may distract from doing the task; and motivating oneself to persist throughout (Pintrich & Zusho, 2002; Ramdass & Zimmerman, 2011; Warton, 1997). Students who lack self-regulatory habits fall into maladaptive homework practices such as procrastination, self-handicapping, over-relying on parental assistance, or engaging in distractive behaviours such as texting or watching TV while doing homework (Bembenutty, 2011).

While self-regulation is critical for completing homework, some researchers have come to realize that the process of doing homework itself can in fact enhance academic self-regulation in students. For example, Ramdass and Zimmerman (2011) claim that since homework promotes the use of self-regulatory processes, it can nurture the development of student self-regulation. In their review of empirical and correlational studies of self-regulation in the context of homework, they discovered “positive relationships between homework activities and self-efficacy, self-reflection,

responsibility for learning, maintaining focus, managing the environment, inhibiting distractions, delaying gratification, and managing time” (Ramdass & Zimmerman, 2011, p. 215). Hence, it seems that the relationship between homework and self-regulation is reciprocal: while academic self-regulation is required for completing homework, it can actually be developed and nurtured through doing homework. The above findings challenge the prevalent popular discourse surrounding homework, which strongly rejects any assertions suggesting that doing homework yields academic or non-academic benefits (Kohn, 2006a, 2006b, 2007).

Self-regulation and motivation in young learners

Whilst it is important to teach young children self-regulation strategies early on to set them on their way to academic success, this becomes even more vital once we realize that they are less able to exercise self-regulation than older children. Firstly, various researchers have claimed that there are cognitive and metacognitive factors that limit children’s ability to self-regulate their behavior. For example, Xu et al. (2010) reports that that young children are not at the developmental stage where they can readily self-regulate since self-regulation demands highly metacognitive processes, which do not emerge in most students until junior high or high school. Paris and Newman (1990) elaborate on this developmental trend as follows:

Regardless of the theoretical perspective, empirical studies reveal that 7- to 8-year-old children rarely reflect on their own performance and seldom evaluate and control their cognitive abilities compared to 11- to 12-year-olds. Older adolescents use a more diverse database to calculate their self-perceptions of ability and thereby exhibit greater self-control (pp. 89-90).

Moreover, Pintrich and Zusho (2002) mentioned that because young children lack prior knowledge of self-regulation and have larger restrictions on their working memory, their

capacity to self-regulate is limited. These cognitive constraints give rise to a developmental paradox that can only be solved by involving other adults to assist young children in self-regulating:

Younger students [...] with less prior knowledge would be expected to have more difficulties in self-regulation due to working memory constraints. At the same time, [...] to become more knowledgeable or skilled, they need to become more metacognitive and regulate their own learning. However, these [younger] students are the ones who may have the most difficulty in enacting the various regulatory strategies. [...] Given this problem, it is not surprising that [they] often have to be "other-regulated" initially through coaching, instructional supports, and teacher scaffolding before they can be self-regulating (Pintrich & Zusho, 2002, p. 258).

Various researchers have specifically stressed the role of parents in supporting children in developing self-regulatory skills (Corno & Xu, 2004; Paris & Newman, 1990; Pintrich & Zusho, 2002; Ramdass & Zimmerman, 2011; Xu & Corno, 1998; Xu et al., 2010).

Additionally, young children are less able to self-motivate themselves to persist in the process of self-regulation. Motivation is a key precursor, mediating factor, and concomitant and primary outcome of student self-regulation: it facilitates initial engagement with the learning task, more sustained attentiveness and persistence throughout, and greater overall satisfaction with learning (Zimmerman & Schunk, 2008). Motivation also allows students to choose learning tasks over other competing tasks and achieve academically:

Students who are motivated to choose a [learning] task when given the opportunity [to select other distracting tasks] display greater progress than unmotivated students [...]. For example, a student who memorizes foreign language words during free time in preference of other activities is more likely to acquire mastery of the language than a less-motivated student (Zimmerman & Schunk, 2008, p. 3).

The ability to select learning and persist in doing so amidst other distracting choices, such as watching TV and playing with friends, rests primarily on the student's ability to

display self-control in the face of temptations and delay gratification (Bembenutty & Karabenick, 2004; Bembenutty & Zimmerman, 2003). Researchers generally agree that younger children are less able to delay gratification than older students (Lee, Lan, Wang, & Chiu, 2008; Pintrich & Zusho, 2002) because they have a shorter future time perspective and thus cannot value distant goals to the same degree (Bembenutty & Karabenick, 2004; Lens, 1986; Puddester, 2011). In essence, because younger students may not be able to see the immediate value of many learning tasks (especially those that may be boring and repetitive), persisting in them becomes more difficult and impedes their academic success:

Being a successful student [...] depends in large measure on resisting temptations that are immediately gratifying in order to increase the likelihood of accomplishing some *temporally remote and presumably more important goal* [emphasis added] (Bembenutty & Karabenick, 2004, pp. 36).

Considering that young children lack the intrinsic motivation to drive their own learning and engage in self-regulatory habits, educators must sometimes tap into extrinsic motivators to stimulate initial interest in learning. Much research highlights the detrimental effects of external rewards on student intrinsic motivation (Ames, 1992; Deci, Koestner, & Ryan, 1999) and researchers warn that an over-dependence on external sources of motivation (such as gamification, external rewards, grades, and the like) could cause students to limit themselves to engaging tasks at the expense of seemingly boring ones that may be crucial for developing self-regulatory habits (Zimmerman & Schunk, 2008, pp. 4-5). Nonetheless, some researchers suggest that external rewards are necessary to place young students on the path to learning (Ames, 1992; Ryan & Deci, 2000; Schunk, 1991). For example, Schunk (1991) stresses that educators must somehow stimulate interest in self-regulatory learning activities, especially those that may seem

boring or monotonous to young learners. He further suggests that external motivators could nurture student interest if clearly tied to student performance and self-efficacy:

The development of interest likely depends in part on a sense of perceived competence for the activity [...]. Research needs to explore the idea that rewards may help to develop interest when they are given contingent on performance and thus signal progress in learning and raise efficacy. [...] This approach should be maximally effective with activities that have clear performance standards so that when students receive rewards they will understand what they denote (Schunk, 1991, p. 220).

Additionally, Ryan and Deci (2000) believe that extrinsic motivation for a learning activity could gradually transform into more intrinsic types:

A person might originally get exposed to an activity because of an external regulation (e.g., a reward), and (if the reward is not perceived as too controlling) such exposure might allow the person to experience the activity's intrinsically interesting properties, resulting in an orientation shift (p. 63).

The authors further claim that external social factors, such as connectedness with family and friends, are key in internalizing learning activities and self-regulatory habits that may not be intrinsically motivating to begin with:

Because extrinsically motivated behaviors are not inherently interesting and thus must initially be externally prompted, the primary reason people are likely to be willing to do the behaviors is that they are valued by significant others to whom they feel (or would like to feel) connected, whether that be a family, a peer group, or a society (Ryan & Deci, 2000, p. 64).

Parental involvement can play an important role in encouraging student self-motivation and academic self-regulation by enhancing academic self-efficacy, providing a sense of safety and connectedness, and facilitating the internalization of positive educational values and attitudes (Gonzalez-DeHass, Willems, & Holbein, 2005; Xu et al., 2010).

Homework and young children

Considering that younger children are less intrinsically motivated to carry out academic self-regulation, their ability to autonomously do homework is minimal.

Researchers generally acknowledge that young children are less able to independently do homework if compared to older children due to developmental differences in motivation (Battle-Bailey, 2004; Bembenutty & Zimmerman, 2003; Coutts, 2004; Katz et al., 2011; Katz, Eilat, & Nevo, 2014; Hong et al., 2004; Tam & Chan, 2009; Warton, 1997; Warton, 2001). For example, Warton (1997) studied self-regulatory homework practices from the standpoint of responsibility and claimed that fully understanding responsibility only occurs when students start to link self-regulated homework practices and behaviours (such as remembering to do homework without being reminded) with an intrinsic sense of ownership over the task. In her research, Warton (1997) discovered that young children truly do not understand what it means to be responsible for doing homework: while they may acknowledge that they need to remember to do homework, they often attribute it to external reasons such as pleasing the teacher or avoiding blame or punishment; it is only towards the end of elementary years (Grade 6) when children begin to associate remembering to do homework with intrinsic reasons, such as homework being their own responsibility or that it is important for their own learning. It seems that children's self-regulatory homework practices do not truly emerge until they finish elementary school.

The inability of young children to be truly responsible for their homework can be partly explained by their limited capacity to value homework's long-term benefits. From a motivational perspective, young children have shorter future time perspectives and are thus less able to delay gratification, set long-term goals, and value present tasks with distant rewards (Bembenutty & Karabenick, 2004; Lee et al., 2008; Lens, 1986; Pintrich

& Zusho, 2002; Puddester, 2011). Applying this to homework, young students do not recognize its intrinsic value and only focus on its immediate costs:

Many students are explicit that homework is an activity that prevents or disrupts other more desirable leisure activities, such as sports or just spending time with friends. If homework is seen as a barrier to successful group involvement, there is no guarantee that it will be chosen over social, peer-oriented activities, despite parental and teacher pressure. (Coutts, 2004, p. 186)

Due to this key developmental difference, there is a sharp incongruence between the utility that children and parents assign to homework respectively, which could explain the parent-student tension that is often reported when doing homework: students often focus on immediate personal and social costs of homework while parents focus on its long-term cognitive, academic, and personal benefits (Coutts, 2004; Warton, 2001; Xu & Corno, 1998). Acknowledging that parents and children differ in their attitude towards homework goals, various researchers have called for more student-centered homework research programs that honor students' voices and consider their perspective when attempting to understand student homework motivation and behavior (Coutts, 2004; Hong et al., 2004; Warton, 2001; Xu & Corno, 1998). Warton (2001), for instance, advocates the use of Eccles' expectancy-value model for achievement-related activities as a potential conceptual framework to explain students' homework motivational behaviours:

According to Eccles's [...] model, the students' goals as well as the value, meaning, and significance they attach to the homework activities are critical for the choices the students make, the effort they will contribute to the endeavor and to the persistence they will display (p. 157).

Educators who choose to dismiss (or ignore) the apparent developmental differences in self-motivation and self-regulation and hastily assume that young students can do

assigned homework unassisted will only face disappointment when their students turn in their poorly completed or incomplete homework.

Considering children's limited ability to self-motivate and responsibly complete their homework on their own, parental involvement is imperative to nurture the self-regulatory habits needed for doing homework. Because young children cannot readily self-regulate, other adults must provide them with instructional experiences that allow them to modify their existing cognitive and motivational theories about school and learning to ones more supporting of self-regulation: "the shift from other-regulated to self-regulated learning is scaffolded and guided motivationally as well as cognitively" (Paris & Newman, 1990, p. 100) For example, in earlier grades, *other-regulation* of student learning is primarily the role of the teacher and as students advance and become more able to self-regulate, teachers play a smaller role (Ramdass & Zimmerman, 2011). Researchers have found that parental involvement in homework is key in inculcating self-regulative strategies in children (Xu et al., 2010), such as "goal setting, planning, time management, attentiveness, and responsibility, all of which are necessary in homework completion and academic achievement" (Ramdass & Zimmerman, 2011, p. 214).

Additionally, when parents take on an active role in student homework, they can nurture more positive attitudes towards homework in their children and enhance their motivation:

parental interest in homework can facilitate student interest, which enhances students' motivation to complete homework assignments using self-directed and self-management strategies (Battle-Bailey, 2004, p. 38)

According to Xu and Corno (1998), the strategies of techniques used by children for monitoring time, attention, motivation, and emotion while doing homework were modeled by parents and very likely originated from them. In fact, it has been found that

parents typically use developmentally specific strategies with their children at home when it relates to homework: parents are more involved with elementary children than junior high or high school children, monitoring their homework completion and providing them with encouragement (Tam & Chan, 2009). The above findings suggests that parents are well aware of their need to support their children with homework at a young age because they are less able to motivate themselves and carry out self-regulatory homework habits.

Online homework and young children

The obligation to support young children with homework and independent learning becomes even more crucial when learning takes places in an online environment. While online environments can motivate children to do their homework due to their interactive, multimodal, and novel nature, they could also prove to be even more distracting for children than traditional learning environments (Portier, Peterson, Capitaotavares, & Rambaran, 2013; Sun & Rueda, 2012). According to Livingstone and Bober (2004), children in the UK are more excited about the Internet as a medium of communication than as a medium of learning and education. In fact, the motivation that children may show towards online homework may have nothing to do with the way the online medium transforms the homework task into something more interesting or fun, but more to do with the possibility of engaging in fun online social activities while online. In their study of parental perspectives toward online homework through wikis and blogs, Portier and her colleagues (2013) found that parents were worried about the distractive features of online learning:

As motivated as most students were to participate in the homework online, one parent observed that this motivation was more about getting online than engaging

in homework. This parent observed that his child “tend[ed] to use the medium for gaming and socializing.” Other parents were concerned about their children being distracted from their homework when they were working online, and 31% of the parents found it difficult to determine whether their children were working on homework or playing and socializing when they were online. (p. 10).

The susceptibility of young children to following distracting links and games in online environments is largely due to their limited capacity to delay gratification and recognize the intrinsic value of homework and learning in general. By simply showing interest in their children’s online homework and participating in it, parents can positively impact their children’s intrinsic motivation and push them to take responsibility for their online learning (Gonzalez-DeHass et al., 2005; Katz et al., 2011; Xu et al., 2010).

Additionally, the proliferation of online homework sites, which provide ready-to-use solutions to homework assignments, adds to the ever-growing list of temptations and distractions in online environments. Much research points to the widespread disinterest students have with homework assignments and the huge personal and social costs that they associate with doing homework (Corno & Xu, 2004; Coutts, 2004; Hong et al., 2004; Warton, 2001). The appearance of technology-driven homework sites, which offer ready-made solutions for students doing homework, poses a challenge to homework’s role in enhancing students’ self-regulatory habits:

There is a great proliferation of [...] homework-related sites that purport to supply students with everything [they need] to complete research assignments, all of which require little intellectual effort on the part of students. [...] Apart from the obvious social-justice issues this raises regarding access and resourcing both in schools and with the more economically disadvantaged groups in society, it sets up a temptation for students to complete a disliked task in the easiest possible manner. Why spend individual time and effort on homework if the task is not engaging? Why not choose a ready-made solution? (Warton, 2001, p. 163)

Many students around the world are already using such sites. For example, Altun’s (2008) study Grade 6, 7 and 8 Turkish students’ views surrounding online homework

sites suggested that (1) these sites are frequently used by the majority of these students and that (2) they highly favour these sites because they save them time doing homework. While one may argue that students in the lower elementary level may not ever utilize these online homework sites, it is very likely that upper elementary students with heavier homework loads will seek such sites and utilize them. Nonetheless, as more teachers start substituting their homework assignments with prepackaged web resources (Warton, 2001), parental monitoring of student online homework practices will become even more important to instill genuine interest in completing homework independently and to protect students from maladaptive homework practices (such as relying on online homework sites for solutions) (Bembenutty, 2011).

Moreover, the uniquely solitary nature of online learning environments makes completing online homework more difficult for younger children who lack the needed self-regulatory skills to work independently. Online learning differs from traditional face-to-face learning in that online learners are expected to seek information, request support, and solve problems without direct support from an instructor (Joo et al, 2000). Since online learners have less immediate teacher contact and supervision, they may be less motivated to persist with the online learning material: “[online] distance education learners lack direct encouragement from instructors [and] may be less self-regulated in engaging in [online] activities” (Sun & Rueda, 2012, p. 193). While the novelty effect of the online medium may generate temporary student situational interest and engagement, the sense of isolation that students feel during online distance learning may negatively impact their ability to independently engage with and self-direct their online learning (Sun & Rueda, 2012). Even adult learners, who have greatly developed their self-

regulatory skills after 12 or more years of schooling, have difficulty persisting in online learning. For example, in most massively open online courses (MOOCs), the majority of learners drop out and do not complete the course: “the general trajectory is clear: many enrol; fewer start out; a small minority complete” (Onah, Sinclair, & Boyatt, 2014, p. 3). In fact, Gütl, Rizzardini, Chang, and Morales (2014) report that retention rates in MOOCs are as low as 3-8% and they partly attribute this to the emotional isolation and lack of self-regulation during e-learning:

In a MOOC offering, students face issues of isolation and disconnect, similar to those experienced in distance learning environments [...]. It is also reported that students fail to self-organize in that they are not prepared to control their own learning and [face] problems in using the learning tools and completing the learning activities (p. 38).

It follows that young learners, who are less able to self-regulate than adult learners, will have even more difficulties engaging and persisting in online learning due to its self-directed and highly technological nature:

Online learning generally requires a high degree of autonomy and depends on users being able to work with the technologies and formats used. Even those who are familiar with using a range of everyday technologies may be uncomfortable when new systems must be quickly mastered (Onah et al., 2014, p. 4).

Considering that online homework is merely a component of online distance learning, it is expected that young students will also find it similarly challenging to persist in their online assignments from start to completion.

Given both the distracting and solitary nature of online learning, it follows that teachers cannot expect young children to do online homework on their own without parental support. Various researchers have argued that parental involvement is critical for student success in online learning environments (Currie-Rubin & Smith, 2014; Curtis,

2013). While teachers can arguably play a huge role in supporting students with online learning, the heaviest burden rests on the shoulders of parents:

One of the primary expectations of online learning is that students will complete lessons that target a particular standard or grade expectation. Completing a lesson might mean reading text and answering questions about the text, or it might mean watching a video and attempting practice problems. Students may have to navigate between online videos and an online quiz. They may also be required to read text in a paper book and record their answers to multiple-choice questions on the computer. As all of this takes place, who answers questions, makes sure that the student is engaged in the lesson and not surfing the web, and reinforces the completion of the lessons? At the primary, elementary, and early middle school years, the parent or adult in the home takes on this responsibility. Although the online teacher can always be e-mailed or called, the minute-to-minute, hour-to-hour, and day-to-day assistance is often provided by a member of the student's family (Currie-Rubin & Smith, 2014, p. 118).

Parents must address the self-regulatory needs of their young children and nurture autonomous learning behaviour if they are to successfully engage in online learning (Currie-Rubin & Smith, 2014; Curtis, 2013; Sun & Rueda, 2012). For example, many of the tasks that parents are expected to carry out when supporting their children with online learning fall under the category of teaching academic self-regulation and these include: motivating their children to start the learning task by showing interest in their learning; setting learning goals with them; providing positive feedback; helping them control their frustration and anxiety and persist in their learning; supporting them with internalizing learning; and assisting them in displaying responsibility and independence (Currie-Rubin & Smith, 2014, p. 120). In the context of online learning, parents undoubtedly cannot afford to be idle, leaving their children to do learning tasks independently – their role is ever-active and ever-changing (Currie-Rubin & Smith, 2014).

Research Methodology and Design

What is Educational Action Research?

Educational action research can be simply defined as research aimed at positively changing educational practice from the ground-up. More specifically, Mills (2011) defines educational action research as:

any systematic inquiry conducted by teacher researchers, principals, school counselors, or other stakeholders in the teaching/learning environment to gather information about how their particular schools operate, how they teach, and how well their students learn [with the intent of] gaining insight, developing reflective practices, effecting positive changes in the school environment (and on educational practices in general), and improving student outcomes and the lives of those involved (p. 5)

Hence, educational action research is conducted by educational practitioners, who have a vested interest in improving their own pedagogical practice as well as the learning environments in which they teach. As the name suggests, educational action research involves acting on the educational setting and is not interested in mere theory building; that is, it aims to yield positive improvement to teaching and learning through thoughtful reflection on the educational setting and the purposeful design and implementation of educational interventions (Hatch, 2002). In a practical sense, teacher-led or school-based action research is arguably problem-oriented: it is used to identify problems in school environments and develop and test solutions for these problems (Mertler, 2014, p. 25)

Educational action research finds its origin from other fields of study, where research efforts are aimed at empowering individuals through collective praxis so that they can improve their own lives. Hatch (2002) describes this type of research as being “concerned with activity and change [and] undertaken for the sake of investigating practice, usually in concert with those working in the front lines, and improving that

practice based on what is discovered” (p. 31). Taking a more critical stance, Kemmis, McTaggart, and Nixon (2013) name this type of research “critical participatory action research” and depicts it as research which: (a) rejects traditional repressive hierarchical research approaches, (b) recognizes that ordinary individuals can actively participate in research projects in their local settings, and (c) attempts to empower participants to reflect on their own circumstances and improve them (p. 4). Mills (2011) categorizes action research into two main types: (1) critical (or emancipatory), which seeks to enlighten and liberate participants through the participatory and democratic construction of knowledge and a commitment to social change, and (2) practical, which gives participants more freedom to determine the nature of their own research projects for themselves (pp. 6-7). For example, the type of research conducted by educator Paulo Freire in Latin America, where he engaged in teaching the illiterate peasants and raising their collective consciousness to their own oppressive social circumstances (Freire, 2004), would fall under the former category, while teacher-led action research projects would likely fall under the latter.

In the field of education, action research has become a popular tool amongst teachers, administrators, and policy makers, so much so that, according to Mills (2011), many teacher training programs have substituted their required research methodology courses – which focus on traditional quantitative and qualitative research methods - with courses on action research. While action research indeed makes research simpler and more manageable to carry out, its rising popularity primarily rests on it being more relevant, practical, and empowering for educational practitioners (Hitchcock & Hughes, 1995; Mertler, 2014, Mills, 2011). Moreover, the growing interest in action research

could be explained as a reaction to the severe disillusionment felt by many educational practitioners toward educational research: on the one hand, there is a stark disconnect between research-generated educational theory and on-the-ground teaching practice, which, according to Kennedy (1997), has made teachers view educational research as unconvincing, unreliable, irrelevant, removed from their current classroom realities, verbose, unintelligible, and incapable of producing systemic changes in current educational practices or policies (as cited in Mills, 2011, p. 10); on the other hand, action research has emerged as a promising alternative that can empower teachers to find solutions for themselves to their own local problems thus becoming “authorities on what works in their classrooms” and to change things from the bottom-up (Mills, 2011, p. 11). In other words, action research has become a “grass roots practice” (Hitchcock & Hughes, 1995, p. 28) bent on bridging the gap between educational theory and practice and taking control of the flow of expertise and wisdom in the field of education.

While researchers have offered various iterative, cyclical, or spiral models describing the overall step-by-step process for conducting action research (Hitchcock & Hughes, 1995; Mertler, 2014; Mills, 2011; Parsons, Hewson, Adrian, & Day, 2012a), action research seems to consist of four main steps carried out in the following order: (1) reflection, (2) planning, (3) action, and (4) observation (or evaluation) (Carr & Kemmis, 2003, p. 162). That is, the action researcher first reflects on a problem originating from his/her immediate experience or practice, then plans how to address the problem and devises a suitable intervention, then takes action to solve the problem by implementing that intervention, then observes or evaluates whether the intervention was fruitful or not, and after that reflects anew to determine what further action is needed: either continuing

the intervention, halting it, or modifying it based on what was learned (Parsons et al., 2012a, p. 15) - and the action research cycle starts once again. In its simplest form, however, action research can be reduced to an iterative process that “moves [the researcher] from reflection to action and back to reflection again” (Parsons et al., 2012a, p. 13). Therefore, action research is, in essence, a dialectical relationship between reflection and action; and considering that the objective of action research is developing reflective practitioners (Hitchbook & Hughes, 1995; Mertler, 2014; Mills, 2011), these two components are undoubtedly integral.

Hitchbook and Hughes (1995) add “collaboration” as a third integral component to action research since they claim that action research cannot occur without collaboration between the researcher and those being researched: whether it be “collaboration between practitioners within and outside of the organization [or] collaboration between organizations [themselves]” (p. 28). However, other scholars, like Clauset, Lick, and Murphy (2008), make a distinction between “collaborative action research” and “individual action research” (as cited in Mertler, 2014, p. 23): an example of the former could be a school-wide action research project, where every teacher in the school is involved in doing action research to answer a general research question tied to the school’s instructional aims and priorities; while an example of the latter could be a sole teacher, like myself, engaging in an action research project - similar to the one described in this paper - as part of post-graduate studies. With this distinction in mind, the end of collaborative action research in the field of education could be school- or district-wide improvement, whereas the impact of individual action research is limited to the teacher’s own professional growth and small-scale changes in the classroom setting.

In the case of teacher-led action research, the teacher and researcher are one and the same, and it can be argued that collaboration plays a lesser role than it would if the researcher were someone from outside the school's organization.

The unique nature of educational action research has rendered it a powerful research tool but has also subjected it to much criticism. Educational researchers from the traditional camp have often falsely depicted action research studies as lacking rigor and being of lesser quality than traditional educational research since they are often conducted by non-academic educational practitioners; however, as Mertler (2014) correctly points out, academic rigor is merely dependent on following certain methodological procedures in the study to reduce bias and increase validity, reliability, and credibility, and action researchers – no matter who they are - can easily provide rigor to their studies by repeating the action research cycle, prolonging engagement in the study, carrying out mixed-methods experimental designs and triangulating data, and conducting member checking and participant debriefing after data is collected, analyzed, and/or synthesized (p. 28). Moreover, because action research is particular, situational, and thus not concerned with generalizability, ensuring high degrees of rigor is not that crucial. What opponents of action research forget is that action research has different features and aims than traditional educational research, and therefore must be evaluated on a different set of criteria (Mertler, 2014). For example, while a researcher's bias and direct involvement/interaction with participants may be seen as problematic by traditional educational researchers, who are used to positivistic research paradigms for example, it is not deemed as such in action research: Hatch (2002) reminds us that "there is recognition that values of the researcher have a prominent place in the inquiry, and change [in study

participants and setting] is the desired endpoint” (p. 31). Additionally, the format of action research reports is different than traditional educational research since researcher bias necessarily alters the manner of reporting action research: “the writing up of action research is also likely to be much less impersonal than in traditional scientific [educational] research, offering a wider potential for making use of different writing styles” (Hitchcock & Hughes, 1995, p. 28). Moreover, it is not uncommon for action researchers to change their research questions and methodologies partway through the study (Mertler, 2014); so the emergent and unpredictable nature of action research must be acknowledged and embraced by researchers who are directly involved in the study and those who are not.

My Study

This study follows an action research methodology, which is described as a “self-reflective spiral of cycles of planning, acting, observing, and reflecting” (Carr & Kemmis, 2003, p. 162). In the context of my study, this process included the following stages:

- 1) Reflection on the problem: Parents feel unable to support their children’s Arabic language learning because they feel they are not proficient in Arabic.
- 2) Planning: How will I empower parents? How will I know that they have been empowered?
- 3) Action (or intervention): Provide parents with and Arabic LMS, online Arabic learning modules, and interactive Arabic homework.
- 4) Observation: Are parents empowered after experiencing the online Arabic learning intervention? Are they more involved in their children’s learning?
- 5) Renewed reflection: Did all parents experience empowerment? If not, why not?

The above stages will be described in detail below. The final form of my research question will appear on page 79.

Reflection on the problem: Parents feel unable to support their children’s Arabic language learning because they feel they are not proficient in Arabic.

As mentioned in the Introduction, over the span of my career as an Arabic language teacher, parents have often approached me seeking advice as to how they can support their children in learning Arabic when they themselves lack the basic Arabic

language skills to do so. This request from parents became so frequent that I strongly sensed that many were disempowered and unable to assist their children with their Arabic learning because they felt that they were not proficient in Arabic. In addition, this sense of disempowerment was clearly coming from within: parents developed this feeling of utter helplessness through self-reflection on their own Arabic language competency and assessing the degree to which they believed they could assist their children with Arabic at home. In other words, the sense of disempowerment was genuine and not cast upon parents from an external source. Even though many parents had some basic Arabic language competency, such as the ability to read and write with limited comprehension, they still felt they had nothing to offer their children in terms of support. Hence, the main issue was one of lacking confidence (or having low self-efficacy) in relation to one's Arabic language abilities. I started to wonder: *“How can I empower parents and increase their confidence in their own Arabic competency so they can better support their children with Arabic language learning at home?”*

Planning: How will I empower parents?

In trying to address the issue of parental disempowerment, I became interested in using technology to empower parents linguistically after reflecting on my earlier attempts at assisting parents. In the past, I tried to support parents by using various technological tools sporadically throughout the school year. For example, one year, I created interactive visual vocabulary lists as PDF files using Adobe Acrobat and posted them on XYZPortal (a pseudonym for our district's information portal for connecting students, teachers, and parents). In such PDFs, students or parents could click on a word or a picture and hear its

Arabic pronunciation. Other years, I used VoiceThread⁷ to create media-rich interactive Arabic learning resources and presentations and I shared them with students and parents. Although these attempts can hardly be considered massive program-wide technological interventions to support parents in Arabic, I always received positive feedback from parents saying they enjoyed using the technological tools and appreciated the effort I made. It is these positive experiences with technology that drove me to believe that technology perhaps held the key to empowering parents and fostering their involvement in their children's daily Arabic learning at home.

As such, my basic research question became: "*To what extent can instructional technology empower parents so that they can support their children's Arabic language learning at home?*" In a sense, I was wondering whether parents would feel more confident and able to assist their children in Arabic language learning at home if they themselves were offered some digital instructional resources that could support them in this task. Moreover, I pondered whether an increased level of parental confidence would translate into increased involvement in their children's Arabic language learning at home.

What barriers do parents need to overcome?

In exploring this revised research question, I attempted to address parental disempowerment from two angles: mitigating linguistic barriers and communicative barriers.

⁷ VoiceThread is a commercial Web 2.0 tool that allows users to have rich multimodal asynchronous online conversations about media. For more information, see www.voicethread.com

a) Linguistic barriers.

These can be defined as linguistic factors that give rise to a real or perceived sense of helplessness that prevents parents from supporting their children in Arabic learning. Such barriers could include difficulties in reading, writing, speaking, or listening in Arabic, as well as the lack of general knowledge of the basic grammatical and structural workings of the Arabic language. Generally speaking, parents who are not native speakers of Arabic would probably feel less able to support their children with their Arabic learning than native Arabic-speaking parents because they don't speak the language themselves and are unaware of the rules that govern it. So, by boosting parental confidence in their own level of Arabic competency, they may be more inclined to support their children in Arabic language learning.

To address the linguistic barriers, I considered creating an online Arabic learning module that aimed at teaching parents basic conversational Arabic, grammar, and vocabulary. I believed that parents would welcome the opportunity of learning basic conversational Arabic in an online format and that succeeding in that course could potentially boost their level of confidence in their own Arabic language ability. With a more positive conviction in their own Arabic language competency, parents might perhaps become more able and more willing to try to support their children in Arabic language learning at home.

Another important way to empower parents could be giving them opportunities where they can assist their children with Arabic language learning at home without feeling that they are unable to do so. For it could be argued that by giving individuals opportunities to succeed in a particular task, they may feel more confident in their ability

to do that task. Hence, if parents were given the chance to successfully help their children with Arabic homework, they might feel more confident in their Arabic language abilities and more capable of doing so again in the future. To offer parents such opportunities to help their children with their Arabic learning, I decided to design online interactive Arabic homework that parents could do with their children and that could only be completed with their assistance or participation. Such assignments could include - but are not limited to – the following Arabic learning tasks: “Have a simple conversation with your child”, “Play a short I-Spy game with your child”, “Together with your child, examine these Arabic geometric designs and discuss their characteristics”, or “Try to read these examples of Arabic calligraphy with your child and discuss what they mean.”

In addition, I believed that parents needed further direct guidance on supporting their children with the Arabic homework assignments. Hence, when designing the interactive Arabic homework assignments, I planned to provide additional scaffolding for parents so that they could better assist their children in completing their Arabic assignments and this took the form of additional step-by-step instructions, detailed explanations, and clear exemplars. I believed that such supports could remove any challenges, confusion, and tension that parents may face when attempting to support their children with Arabic homework assignments.

b) Communicative barriers.

These are defined as communicative factors that prevent parents from knowing important information regarding their child’s Arabic language learning at school. It is reasonable to assume that parents who are not aware that their children have Arabic homework, for example, will not be able to support them in their homework. Hence,

establishing clear channels of communication with parents with regards to their child's Arabic language learning could potentially remove obstacles standing in their way of supporting their children with Arabic.

To address communicative barriers, I decided to create a dedicated central online portal (or website) that students and parents could resort to for all their Arabic learning needs. On such a portal, all past, current, and future Arabic assignments would be publically listed with accompanying due dates so that parents would be aware of the Arabic homework assignments their child needs to do next as well as those their child may have missed. Moreover, students would be able to login, access their homework, and track their own completion progress: complete and incomplete assignments would be clearly indicated for each individual student. Additionally, parents who login would be able to access the online Arabic learning module and track their own progress in the same manner. To minimize any technological barriers that parents and students might potentially face due to being apprehensive of technology, unfamiliar with using online learning portals, or simply less tech-savvy, parents and students alike would be oriented on using the website during evening workshops and lessons in the classroom. Furthermore, both traditional and electronic newsletters and announcements would be sent to parents periodically to invite and remind parents to: (1) attend upcoming training workshops, (2) register for the online Arabic learning module for parents, and (3) support their children with newly released interactive Arabic homework assignments.

What types of instructional technologies could empower parents?

I designed and implemented the following technological instructional interventions to empower parents in supporting their children with Arabic language

learning at home: a learning management system, and online Arabic learning module for parents, and interactive homework assignments.

1) Learning management system (LMS).

As my LMS solution, I selected LearnDash⁸: a commercial LMS plugin for Wordpress, which allows for the simple creation of online courses with multiple lessons and sub-lessons. Moreover, learners navigating a LearnDash course can visually track their progress as they advance through the course.

To address the communicative barriers that parents might face, I added various communication channels on the LMS for parents such as a contact form, chat, and instant messaging. I also added a “Frequently Asked Questions” (FAQ) page to provide guidance on navigating the website and troubleshooting basic technical problems as well as a “Homework” page to keep parents informed of their children’s Arabic learning and latest homework assignments requiring submission. Figures 1, 2 and 3 demonstrate a few of the LMS’s communicative features. Appendix A provides additional screenshots from the LMS that highlight its structure, layout, and functionality.

⁸ www.learndash.com

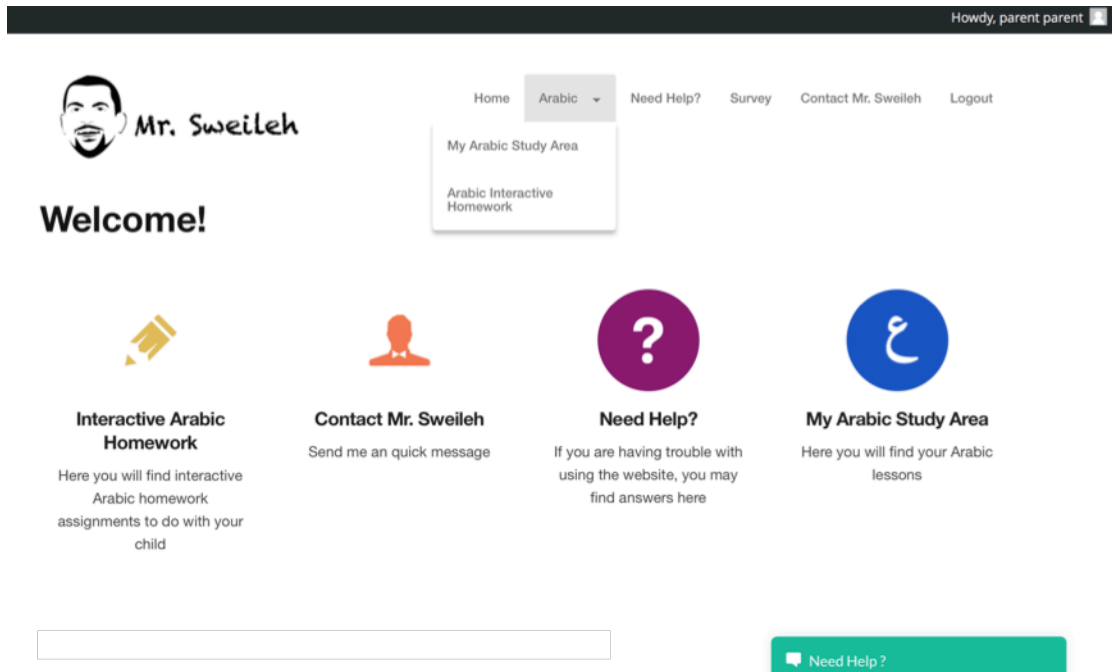


Figure 1: Homepage of online Arabic LMS when learner is logged-in

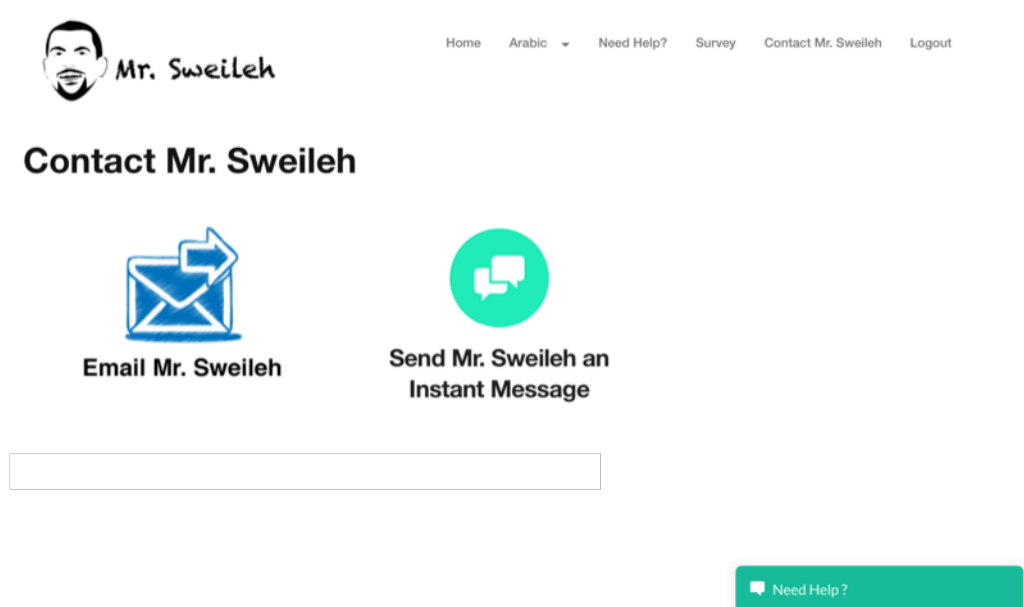


Figure 2: Snapshots of "Contact Mr. Sweileh" page that displays links that allow contacting Mr. Sweileh through email, instant message, and chat on the online Arabic LMS

Need Help?

How do I login to [REDACTED]?	+
How do I login to Voicethread?	+
Where can I find my child's Arabic homework?	+
How do I get to my Arabic study area?	+
How can I send Mr. Sweileh an email?	+
How can I send Mr. Sweileh an instant message?	+
How can I chat with Mr. Sweileh online?	+
How do I upload my own picture (or avatar)?	+

Figure 3: Snapshot of "Need Help" page on the online Arabic LMS

2) Online Arabic learning module for parents.

Using LearnDash, I designed a short online Arabic learning module for parents that offers enough scaffolding, guidance, and support to ensure their success in learning Arabic as a second language. The online learning module addressed basic Arabic vocabulary, grammar, sentence structure, and cultural elements. Using Articulate Storyline⁹, I created many multimedia-rich and interactive Arabic learning activities for the online Arabic learning module to enhance the online learning experience for parents and provide additional scaffolding.

⁹ Articulate Storyline is a commercial rapid e-learning development tool by Articulate. For more information, see www.articulate.com/storyline

Below are a few screenshots that depict some elements of the online Arabic learning module: Figure 4 displays the online learning module’s welcome page; Figure 5 shows the “Getting Around” page, where parents can watch a tutorial video that takes them on a walkthrough of the Arabic learning module; and Figure 6 provides an example of teaching Arabic cultural elements. Appendix B provides additional screenshots depicting the online Arabic module’s structure, layout, methodology, scaffolding, and interactive multimedia-rich learning activities for interested readers.

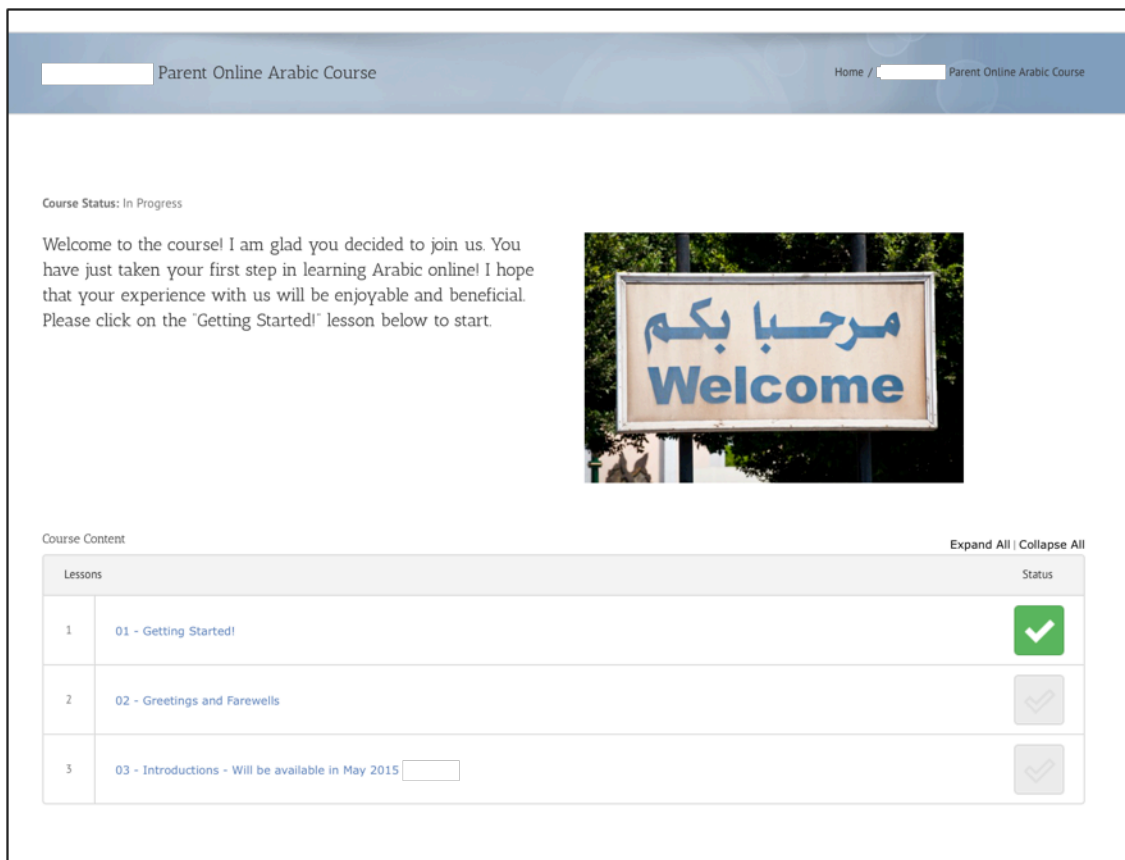


Figure 4: Welcome page of online Arabic learning module for parents

Getting Around Home / Getting Around

Topic Progress: ●●●●●●

← Back to Lesson

Please watch the screencast below. It will teach you the basics of navigating through the course and using the interface.

I have also added some screenshots below in case you were not able to see the screencast for whatever reason. They summarize what was explained in the screencast.

Click on any screenshot to enlarge it.

Read all red comments and annotations within each screenshot.

[Click here to see screenshots](#)

Now it is your turn to try! Please click on the "Mark Complete" button on the bottom of the page to advance to the next topic and you will notice a green circle appearing above. Come on! Don't be shy!

Give it a try! Click on the "Mark Complete" button below to continue

Need help? Leave a comment below if you have any questions

Course Progress

Lessons

- ▼ 01 - Getting Started!
 - Getting Around
 - What is a Language Function?
 - What is a Language Ladder?
 - Icons and Symbols
 - How You Will Learn?
 - Let's Begin!
- ▶ 02 - Greetings and Farewells
- ▶ 03 - Introductions - Will be available in May 2015

Return to Parent Online Arabic Course

Figure 5: "Getting Around" page of online Arabic Learning module for parents

home, and (2) to provide parents with additional guidance and scaffolding to empower them to support their children in completing their Arabic homework.

In designing the interactive Arabic homework, I kept in mind the criteria that Antonek and her colleagues (1995/2008) outlined for effective interactive homework:

- 1) its format must be simple and consistent,
- 2) it must be relatively short and easy to do by parent and student,
- 3) it must contain familiar content (that which was studied sufficiently in class),
- 4) it should not take too long to complete,
- 5) it should not be too frequent,
- 6) parents must sign off on the homework upon completion,
- 7) and parents must be allowed to assess and provide their feedback on their child's performance in the homework task.

Using the many multimedia and interactive features that the Internet affords, I adapted Antonek et al.'s (1995/2008) physical version of interactive homework for the online environment: instead of a one-page sheet of paper that outlines the task, provides reference material (such as vocabulary and sentence structures), and includes a section for parents to sign off on and provide feedback about their child's performance, my online version of interactive Arabic homework consisted of a (1) structured VoiceThread and (2) a short online survey. Since Voicethread facilitates seamless recording of annotated audio and video commentary for any type of media, I used it create multimedia-rich and interactive screencasts that clearly described and explained elements of the Arabic homework task for students and parents, provided an exemplar, and give students and parents the chance to carry out the task and submit it online using a

microphone and video camera. The online survey allowed parents to sign off on the homework and share their feedback about the homework and/or their child's performance. The online interactive Arabic homework was incorporated into Arabic LMS so that assignment completion could be tracked and recorded. Figures 7 through 13 depict elements of an online interactive Arabic homework assignment. Interested readers who wish to create similar online interactive homework assignments and integrate them within an LMS can refer to Appendix C for more detail.

Figure 7: Snapshot of a sample interactive Arabic homework page on the online Arabic LMS, which displays the VoiceThread and a title slide within it

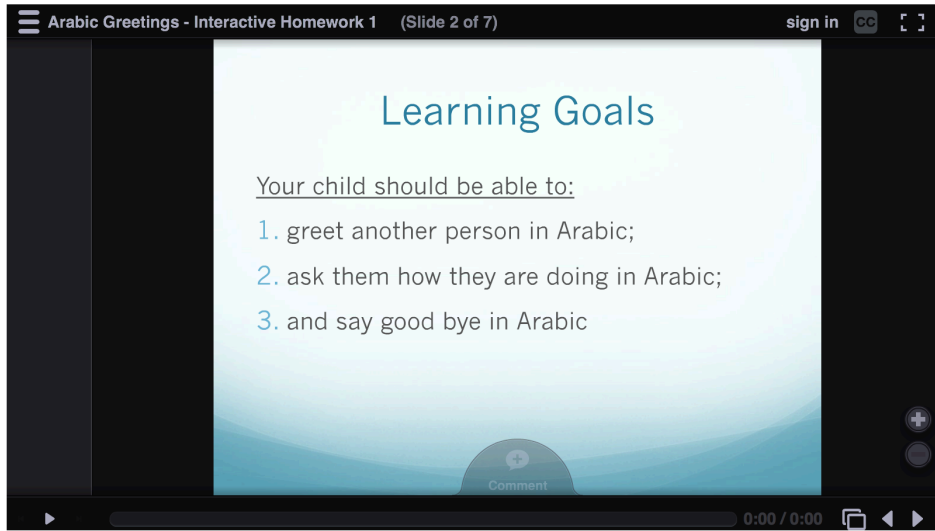


Figure 8: Example of an objectives section within an interactive Arabic homework assignment

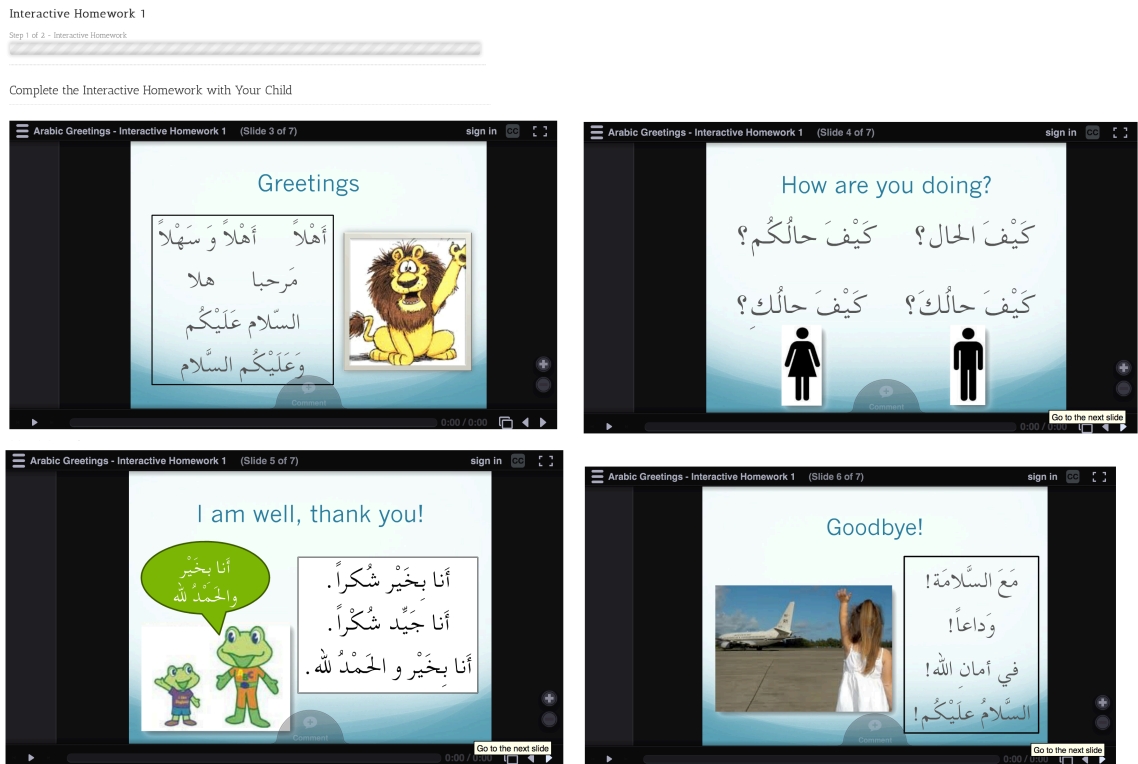


Figure 9: Example of a mini-lesson section within an interactive Arabic homework assignment

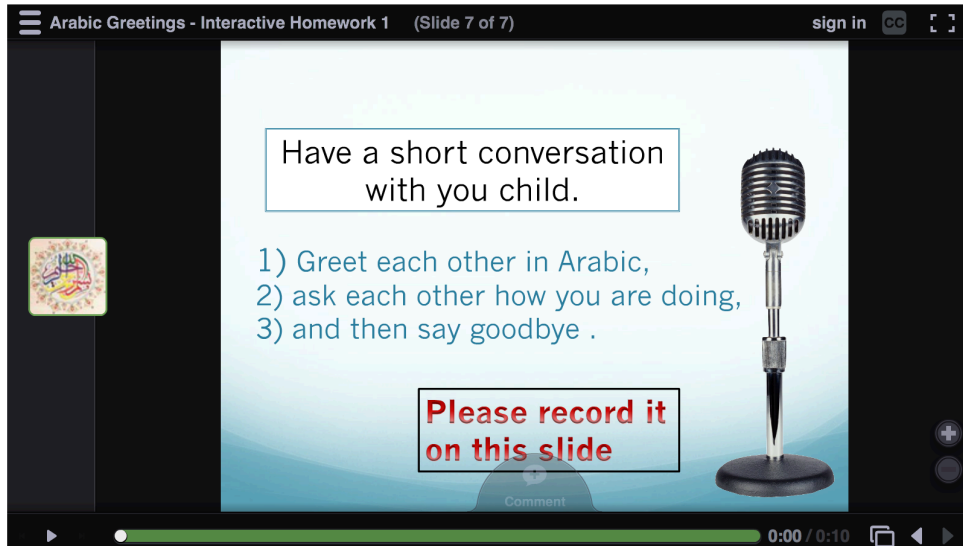


Figure 10: Example of a task description and an assignment submission page within an interactive Arabic homework assignment

Acknowledgment *

By clicking this checkbox, I acknowledge that I completed the interactive homework with my child.

Figure 11: Acknowledgement message that parents see below interactive Arabic homework assignments

Acknowledgment *

By clicking this checkbox, I acknowledge that I completed the interactive homework with my child.

Next

Figure 12: Snapshot depicting how clicking the checkbox beside the acknowledgement message triggers the appearance of "Next" button which leads to the post-task feedback form

Interactive Homework 1

Step 2 of 2 - Feedback

50%

Your Feedback

How well did your child demonstrate his/her Arabic learning in this interactive Arabic homework assignment? *

Very Poorly	Poorly	Fair	Well	Very Well
<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

2. Do you think your child needs further support and practice to master the skill demonstrated in the interactive Arabic homework assignment? *

- Yes
 No

3. If you have any other comments about your child's performance on this interactive Arabic homework assignment, please write them in the space below.

4. Please provide any other feedback about this interactive Arabic homework assignment below.

By signing below, I acknowledge that I completed this interactive Arabic homework assignment with my child and assessed his performance.

Parent's Full Name *

First

Last

Signature *



Previous

Submit

Figure 13: Snapshot of the post-task survey (or feedback form) that parents must complete to sign off on each interactive Arabic homework assignment

Planning: How will I know that parents have been empowered?

To truly see if parents had been empowered, I planned to collect data from multiple sources and in multiple formats and then triangulate the results. Triangulation of data brings multiple perspectives from which we can study the research question more comprehensively, and it minimizes bias when analyzing and interpreting research data and maximizes the reliability, validity, and credibility of the results (Creswell, 2014, p. 201; Hatch, 2002, p. 121; Parsons, Hewson, Adrian, & Day, 2012b, pp. 33-34). Following the advice of Jick (1979) regarding triangulating data in mixed methods studies (as cited in Parsons et al., 2012a, pp. 31-32; Parsons et al., 2012b, p. 14), I decided to assess my parents' level of empowerment from 3 angles:

- 1) ask parents directly about their sense of empowerment,
- 2) ask students about their parents' sense of empowerment, and
- 3) observe parents' actions through their behavior on the LMS and infer their level of empowerment from that.

In order to address the first two angles, I collected survey and interview data from parents and students respectively, and to assess the third angle, I collected logged LMS data.

Sources of Data

1) Surveys

Parent surveys were designed to: (a) collect basic descriptive data from parents about their linguistic background, technological know-how, and home environment; (b) gather initial data about parental empowerment in relation to their ability to support their children with Arabic; and then (c) determine whether parental perspectives changed over the span of the school year as a result of introducing the technological intervention for

empowering parents. Hence, two surveys were designed: one to be administered to parents at the start of the school year and the other to be administered at the end of the school year. Below is a list of areas that the survey questions were designed to address:

- a) Linguistic background and home environment
- b) Parental Arabic language proficiency
- c) Level of reinforcement and support of Arabic at home
- d) Parental level of involvement in their children's Arabic language learning
- e) Parental ability of assessing their children's performance against curricular outcomes of the "Arabic Language and Culture" course
- f) Parental accessibility to and familiarity with online learning tools and courses
- g) Parental perceptions about the impact of online instructional tools on their sense of empowerment and involvement in their children's learning.

Survey questions were a mix of Likert scale, multiple selection, multiple choice, and short open-ended questions. Parent surveys are included in Appendix D.

Similarly, two surveys were offered to students: one midway through the year and another at the end. The first survey collected baseline data from students about their parents' level of Arabic support at home and involvement in homework, while the second survey attempted to gauge the extent to which students felt that their parents were involved in their Arabic language learning throughout the year and whether they felt that their parents' sense of empowerment and involvement was impacted by introducing the technological Arabic learning intervention. The latter survey also gathered student feedback about their experiences using the online Arabic LMS. Student surveys were written at a linguistic level that could be understood by Grade 3 students or older. For

younger students (i.e. Grade 1 and 2), surveys were administered orally using simpler language, questions were clarified when needed, and answers were recorded in the student's own words. I chose not to interview Kindergarten students because I felt they were too young to truly comprehend the survey questions. Student surveys are included in Appendix E.

2) Interviews

Interviews serve to triangulate data and act as member-checking activities, but more importantly, they add richness and life to the limited quantitative data obtained from surveys since they can potentially unearth participants' feelings about past experiences and events and can uncover their current feelings, motivations, and concerns (Hatch, 2002, p. 91). In other words, interview data complement survey data and reveal deep personal insights about participants and phenomena that could not have been learned otherwise. It is for this reason that I chose to conduct interviews in my study to learn more deeply about parental empowerment from parents themselves.

Interview questions aimed at eliciting responses in relation to four main themes:

- a) Parents' sense of empowerment in relation to supporting their children with schooling in general and with Arabic language learning in particular, and the types of challenges and obstacles that prevent them from fully supporting their children;
- b) Technology's ability to empower parents and help them overcome the barriers that stand in their way of supporting their children with schooling in general and Arabic language learning in particular;

c) Characteristics of technology that facilitate parental empowerment in relation to Arabic language learning

d) Parental views on homework and blended learning environments

Designing interview questions with particular themes in mind provided an initial structure from which coding and analysis of interview data could commence. Interviews were semi-structured in order to maintain a friendly and natural conversational feel, which was especially important since parents saw me as taking on two roles in this study: (1) researcher and (2) their child's Arabic Language and Culture teacher. My dual role will be further addressed in a later sub-section. Sample interview questions are provided in Appendix F.

Student interviews were held in conjunction with the end-of-year parent interviews. Students and parents sat together for the interview to answer questions and speak about their experience with online Arabic LMS, the interactive Arabic homework, and their sense of empowerment. Although student interview questions were not pre-determined but were constructed and asked as needed throughout the interview, they did not drift away from the main focus of the study. Sample guiding interview questions for students are included in Appendix G.

3) Logged LMS Data

Many LMSs automatically log multiple types of data that can be used to describe and understand the perspectives and behaviors of learners using the LMS and consequently inform changes to its structure or course content. For example, an LMS can track the pages that the learner visits in order to create user navigation paths, which inform the LMS administrators about how users typically navigate the LMS and which

pages are most popular and which are rarely accessed (Poon, Kong, Yau, Wong, & Ling, 2017; Psaromiligkos, Orfanidou, Kytagiias, & Zafiri, 2011). LMS administrators may use this information to redesign parts of the LMS to make it more user-friendly: for example, if it is found that users need to click multiple times to get to course content, an LMS administrator may add a quick link so that users can get there faster (Psaromiligkos et al., 2011). Similarly, LMSs can track the number of times users login or logout of the LMS; the time spent on any particular learning session; number of lessons viewed or assignments completed by the user; number of discussion posts left by the user, and also keep permanent records of online communication amongst students, teachers, and administrators within the LMS (Black, Dawson, & Priem, 2008; Lowes, 2014; Psaromiligkos et al., 2011). Researchers use such data to construct metrics for student engagement and draw correlations with student achievement online (Lowes, 2014).

In my study, I utilized some a few data types logged by the LMS to shed light on a parent's sense of empowerment in relation to supporting their children with Arabic language learning at home: student login activity and interactive Arabic assignments completion rate. The number of student logins would give me an idea of how frequent the student is accessing the online Arabic LMS and this would point to a minimum level of parental support being provided at home (such as facilitating regular time and technological tools needed to carry out the online Arabic learning). The number of completed interactive Arabic homework assignments would gauge how involved parents are in their children's Arabic language learning since these assignments can only be completed when done jointly by the parent and student. To track the login behaviour of

students on the LMS, I installed the Stream plugin for Wordpress¹⁰. As for tracking the completed interactive homework assignments, the LearnDash LMS has the inherent ability to track assignments and lessons that have been marked as “complete” by the user.

Additionally, I included a short survey after each interactive homework assignment for parents to complete as a means to sign off on the completion of the assignment with their child and to provide feedback on their child’s performance in Arabic. The online survey was constructed using the Gravity Forms¹¹ plugin for Wordpress and was linked to each interactive homework assignment. Once parents and students finished the interactive homework assignment together, the parent would click on check box to acknowledge that they did the assignment with their child, and then a “Next” button would appear that would direct parents and students to the post-interactive assignment survey (for more details, see Appendix C). I have included the post-interactive homework survey questions in Appendix H.

I also wanted to learn what parents and students thought of the online Arabic LMS as a learning tool. Although not directly related to parental empowerment per se, understanding which features of the online Arabic LMS students and parents thought were positive and helpful could potentially shed light on the type of functionality that creates positive online learning experiences and thus empowers learners when learning second languages online. This type of data may be extracted from the online Arabic LMS’s communication logs (such as when parents and students ask for help

¹⁰ <http://wp-stream.com/>

¹¹ <http://www.gravityforms.com/>

troubleshooting a technical problem through the LMS's chat and messaging services) and informal communication channels outside the LMS (e.g. email, phone calls, and face-to-face conversations).

Course context

The online Arabic learning intervention was implemented in the context of teaching Arabic Language and Culture in an elementary school in Western Canada. At this school, many students are expected to learn Arabic as a second language for 150 minutes a week. In accordance with the Western Canadian Protocol (WCP) Framework for International Languages, my pedagogical approach was to nurture students' communicative competence in Arabic through focusing on four interrelated and interdependent components: applications, language competence, global citizenship, and strategies for language learning, language use, and general learning¹². While communicative competence was the main goal of the Arabic language learning, there was also an emphasis on teaching Arabic thematically and highlighting examples of Quranic vocabulary and sentence structure to facilitate the understanding of the Quran.

Participant pool.

My study sample pool includes all individuals who experienced the online Arabic learning intervention: namely, only those students, who took the Arabic Language and Culture course with me during the 2014/15 school year (i.e. from grades K-6 who were

¹² For more information about the WCP Framework for International Languages, see <https://education.alberta.ca/media/481786/the-common-curriculum-framework-for-international-languages-alberta-version-kindergarten-to-grade-12.pdf>

learning Arabic with me that year) and their parents (or those taking on parental roles in their households). All other families in the school who did not study Arabic Language and Culture that year (such as families whose children studied French as a Second Language instead of Arabic) were not participants in the study. All participants in the study were of the Muslim faith and they enrolled their children in the Arabic Language and Culture course primarily because of their faith: they wanted them to learn Arabic to understand the Quran. The total number of eligible families was 102 families, while the total number of eligible participants was 368 individuals: 204 parents and 164 students.

Action (or intervention): Provide parents with online Arabic learning modules and interactive Arabic homework.

Table 1 below chronologically outlines the activities carried during the 2014/15 school year to implement the online Arabic intervention for parents. Please note that throughout the year, a total of 10 interactive Arabic homework assignments were released for Grades 1-6 and 4 assignments were released for Kindergarten. Also, students and parents were given two weeks to complete an assignment before the next one was released. Whenever a new interactive Arabic assignment was released, a letter was sent home to parents and student informing them of this, which included instruction on how to access the assignment and submit it on the LMS. Moreover, for every new assignment, students were given an in-class overview of the assignment and its requirements before being expected to do it at home with their parents. Correspondences with parents and students about the online Arabic intervention are included in Appendix I.

Date	Activity
September-October	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Obtained parental consent to store student personal information on the LMS and 3rd party Web 2.0 tools in accordance with the province's <i>Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy (FOIP) Act</i>. • Created student accounts and groups on the online Arabic LMS. • Created the first few interactive Arabic homework assignments. • Conducted in-class student training on the use of the online Arabic LMS and VoiceThread.
November	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Held an information session for parents on online Arabic learning, during which parents received tips on how they can support their children with online Arabic learning and homework on the LMS. Parents were also told that any data voluntarily collected from them or their children in relation to the online Arabic learning might be incorporated into graduate coursework that I was doing. • Sent student LMS login credentials home in letter outlining how to login to the LMS and complete the interactive Arabic homework. • Released interactive Arabic homework #1 (for grades K-6).
December	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sent home "Beginning of the Year Parent Survey" as a means of receiving input for designing the online Arabic learning module for parents. Two copies were sent to each household. • Released interactive Arabic homework #2 (for grades K-6).
January-February	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Released interactive Arabic homework #3-5 (for grades 1-6).
March	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Released a new interactive "Arabic letters" course for students on the online Arabic LMS, which aimed to teach children to: (a) name the Arabic letters; (b) identify their different letter forms; (c) read them with short and long vowels; (d) trace and write them; (e) learn new vocabulary that contain each letter; (f) and listen to and read interactive storybooks containing the learned vocabulary. Screenshots from this course are included in Appendix J. • Sent letters and emails to parents informing them of the interactive "Arabic letters" course. • Held second information session for parents on Arabic language learning, during which I introduced them to the online Arabic learning module for parents and invited them to enroll in it. Slides for my presentation are included in Appendix I. • Extended another invitation to parents to enroll in the online Arabic learning module for parents during student-led conferences.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Administered the first “Student Survey” in-class. Students were reminded that the survey was voluntary. For younger students, surveys were delivered orally; and while answers to open-ended questions were often recorded verbatim, it sometimes made more sense to jot down an overall summary of what they said.
Early April	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Launched the online Arabic learning module for parents. Inviting parents to join module via letter and email Offered technical support to parents who had difficulty registering in or progressing through the online Arabic learning module. As a facilitator of the online Arabic learning module for parents, I provided support to parents who needed it, but I avoided being pushy in reminding parents to continue with their online Arabic learning.
Mid April - Late June	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Released interactive Arabic homework #3-4 (for Kindergarten). Released interactive Arabic homework #6-10 (for Grade 1-6). Sent two copies of the “End of the Year Parent Survey” to each household. Administered end-of year “Student Survey” in-class in a manner similar to the one conducted in March.

Table 1: Chronological outline of activities carried during the 2014/15 school year to implement the online Arabic intervention for parents

Observation: Are parents empowered after completing online Arabic learning modules and interactive Arabic homework? Are they now more involved in their children’s learning?

After offering parents and students the intervention, the next step was to observe whether the online Arabic learning intervention indeed empowered parents. To determine this, I had to analyze the collected data and record my findings. Since the “Observation” stage of the action research cycle directly relates to the process of data collection and data analysis, I will speak about (a) my level of participation in the study, (b) recruiting research participants and gathering their consent, (c) data collection, (d) data analysis,

and (e) recording findings. The latter point will be individually addressed to the Findings section of this paper.

a) Level of participation: My dual role as a teacher-researcher.

Since my research project can be classified as teacher-led action research, I had to take on a dual role: teacher-researcher. In other words, my level of involvement with the study participants was two-fold: on the one hand, students and parents knew me as their Arabic teacher; on the other hand, I was also a researcher leading an action research project in the school setting with my students and parents as potential participants. In a sense, I had a dual-role as an Arabic teacher (someone directly involved in the day-to-day realities of educational practice such as planning, teaching, assessing, and communicating with various educational stakeholders) and a researcher (someone who carefully plans and formally introduces an instructional intervention to study participants, observes their responses to the intervention, and continuously collects and analyzes data for research purposes). My level of participation in this study impacted the order by which I went about recruiting participants and gathering their consent.

In most studies, participants are recruited and informed consent is gathered from them before they can partake in the study's activities; in my case, however, they took place after potential participants had already taken part in the study's activities and had contributed much data to the study. This was done for two main reasons: (1) to reduce participant bias to the intervention and (2) to avoid any perception of undue influence on research participants. The former relates to honoring the teacher's pedagogical role and maintaining the study's methodological integrity, while the latter is ethical in nature.

1) Reducing participant bias to the intervention

As a researcher, I wanted to observe the normal day-to-day reality of how parents and students would respond to a novel, technological, intervention for learning Arabic without feeling pressure to perform one way or another. In my study, it was important that parents and students merely viewed the online Arabic learning intervention as a regular component of daily Arabic teaching – as nothing more than a pedagogically grounded learning tool that their Arabic teacher introduced. Otherwise, my study would have been necessarily pushed into one of two polarizing directions: some students and their parents might have opted out of learning Arabic online altogether under the grounds that it is just part of a “voluntary” research study, which they are entitled to refuse participation; while others may have chosen to fully participate in the study to please the teacher-researcher. Even Hatch (2002) affirms the polarizing influence that being informed of the teacher-researcher dual role can have on participants when he says:

This knowledge [of the researcher’s dual role] will influence the behavior of those being studied and influence the researcher’s ability to be effective in both roles [...] It’s reasonable for participants to ask, ‘Why should I take you seriously as a teacher [...] when I know you are here to study us?’ or ‘How do you want me to act so that I won’t mess up your study?’ (p. 74)

Logistically speaking, these two outcomes are highly problematic for me - both as a teacher and as a researcher: on the one hand, the teacher-in-me would be frustrated that a sizable portion of my students opted to abstain from learning Arabic online in the manner that I laid out for them; on the other hand, the researcher-in-me would feel that the findings of the study are biased because some participants felt pressured to complete all the research activities (e.g. the online Arabic learning module for parents, the interactive Arabic homework, etc.), rendering the study unrealistic and unpractical. Hence, when the

researcher role overpowers the teaching role, it negatively impacts the teacher's ability to teach and the researcher's ability to maintain the study's integrity.

2) Avoid the perception of undue influence

Additionally, parental consent was intentionally collected only after the school year ended to avoid the perception of undue influence. Being a teacher-researcher, it could be argued that my teaching role grants me added authority over research participants because my students and parents see me as an authority figure. In other words, had I asked parents and students to participate in the study during the school year (or even before the school year had started), someone may reasonably claim that parents (and their children) may have been pressured to participate in the research project out of fear that their teacher may negatively alter their child's grade if they decided not to participate. To remove any *potential* perception of undue influence from the minds of others, consent was only gathered from parents (and students) after the school year had ended and only after final grades had been submitted.

b) Recruiting participants and gathering consent.

After the 2014/15 school year had ended, I obtained the contact information of all students and parents eligible to participate in the study. Then, I phoned each family inviting them to participate in study and went over its consent form. If I could not reach a parent by phone, I left a voicemail and also sent a formal invitation to participate in the study via email, along with an attached letter of introduction and the study's consent form (see Appendix K).

Parents who chose not to participate in the study were not contacted further but were thanked for their consideration. As for parents who showed interest in the study,

they provided their informed written consent either via email or in-person. If parents did not send back a signed copy of the consent form in a timely manner, I made a few attempts to follow up by phone and email and reminded them to send the signed consent form at their earliest convenience. If parents did not provide written consent after a few follow-ups, I took that as an indirect indication that they no longer had any interest in participating in the research project, and at that point I contacted them no longer. At the end of this stage, 176 participants who agreed to participate in the study: 81 parents and 95 students, who made up 56 families.

c) Data Collection.

By the end of the 2014/15 school year, most data had been collected from participants: students and parents had both experienced the online Arabic learning on the LMS and had a chance to participate in interactive Arabic homework; parents were invited to enroll in the online Arabic learning module and some took part; students and parents both completed surveys in relation to their online Arabic learning experience and parental empowerment; and much data had been logged on the online Arabic LMS. All that remained was: (1) conducting end-of-year interviews with families and asking them directly about their experiences with online Arabic learning last year, and (2) inviting families to complete any surveys they hadn't completed during the study period.

End-of-year interviews

In sampling participants for interviews, I used two main approaches: “maximum variation sampling” and “stratified purposeful sampling” (Hatch, 2002, pp. 98-99). The former sampling approach ensures that generated interview data is rich and diverse, while the later method ensures that the generated data is not skewed one way or the other.

Insights drawn from such interview data could potentially help improve the next iteration of the online Arabic learning intervention so that it could benefit the widest range of families. Table 2 summarizes both sampling methods used in the context of the study.

Type	Maximum variation sampling	Stratified purposeful sampling
Aim	Provides richer and more diverse discourse on the research topic	Forms a well-balanced interview sample
Selection criteria	Families holding different (and sometimes diametrically-opposed) perspectives	Families from backgrounds and compositions fairly representing sample pool participants
Sample includes a set of families...	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • from various ethnic backgrounds • for and against homework • with opposing views on parental role and involvement in their children’s schooling; • with different perspectives on technology and online learning, etc. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • with children from all grades • whose backgrounds and native tongues are representative of all study participants • with both high and low interactive homework completion rates • whose members participated in the online Arabic learning module and those who didn’t; etc.

Table 2: Sampling methods used in the study for selecting interview participants

To find families who showed most variation and ensured best stratification, I examined parental survey responses, interactive Arabic homework completion rates, and online Arabic learning module enrollment and progression. For example, survey data highlighted the demographics of participants and their perspectives on various matters; and the interactive Arabic homework completion rates differentiated between families that supported their children with Arabic learning and those that didn’t. I also took note of parents who left survey answers that were “interesting” and “unique” because I believed that they could take the discussion of parental empowerment, instructional technology, and Arabic language learning in other directions, which would enrich the

study. After that, I had a good idea about which families I needed to interview and which I didn't feel the need to.

The end-of-year interviews were scheduled and conducted between January 2016 and June 2016 after all parents were invited to participate in the study and consent was collected from those who wished to participate. I prepared a list of open-ended "guiding questions" (Hatch, 2002, p. 101) that acted as discussion starters as well as follow-up prompts to further the discussion (see Appendix D). As such, these interviews could be classified as formal semi-structured interviews (Hatch, 2002, p. 94).

I interviewed 18 families and all interviews were audio recorded with their permission. Interviews lasted 70 minutes on average. If children were present at the time of the interview, I invited them to sit for the interview, but when they became restless, bored, or wanted to leave for any reason, they were excused. Interviews were halted when all the research questions were adequately answered and when collected data had become redundant (Hatch, 2002, p. 90).

Other data.

Some participants were invited to complete voluntary surveys that they hadn't completed during the 2014/15 school year. Once completed, the surveys were added to the survey data that had been collected previously. Table 3 summarizes the response rate for all 4 surveys administered in this study. Note that the end-of-year student survey could not be administered to younger students (i.e. in Grade 1 and 2) due to lack of time to conduct these surveys orally.

Survey	Response Rate
Beginning-of-year parent survey	34.5% (from a total of 81 parents)
End-of-year parent survey	59% (from a total of 81 parents)
Initial student survey	84% (from a total of 82 Grade 1 to 6 student)
End-of year student survey	83% (from a total of 58 Grade 3 to 6 students)

Table 3: Survey response rates

d) Data analysis.

A range of mixed-methods data analysis techniques was applied to the survey, interview, and logged LMS data in order: (1) to triangulate data for maximum reliability and (2) to enrich results to better explain the issue of parental empowerment via instructional technologies in the context of Arabic learning. Below, I will briefly describe how I maintained participant anonymity and then analyzed the collected data.

Participant Anonymity

To maintain anonymity, each student and parent was assigned an alphanumeric “Student ID” and “Parent ID” respectively (e.g. S54 for student #54 and P07 for parent #7). Also, every study participant was assigned an alphanumeric Family ID (e.g. F32 for family #32) as a means to cross reference parents and their children (or students). This way, data analysis could be done without needing to refer to the names of students or their parents. At this point in the study, personal identifiers were stripped away from data, only leaving the alphanumeric Student IDs, Parent ID, and Family IDs as identifiers. However, a master list that linked student and parent personal information with their assigned Student IDs, Parent ID, and Family IDs was kept.

Logged LMS Data

I used descriptive statistics and frequency charts to summarize homework completion rates and login behavior on the LMS. Closed-ended questions from post-interactive Arabic homework surveys were analyzed in a similar fashion, while open-ended questions were coded and quantitatively analyzed via MAXQDA 12 software.

Before analyzing LMS login data, the data was culled to ensure that the only login records considered for analysis were those that were recorded when students accessed the online Arabic LMS *after* school. In other words, any student LMS logins that were recorded during school hours were removed from the login data to ensure that analysis is restricted only to those attempts made by students to access the LMS in their home environment. For example, there were occasions when students used Chromebooks in class under my guidance to access the online Arabic LMS (e.g. to explore the online Arabic LMS or to do an online survey on the LMS). Clearly, these student logins were directed by me – the teacher – and were not initiated by students themselves nor were they directly in response to their parents’ requests (e.g. parents asking their children to do their online Arabic homework at home). Since the aim of analyzing student login data is to learn more about student and parent login behavior in their home environment, including such records would have definitely skewed the data and suggested that students and parents were accessing the website more often than they actually were.

Interview Data

Interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed into MAXQDA 12 software. As mentioned earlier, my interviews were semi-structured and divided into four main themes:

1. Parental Sense of Empowerment
2. Technology as a Tool for Parental Empowerment
3. Positive Characteristics of Technology in Relation to Arabic Language Learning
4. Parental Views on Homework and Blended Learning Environments

These themes facilitated segmenting the interview transcripts into four main parts and coding each individually. When examining a transcript, I read it segment by segment, and as sub-themes emerged, I used these sub-themes to code smaller sections and quotes within each segment. Using an emergent coding and the constant comparison approach for each new transcript (Hatch, 2002), I generated a hierarchy of codes (or sub-themes) to consistently code all interview transcripts.

After coding all transcripts, I used the segment retrieval feature in MAXQDA 12 to see how all interviewees responded in relation to a particular code, and from that I was able to report my findings and make conclusions about participant perspectives surrounding parental empowerment via instructional technology in the context of Arabic language learning.

Survey Data

Closed-ended survey questions were analyzed via descriptive statistics. As for open-ended survey questions, they were transcribed in MAXQDA 12, coded, and qualitatively analyzed in a similar manner to interview data.

Renewed reflection: Did all parents experience empowerment? If not, why not?

The last stage of the action research cycle is that of renewed reflection, which leads into the next cycle of action research. The idea behind teacher-led action research is that it is an iterative process that facilitates continuous reflection one's teaching practice and drives teachers to grow as educators and try new things and experiment with new teaching interventions after examining old ones (Mertler, 2014, p. 23; Mills, 2011, p. 9). The renewed reflection obtained from the previous cycle of action research feeds into the next one as teachers make use of what they have learned to change their pedagogical practice and observe whether the new changes are a step in the right direction.

I will discuss my reflections on this action research cycle in the Discussion and Conclusion sections of this thesis. It must be noted that in writing the thesis itself, there was much opportunity for renewed reflection on the lessons learned from the action research experience and for revising my original thoughts surrounding parental empowerment in the context of online Arabic learning.

Findings

I will organize and report my findings under the following thematic sub-sections:

- A. Parental empowerment and its barriers
 - a. Parental definition of “empowerment”
 - b. Barriers to parental empowerment
 - c. Technology’s role in parental empowerment
- B. Participants experience with online Arabic learning intervention
 - a. Usage of online Arabic learning intervention
 - b. Attitudes towards technology
 - c. Impact on parental sense of empowerment
- C. Factors impeding higher engagement with online Arabic learning intervention
 - a. Structural (or task design) factors
 - b. Communicative factors
 - c. Philosophical factors
 - d. Age-dependent self-regulatory and motivational factors

Section A will present findings that (a) define “empowerment” from a parental standpoint – both in a general sense and within the context of schooling; (b) describe the linguistic and communicative contexts and barriers that disempower parents and prevent them from supporting their children with Arabic language learning at home; and (c) share parental views on the role of technology can play to overcome these barriers. Section B will describe how parents experienced the online Arabic learning intervention from multiple facets: their usage of the Arabic LMS with their children, their attitudes towards it, and its impact on them. Section C will present findings that highlight some structural,

communicative, philosophical, and age-dependent self-regulatory and motivational factors that may impede higher engagement with technological interventions aimed at empowering parents with supporting their children's Arabic learning.

A) Parental Empowerment and its Barriers

All parents interviewed were asked to share what the word "empowerment" meant to them and whether they felt empowered in relation to their children's Arabic language. I will begin by reporting their thoughts on the definition of "empowerment" and then depict their own feelings of empowerment as it relates to their children's Arabic language learning.

a) Parental definition of "empowerment".

Parents discussed "empowerment" at various scopes: some spoke about it broadly and defined it as giving someone power, strength, or authority; while others limited their discussion of parental empowerment to their children's education. Nonetheless, all parents seemed to suggest that empowerment entails providing supports to others to foster a sense of independence, control, agency, and/or self-confidence to achieve a certain goal.

More than half of the parents interviewed were of the opinion that empowerment generally rests on providing individuals with specific *tools* and *resources* that help them carry out tasks and take charge of matters. In relation to supporting their children with school, parents mentioned that the following tools and resources could empower them: subject syllabi, lists of curricular objectives, sets of teaching strategies and learning activities that can be implemented at home, interactive online learning resources, and

even access to an online LMS. While acknowledging the importance of tools and resources, some parents linked empowerment to self-reliance, self-sufficiency, and independence: one mother suggested that even when provided with the necessary supports, one is never truly empowered if one must rely on others to do a task:

[When I think of empowerment], I think of being able to do it myself, having the tools to figure out what needs to be done, and then being able to access the information on my own. I'm empowered ... if I'm not dependent on someone showing me how to do that.

Some parents also defined empowerment in terms of having control over one's affairs in order to achieve a particular goal. In particular, some parents spoke of agency in decision-making and freedom to do what feels appropriate without being influenced by others as being critical to empowerment. In the context of doing homework with her children, one parent said:

I have friends who are very much focused on "We sit, we work, we do our workbooks", and their kids are doing Grade 2, and that's works for them but it doesn't work for me. I think that empowerment is to do what works for *me* with *my* kids because I know sitting with them is something I don't enjoy ... I don't want to do [it] and I don't think they'll enjoy [it] that much either. So I can make the decision for myself ... I feel like that's empowerment ... [being able] to step back and be like "Oh, I'm not going to do that". That would be empowerment for me: to be able to make that decision for my kids, for myself, without being influenced.

Also central to empowerment is the concept of responsibility. According to one parent, nurturing responsibility is the aim of empowerment:

When we talk about empowering the students, I think about giving them the responsibility: putting them in charge [...] where they are responsible for their learning and they're doing something about it. And I guess the same for empowering anybody.

Interestingly enough, when parents discussed empowerment in the context of their own children's education, the object of empowerment varied: some parents focused on

empowering themselves while others sought empowerment for their children.

Nonetheless, responsibility always followed the object of empowerment: parents, who believed that *they* were mainly responsible for their children's education, typically spoke in terms of "parental empowerment" or their own empowerment, while parents who cast that responsibility on their children often spoke about empowering their children – not themselves. Additionally, all parents suggested that the aim of empowerment – whether it was directed at parents or children - was to facilitate their children's success at school.

b) Barriers to parental empowerment.

When asked about whether they felt empowered in relation to their children's Arabic language learning, most parents who were interviewed expressed disempowerment. The following subsections will present findings in relation to two barriers to parental empowerment: linguistic and communicative.

1) Linguistic barriers.

To depict the linguistic contexts and barriers that disempower parents from supporting their children with Arabic language learning at home, this sub-section will report findings on the linguistic background of participants and home environment, the place of Arabic in the home environment, and reports of linguistic disempowerment in the context of parental involvement in Arabic schoolwork.

Participant linguistic backgrounds.

Participant families came from a variety of linguistic backgrounds. According to parent survey results, the two languages predominantly spoken at home with children were Urdu and English: 32% of families only speak Urdu at home, 21% of families only speak English, and 14% of families speak both. The remaining 33% reported their

primary home language as the following: Arabic, Bangla, Hindi, Kurdish, Pashto, and Uyghur.

Arabic in the home environment.

In this study, most participants could be regarded as non-Arabic speaking. According to survey results, 85% of parents reported that they rarely or never spoke Arabic at home. The nature of Arabic spoken at home by most families could be characterized as short isolated religious discourses such as Islamic greetings, litanies, and Quranic recitation. Few parents reported using non-religious Arabic and it was often done in the context of completing Arabic homework assignments. Only Arabic-speaking parents reported the use of high-level conversational Arabic at home but this was often a means to combat the intrusion of English into their home environment: one Arabic-speaking mother said she was trying to speak more Arabic with children at home because they tended to speak more English than Arabic.

By far, the most popular response given by parents in relation to their attempts at exposing their children to Arabic outside of school was having their children learn and memorize the Quran, whether it was at home or at the local mosque as part of evening or weekend Quran classes. Some respondents expressed that they do nothing to expose their children to Arabic. Only native Arabic-speaking parents reported that they engaged in routine daily interactions with their children in Arabic.

When asked how they currently support their children with Arabic language learning at home, parents' responses varied: most parents encouraged their children to complete their Arabic homework (either by sitting beside them or reminding them); some parents reported that they would ask their children to teach them what they learned in

Arabic class; and others had their children learn from physical and digital Arabic learning resources at home. In addition, reading Quran was reported as a support strategy by a few parents.

Reports of linguistic disempowerment.

The most common source of disempowerment reported by non-Arabic speaking parents was their lack of Arabic knowledge that prevented them from supporting their children with Arabic learning at home. For many, their ability to help their children in Arabic was limited to basic low-level language tasks such as decoding Arabic script. One parent expressed this clearly:

I'm not an Arabic speaking person. I can read Arabic because I read the Quran, so I can read all the letters in the alphabet. I understand how things come together - to a point. But I don't understand all of the stuff that I'm reading ... a few words. Because I'm Urdu speaking, there are some similar words to Arabic.

This same parent also felt that her child knew more Arabic than she did and she wasn't very confident with her ability to assist her child:

I just don't like my accent [...]. I know that it's wrong. I know that it's off big-time. Cuz, I learned from my mom and she was from Pakistan, and that's all we had when I was here in the 70s. And ummm [my child's] accent is completely different than mine ... he corrects me all the time. He laughs at my 'Ayns'¹³ ... and all that.

For other parents, not knowing Arabic makes it more difficult to gauge their children's Arabic language competency and pinpoint their strengths and weaknesses in order to help them:

¹³ The letter 'Ayn (ع) is an Arabic letter whose place of articulation is located in the middle of the throat. It is a voiced pharyngeal fricative and is particularly difficult for non-native speakers of Arabic to pronounce. From my experience, Urdu speaking individuals confuse 'Ayn with Hamza (ء) - another Arabic letter, whose place of articulation is from the lowest part of throat (a voiced glottal plosive).

We are so challenged when it comes to Arabic. I think [what] would just help us to teach him [and] support him [is] to maybe throw phrases at him and see how he reacts - to see if he understands. [...] We're constantly testing to see where he is at in his learning, you know, "Write me [...] something. I wanna see how you are writing these days." You know, like little things like that. [...] But when we don't speak the language or we have no concept of it, it makes it challenging for us to do [so].

These testimonies were supported by parental self-reports on surveys. When asked to rate their own Arabic language competency between 1 and 5 ("Beginner" = 1 and Proficient" = 5), only 8% of respondents ranked themselves as being proficient in Arabic (and these respondents were all native speakers of Arabic), while 73% of respondents considered themselves beginners. In terms of assessing their children's Arabic language proficiency, only 16% of respondents felt moderately or very comfortable in their ability to do so. Overall, 63% percent of respondents reported some level of confidence in their ability to support their children with Arabic language learning at home, however, as shown by Figure 14, it can be argued that this support was limited to low-level linguistic skills. For example, many respondents reported high confidence in supporting their children with "Letter and Vowel Recognition", "Reading Individual Words", "Tracing and Copying Letters", "Writing Individual Words", and "Vocabulary Practice and Memorization", while far fewer respondents thought they could help them in areas of "Reading Comprehension", "Writing Meaningful Sentences", "Listening Comprehension", "Speaking", "Conversations and Dialogue", "Grammar Rules", "Spelling Rules", and "Cultural Aspects of Arabic" (see Figure 14).

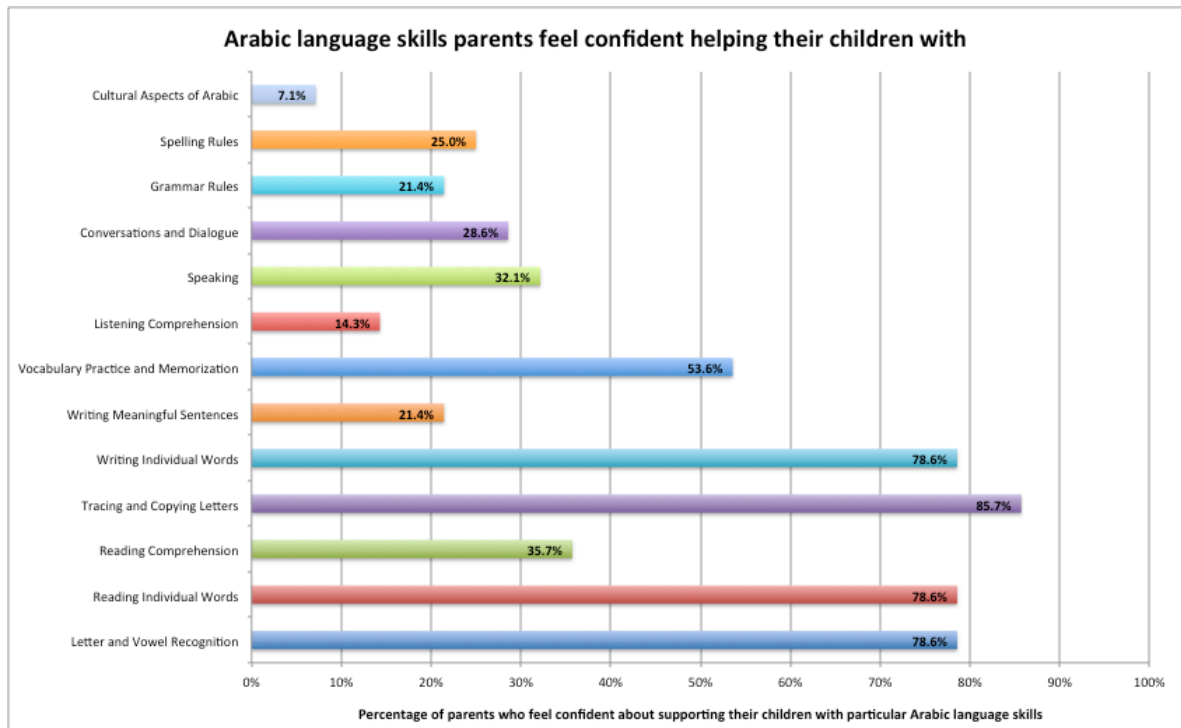


Figure 14: Chart depicting a breakdown of Arabic-related skills that parents feel confident in supporting their children with at home

Even Arabic-speaking parents, felt disempowerment regarding their ability to support children with Arabic, but their reasons differed vastly from non-Arabic speaking parents. While they spoke Arabic fluently, they still faced many challenges. For example, some Arabic-speaking parents reported that they typically could not find quality Arabic resources to engage their children and sustain their interest, which therefore made teaching their children Arabic at home very difficult. Other parents complained that it was extremely difficult to force their children to speak Arabic at home due to the overpowering influence of the English-speaking environment; one parent said:

Unfortunately in this country, how much time he spends outside, and how much time on TV, and what [sort] of books he read[s] ... they're all in English. So it's only [a] few hours [that he has at] home, and even that few hours he's not using all of them in Arabic - most of it [in] English.

Moreover, Arabic-speaking parents reported that maintaining Arabic as the primary spoken language at home is extremely difficult even though they themselves are perfectly competent in Arabic. For example, one parent stated:

It's a challenge to just be persistent and just talk to him in Arabic. Not easy because English is easy and you know that he will understand you right away ... it's not [as] frustrating like Arabic: you tell him something, and then you wait, and then he ask[s] you again, and we just take the easiest way and talk back in English. [...] We put the rules, but we don't follow up with them ... like, we decide: "Listen guys, we are not going to speak English at home", and we end up breaking the rules ourselves. So, the first time we have a challenge we just switch to English. So, it's a big challenge ... it's not easy. Now we start even talking to each other - my wife and I - speaking in English, sometimes, I don't know why.

Such testimonies point to the realities that Arabic-speaking parents have to deal with while trying to transmit the Arabic language to their children in a predominantly English-speaking environment. Some parents state that they have tried to combat this by traveling abroad with their children to Arabic-speaking countries for a few months so that they can learn Arabic and practice speaking it.

While many parents expressed guilt for not being able to do enough to support their children in Arabic, one non-Arabic speaking parent noted the importance of having realistic expectations. He pointed out that he understands his own limitations and those of the educational system, in which his child is learning Arabic:

Because we are not Arabic speakers ourselves, we ... we have to make our expectations realistic, right? [...] But I think one of the shortcomings that I see [...] is that is maybe [we need] additional class time [...]. Because you know immersion ... right ... this [program] isn't fully immersion, right?

He also added:

If you're talking about empowerment, as long as you give them the opportunity to learn in a good environment, then you're good to go, right? Now, if you're talking about expectations of our systems, it's a little bit different, right? Because, if you compare apples to apples, like if [you] compare [Arabic with] another second

language and the emphasis and the training and the amount of resources that are put into it, I don't think Arabic has enough... I truly believe that. [...]

Only a few non-Arabic speaking parents expressed some level of empowerment in relation to supporting their children with Arabic learning and they attributed it to their own past experience learning Arabic. Since this small group of parents had learned Arabic in the past, they felt that they had acquired sufficient Arabic language competency to assist their children with their Arabic learning at school. Not only that, some of these parents expressed their ability to carry out basic speaking tasks with their children in Arabic at home in an effort to teach them Arabic. One parent expressed it as follows:

We can point at anything [...] and be able to say to our children, "This is Kitaab (a book)", "This is Kursee (a chair)", "This ...", "That ...", anything in the house, or when we go out ... umm [...] that's what we have been doing ... that's a plus. Many parents who don't know the Arabic language [...] would not be able to do that.

Reports of parental involvement in Arabic schoolwork

While most parents felt disempowerment in relation to their ability to support their children with Arabic at home, many parents wanted to be involved in their children's Arabic learning. According to survey data collected at the beginning of the school year, more than 80% of respondents expressed their willingness to support their children in their Arabic language learning during the school year, and 90% of them said they would complete the interactive Arabic homework assignments with their children. When asked about possible barriers that could prevent them from being fully involved in supporting their children's Arabic learning and partaking in the Arabic interactive homework assignments, being "busy" and "lack of time" was the most frequent response, and "lacking confidence" in one's ability to assist was another common response. Only one parent openly stated that she wouldn't get involved in her child's schoolwork: this

parent gave a philosophical argument against homework and parental involvement in school and said that the aim of homework is for students to practice material they already learned in class and that it is not something that parents should be expected to help them with; she also stated that instructional time at school is sufficient for elementary students and there is no need to supplement it with further learning time at home.

While parents reported high levels of foreseen involvement in their children's Arabic learning, students reported that their parents were more actively involved in supporting them in subjects other than Arabic. When asked to rate their parents' level of involvement in their Arabic learning midway through the year, only 13% of student respondents reported that their parents were very active in their supportive role; whereas, 46% of respondents reported that their parents were very actively involved in supporting them in subjects *other* than Arabic (see Figure 15). There is evidence that much of the discrepancy between parent and student reports is due to Arabic language barriers.

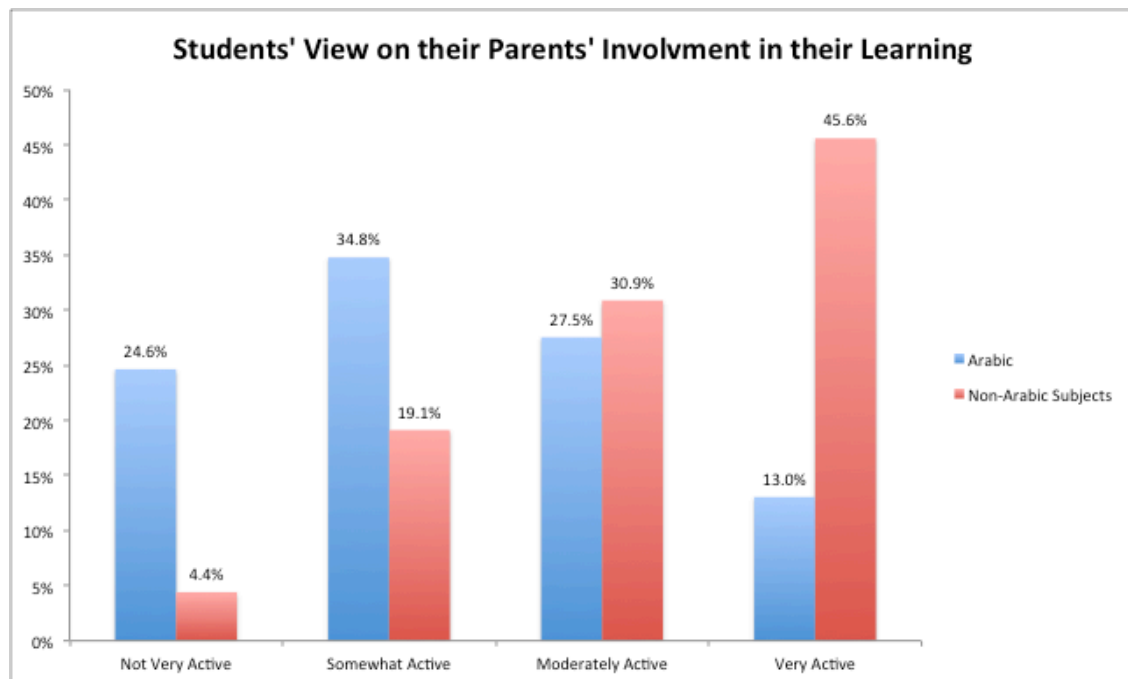


Figure 15: Student perspectives on parental involvement in schoolwork

2) Communicative barriers.

While linguistic barriers were the most common sources of disempowerment reported by parents in this study, some parents also pointed to the existence of communicative barriers that hindered their ability to know what was going on in school and support their children in Arabic. To depict the communicative contexts and barriers that disempower parents with respect to supporting their children's Arabic language at home, this sub-section will report findings on general communicative gaps between school and home as well as parental unfamiliarity with the Arabic language and culture curriculum.

General communication gaps between school and home.

According to interview data, most parents expressed that they were often unaware of what their children did at school or if they had any homework. Many parents, especially those who rely on their children to relay paper-based communication between school and home, blamed student forgetfulness for much of the miscommunication (e.g. students forgetting to inform their parents, forgetting their agenda at school, or accidentally losing the note or newsletter that was sent home). In fact, one parent acknowledged that directly asking her child about day-to-day happenings at school was unreliable at best:

Let's be honest, by the time the day is done, kids don't remember what they did all day. They really don't. I mean, there are certain things that stick out and [my child will] definitely mention those to me but the day-to-day like umm what we're doing in math, "Oh we're doing the same thing as we did, as we've been doing ...", you know what I mean? Like, it's really hard, it's sometimes ... it's like pulling teeth. Ummm, so I find that it's ... it's hard to know what's happening on a day-to-day basis. I get the gist of what [my child is] doing but I don't ... I rarely get details.

Student participants also depicted how they have their own criteria of what they deem worth sharing. One student said:

I don't know ... [...] If there is something important like a big test, maybe I'd tell her. But if it is just a small thing, I don't really usually tell her because ... [...] Ok, if I have, like for example, a math test, but I know everything that is coming in that test, I'm 100% confident, I even studied, then there would be no reason to tell her because I'm good. But if there is a math test that I didn't understand, I would come to her and ask her: "What should I do?" and "Can you help me in some of these areas?"

Unfamiliarity with Arabic curriculum.

Some parents expressed that they couldn't confidently support their children with Arabic because they didn't know what their children needed to learn. Both Arabic-speaking and non-Arabic speaking parents reported unfamiliarity with the Arabic Language and Culture curriculum and learning outcomes: according to survey results, only 15% of parents were moderately or very familiar with the curriculum. Additionally, few parents reported being able to assess their children's performance in Arabic: and only 12% felt comfortable enough to assess their children's Arabic performance against the Arabic curricular outcomes. These findings suggest that parental ability to gauge student progress in Arabic rests on their familiarity with Arabic curricular outcomes.

Parents indicated greater familiarity with the curriculum for some school subjects compared to others. For example, one parent reported in an interview that she had difficulty helping her children with Social Studies because she was unfamiliar with Canadian history; however, she had no problem assisting them with Mathematics as she considered it universal in nature. For other parents, who grew up in Canada, their main source of empowerment was their familiarity with the curriculum. One mother describes this as follows:

I think my husband and I have the advantage that we've gone to school here, so we sort of know ummm the concepts a little bit, you know, whereas, when I was growing up, my mother learned completely different than how I was being taught. So she had a challenge with helping me with homework because her method of

learning was completely different. Umm whereas, we have the advantage that we can teach him the same way that he's learning at school when it comes to most things - we've learned them the same way.

c) Technology's role in parental empowerment.

When asked about technology's role in empowering parents to support their children with school and with Arabic language learning in particular, some key themes emerged with respect to how technology can potentially overcome linguistic and communicative barriers that disempower parents in the realm of Arabic language learning.

1) Overcoming linguistic barriers via technology.

According to interview data, parents believed that technology could empower them linguistically in five main capacities:

- providing resources and tools for Arabic language learning
- offering opportunities for linguistic feedback and self-assessment
- delivering Arabic learning at a distance
- rendering Arabic learning more engaging and fun for children
- creating more impactful interactive multimodal Arabic learning

Each of the above points will be discussed below in detail using findings from parent interviews.

Technology as providing resources and tools for Arabic language learning.

Some parents said technology provided them with Arabic learning resources that they wouldn't be able to offer their children otherwise. Many of these parents associated technology to the Internet, which gives them immediate and unlimited access to multimedia, activity sheets, and textbooks that can support their children with Arabic

learning; while others equated technology with language learning applications and games on mobile and tablet devices. Because many parents lacked basic Arabic competency – or the time – needed to teach their children Arabic, they relied on online resources to carry out this task for them. For example, one mother praised technology for teaching her daughter Quran through exposure and repetition:

Even with my daughter, like she started going to *Duksee* (i.e. Quran School), and I put on stuff online and I'd just play it for her, you know? And I'll ... I'll tell her "K, repeat after what they're saying". So I'll sit there, I'm doing something, and I hear her ... she's copying what they're saying, or she's repeating after the Quran ... and she learns it [...] She knows like ... how many Surahs now? 10? 11?

One parent suggested that online resources are so plentiful that one could theoretically learn any language from the Internet unassisted.

While many parents praised the multitude of Arabic technological learning resources, others described them as unsuitable and poor in quality. For example, one parent claimed that many freely available Arabic apps were not tailored to the needs of non-Arabic speakers:

When you develop an [Arabic] app without a voice coming out, [...] I don't see it being helpful for someone who [doesn't know Arabic].... But if [it had] a voice that come out... you can listen to the voice, and [...] see the transliteration [and] say "Ok, this how to pronounce it ..." [...] Sometimes you don't find [apps like that]... and those apps that have that facility, you have to pay [for them].

When features important to non-Arabic speakers such as audio feedback are only available at an added cost in Arabic learning apps, parents are less likely to obtain them for their children.

Even Arabic-speaking parents faced difficulties finding quality online Arabic learning resources for their children. One parent stated that there were far more quality language-learning resources in English compared to Arabic:

For example, in English, if you go to YouTube, you find what's called "Storyline Online"¹⁴ ... This website is one that has no analog in Arabic [...] Famous persons like actors and what not ... they hold a storybook and read it - just as if a teacher is reading it [...]. I tried to find something similar to this in Arabic, but I couldn't find anything. [...] There is [also] no "Raz Kids" in Arabic¹⁵.

This same parent also argued that this issue extends to Arabic videos and cartoons:

Most Arabic cartoons - like 99% of them - are translated from other languages¹⁶.... There aren't any cartoons that are authentically Arabic - that is, designed by Arab illustrators for the Arabic audience... Most of them are taken from China, Japan, and America and they translate them.

While technology can empower parents with many Arabic resources so that their children can learn Arabic independently, locating and selecting high-quality and suitable

¹⁴ See <http://www.storylineonline.net/>

¹⁵ At the time of the interview, there were no sites like Raz Kids for supporting students with Arabic reading. Recently, however, "iReadArabic" has emerged to fill this void: it is an excellent subscription-based website that offers its services to schools and individuals families. For more info, visit www.ireadarabic.com.

¹⁶ Many popular Arabic cartoons are subbed or dubbed versions of Japanese Anime, other Asian cartoons, or Western cartoons and blockbusters by companies such as Disney, Marvel, and Pixar. Authentic Arabic cartoons (i.e. those designed in the Arab world) are harder to come by, but even such cartoons are often created for teaching Arabic language or Islamic values and not for mass dissemination in media as an art form in the pure sense; examples include: *Arabian Sinbad* (<http://arabiansinbad.com/>); *Pacca Alpaca* (<http://en.paccaalpaca.com/>); *Tareq wa Shireen* (<http://www.rubiconholding.com/entertainment/tws.php>); *Lantern Tales*; *New Joha*; and *I Love My Language* (<http://www.clearpictures.tv/Animation.aspx?lang=en>).

Arabic learning resources was seen as a challenge for non-Arabic and Arabic speaking parents alike.

Technology offers opportunities for feedback and self-assessment.

Another theme raised by parents during interviews was technology's ability to offer feedback to learners to facilitate self-assessment. For some parents, technology's empowering effect is most evident when utilizing Arabic learning tools with audio/video playback capabilities, which provide the learner with clear, spoken exemplars for proper pronunciation of Arabic letters and words. Additionally, many students and parents expressed that online recording tools can facilitate learner self-reflection and heightened awareness of Arabic usage. For example, one mother commented on the benefit of audio recording tools as follows: "It helps to hear yourself sometimes, you know, [...] like we might say something but we may not really know how it sounds until we play it back."

Others described how some technologies are now able to continuously assess learner progress, adapt instruction accordingly, and play the role of the teacher. Known in educational technology circles as Intelligent Adaptive Learning Systems, these systems can "learn" with the learner and adjust their pedagogical approach depending on how the learner is doing. For example, one parent explained that such intelligent technological systems could potentially help learners reflect on their spoken and written Arabic through voice recognition and optical character recognition (OCR) technologies:

For example, with technology, what's really gonna be good is [...] a way to assess where you're at. [...] Like if you can't say [the Arabic numbers] one to five properly, [...] it should be able to be that technologically advanced to say, "Ok, you didn't really say that right ... say it like this and try again", right? Like that's advanced technology to its extreme where it's gonna measure that element. And the same thing with writing ... like imagine a writing tool that says "Ok, well you didn't write this properly, I want you to write the word 'Wahid'" [and] it would be that the computer would look at it, analyze whether or not you're within the

lines [...] because I'm sure technology can do that easy, right? OCR-ing is not ... is not impossible. Even for Arabic, right? Like, I mean, if you can do it for English, you can do it for Arabic, right? You can OCR it ... Optical Character Recognition software. So it recognizes the word and [...] if it's off, it's gonna tell you "This is off", and it will send you a thing saying "Ok look, these were kind of off. These were ...", you know, we couldn't read this because the person's hand writing was that bad, right? That would be awesome. [...] And then [it will] even give you hints about [...] how you're [...] to use your hand [to write it correctly].

Similarly, another parent imagined the benefits of having Tajweed learning software (i.e. software for teaching Quranic recitation) that incorporated facial recognition technologies and could detect if students are properly uttering the Arabic letters from their precise places of articulation and correctly pronouncing the words and then would provide corrective feedback. Such technologies aim to replace the human teacher with an intelligent computerized agent that can offer feedback equally well. Parents who wish that their children to continue their Arabic learning at home but are unable to offer them student-teacher instruction in a face-to-face setting may attach their hopes to advanced technological solutions that could fill the void.

Technology as a distance-learning tool.

Some parents acknowledged that technology could conveniently facilitate the practice of Arabic beyond the walls of the classroom. One parent stated that compared to traditional learning in the past, technology now creates opportunities for furthering one's Arabic studies at home in the absence of the teacher:

If I compare to when I went to the *Madrrasah* (i.e. religious school for Arabic and Quran), so we [didn't] have anything like umm tablet, or Internet, or websites to start learning the sound and pronunciation. We [didn't] have that. So that will limit our chance [to practice]. Even though [...] we studied [...] Arabic [at school], we go back home [and] we forget. [...] Our parent[s] too ... they can't help us out [at home]. So you still have to go back again to the school the following day to do the same thing. So, with the technology, they can easily go to the Internet and go to the website [and] do practicing.

Some parents welcomed online learning as an option to compensate for the lack of Arabic instructional time offered in school as they realized that that instructional time is inadequate to achieve major gains in Arabic competency. One mother said:

The time that they are getting [Arabic] at school ... it's not enough to be able to learn the language properly ... They can learn a little of it - they can get the words and vocab, a little bit of it here and there - but to get the language properly, I think they need a lot more than just the school program. [...] It would have to be reinforced at home, they have to ... they would have to practice a lot more, yeah. [With an online learning system], they could go on it anytime and practice, right? It would definitely help.

For other parents, online Arabic learning could potentially empower them by granting them more freedom in relation to doing homework in the evening. Considering his family's busy schedule most evenings, one father expressed that online learning would facilitate a home-life balance by reducing the burden of traditional homework:

[With online learning,] the understanding of homework as "fixed", I think, changes there. [It] would [...] be less demanding at given times. So, you know, [...] my children are going home today and then they have Tae Kwon Do right after school and they got to get ready and go. [Now,] they can put it off (i.e. doing homework). This is what I'm saying, the time constraint that you have ... that you usually have on homework [is no longer.] You know, this is perfect. So, you know, when they're [...] having a little time, you know, finding a little extra time here and there in their daily schedules [...], this would be perfect. [Do it] at their own pace [...]. This is something that will work actually.

While the advantages of online Arabic learning are clearly evident for students (i.e. it allows them to reinforce their Arabic in the absence of the teacher anytime, anywhere, and at their own pace), its empowering potential also extends to parents who wish to learn Arabic. One mother mentioned how online technology potentially empowers her to overcome strict individual, religious, and cultural barriers that govern her life and to break the boundaries of space and time to pursue her own academic studies or Arabic learning goals:

I think for online programs, the best part is that ... to use my example, I am restricted in many areas just because I cannot go out. So online [learning] is a very good experience: I can do it in my own house at my own convenience. So for me, that's a very big tool.

Technology renders learning more engaging and fun for children.

Most parents acknowledged that technology makes learning more attractive and exciting for children. They generally noticed that their children were more inclined to learn when it involved the use of technology. For example, one parents stated:

Well, it attracts them. That's where they want to be spending most of their time. Most of their time, they are in front of computer or TV, so if you could just feed them [their learning] through that channel then it could be easier.

Another parent described her child's lure to technology as follows:

When I write sums, for example, I write some math sums on a paper, [my son] is reluctant ... reluctant to do [them]. When I give [him] an iPad and basic math facts like plus and subtraction ... addition and subtraction, [...] then he is interested [and says] "Ya, I'm doing on this".

Besides there being a certain lure to technology, other parents recognized that their children belong to the "digital natives" generation – one constantly immersed in technology and accustomed to it so much so that its members almost expect it as a regular part of their learning. One mother claimed that unless current pedagogical practices abandon their traditional approach and start utilizing technology, children today would lose their motivation for learning:

I think technology in general is playing a much larger role than it did in the past. I mean, traditionally, everything was done through memorization and you know, just repeat ... repetition. And umm I ... while it still helps, I think it still ... certain concepts are best learned that way, but I think ... even if you look around just at traditional math, English, science, everything is moving towards technology and I think until Arabic starts to go in that same direction, it going to make it challenging for kids to learn because now they are wired to learn that way. [...] I mean, kids are on technology all day long anyway. [...] I think kids [...] are used to it, right? It's not like how we are ... we are older. Technology for us is a bit challenging. But these kids have been [...] born with technology.

For other parents, their children love using technology while learning because it makes learning game-like. One parent suggested that her children were motivated by to learn via technology because learning didn't feel like work. Many students I interviewed reported similar sentiments about learning, work, and play. The following statements highlight the preference for interactive technological learning apps over traditional pen-and-paper learning tasks because learning via technology no longer feels arduous. One student stated:

[I love interactive online learning] because it's fun. And you're learning at the same time, but you don't really notice it. [...] There is this math game, and when I play it and go do my math work, it actually helps, but I don't notice when I'm playing that game that I'm doing math. [...] It's like a time-management and money counting thing.

Similarly, another said:

There's a website like that and it's like games, but you don't really notice it because you're playing the game and it gives you like time and stuff and it helps with your skills ... like basic multiplication. [...] It's kind of like you're learning and you just notice that you learned. [...]

Knowing that their children are inclined to learning by using technology and find it fun and engaging, parents may feel empowered when they have interactive learning tools at their disposal because motivating their children to do their schoolwork becomes much easier. However, some parents warned that using technology as a motivator could backfire when children expect it as the norm. One parent described the situation that he encounters when he promises his child technology as a reward for doing his homework:

I don't like it that I have to tell him: "Do the written Arabic work that was assigned at school on paper first, then I will give you the iPad to use" ... [because] he refuses and starts to say that he wants the iPad only and doesn't want to do written work. Ultimately, the argument ends with me saying "I won't give you the iPad," and he does nothing as a result - no homework.

While technological learning tools and apps empower many parents by serving as extrinsic motivators, some parents considered them to be the source of many battles over homework.

Technology creates more impactful interactive multimodal Arabic learning.

For some parents, technology is empowering because it can offer very interactive multimedia learning tools for effective Arabic language learning. With existing multimedia technological tools, learners are no longer limited to written text when studying a second language; rather, they can access oral, visual, and textual linguistic input all at once. In particular, one parent explained that she prefers interactive digital resources for learning languages because students can use more senses than they normally would when using traditional print resources:

I think you can do a lot more with the digital, like you know, you are using more senses: you are using your sight; you are using your hearing. Umm I think in that sense, the digital would be more helpful. Umm, of course, writing I think would be better on paper I'd assume, but I think from a learning perspective, I think digital, more than likely.

Another mother mentioned that interactive learning resources would empower her to learn Arabic because, as a beginner, she needs many different scaffolds to make linguistic connections between new words:

All three of [these] things are important when you are in my situation: seeing a visual, seeing the letters, and seeing how it's being said. And umm [...] then having a translation close to it, or right after it, whether it's being said in English after, or whether it's being written in English underneath, however. That's what I think is ... I mean, that's because I'm so basic in that, so maybe that would help. And once you get started, then once you have the basics down, you don't have to have [all that] for [...] further study.

Although the above parent is suggesting that only “basic” (or beginner) second language learners in her position would benefit from multimodal interactive linguistic scaffolds, such scaffolds can also benefit learners at higher levels of language proficiency.

Additionally, some parents highlighted the importance of animation and movement in engaging learners, especially children. One mother reported that her own children love using interactive learning apps such as those that allow creating animated stories because it brings learning to life. Hence, it seems that the interactive and multimodal nature of technology can empower language learners of all ages.

2) Overcoming communicative barriers via technology

As discussed earlier in this section, many parents believe that home-school miscommunication arises due to student forgetfulness and bias when relaying verbal or written messages to parents. Some parents, who were interviewed, expressed that online communication channels could potentially eliminate such communication gaps since these digital channels need no human proxy between school and home and thereby circumvent students’ roles as unreliable messengers. For example, one parent explained that accessing XYZPortal (i.e. a pseudonym for the school district’s online communication portal) was her communication mode of choice because she could remind her children to do their homework if they forgot:

I prefer to see [school communication] in XYZPortal. Umm, because then I know what exactly there is to be done. Ummm, [my child] writes in his agenda and I let him take it out at the end of the day when he gets home to ... to tell me what it is that he has written. Ummm but if I have it in XYZPortal, then I can make sure to remind him if he hasn’t written it down or if he’s forgotten about it ummm because [...] I find that once he leaves school, he just wants to go home and play and own his thing. You know, so he ... homework really doesn’t, you know, take priority for him.

Other parents expressed that online communication is often a better alternative to traditional paper-based communication, especially when the latter becomes unreliable. For example, while acknowledging the importance of the student agenda in nurturing penmanship, accountability, and self-assessment in students, one father still favored email for school-home communication because it removes the student from the equation:

The intent behind [the student agenda is] that they get children used to writing: the kids themselves should be writing what it is that they have to do. For example, “Today we did this”. So it’s two-fold ... on the one hand, they practice writing, and on the other hand they develop strong work ethic and responsibility ... like to be organized. [...] The benefit of the agenda is that the student or child is actively participating in the communication act. [However], when you send an email, it is strictly between me, as a parent, and you, as a teacher, and the student has no idea and doesn’t feel that they are part of it. [...] Clearly in this case (i.e. if the agenda is an unreliable means of communication), if I receive email, that would be better.

These statements suggest that providing parents with online digital tools for school-home communication might empower them to overcome existing communicative barriers and gain a sense of control over their children’s education.

B) Participants' Experience with the Online Arabic Learning Intervention

The online Arabic learning intervention aimed to empower parents in supporting their children with Arabic language learning. Participants responded to the online Arabic learning intervention in various ways and interacted with it to differing degrees. This section describes how research participants experienced the online Arabic learning intervention by sharing findings that: (a) highlight how participants used the various online Arabic learning technologies implemented during the study; (b) portray participant attitudes towards these tools and online Arabic learning; and (c) depict the online Arabic learning intervention's impact on parental sense of empowerment.

It must be noted that research participants had access to the technology necessary for participating in the Arabic learning intervention individually and/or alongside their children, and they had experience using similar technology in the past. According to survey results, the vast majority of respondents (96%) had access to email, Internet, and a computer at home and they were comfortable using all three tools. While about 61% of respondents had never taken an online course, only one respondent reported being "Not very comfortable" with taking an online course through an LMS.

a) Usage of online Arabic learning intervention

The online Arabic learning intervention implemented in this action research project was composed of three main technologies: an online Arabic LMS, and two components hosted within the LMS, namely an Arabic learning module for parents and interactive Arabic homework assignments. Findings describing how participants interacted with each of these components will be discussed below.

Online Arabic LMS

Between November 2014 and June 2015, students used the online Arabic LMS to do interactive Arabic homework assignments and other Arabic learning activities. On average, students logged in 8-9 times over that period. The average number of logins varied by grade level: students in Kindergarten logged in the least, while students in Grade 3 logged the most. On average, students in upper elementary grades (i.e. Grade 5 to 6) used the online Arabic LMS less often than those in lower elementary grades (i.e. Grades 1 to 4). See Table 4 below for more details.

Grade Level	K	1	2	3	4	5	6
Average Number of LMS Logins	3.4	9.6	10.5	15.1	9.3	6.4	5

Table 4: Average number of LMS logins over span of school year by grade

As time progressed, students seemed to access the online Arabic LMS less frequently. As seen in Figure 16, when the LMS was first introduced in mid-November 2014, there was an initial spike in the number of students logging in and accessing it, but the LMS usage quickly diminished as time progressed reaching a low during the Winter break. LMS usage increased slightly in the first month or two of the new year but reached another low in late February. When the online Arabic letter's module was released to students in early March 2015, a large increase was seen for students accessing the LMS for about two weeks but this again diminished quickly over the remainder of the year.

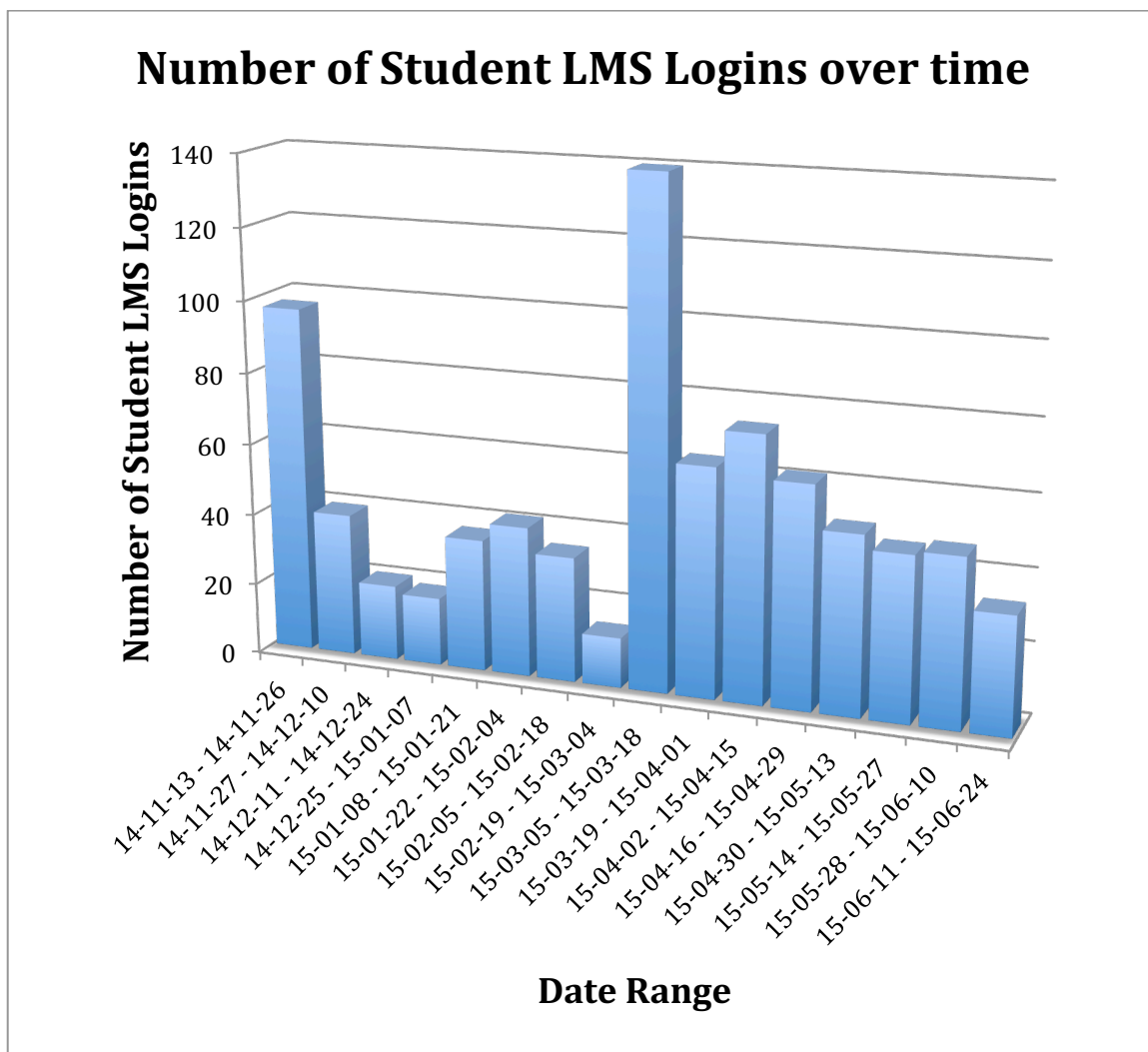


Figure 16: Number of student logins on Arabic LMS over span of school year

Arabic learning module for parents

While many parents, at the beginning of the school year, had expressed interest in learning Arabic online if the opportunity presented itself, only 18 parents enrolled in the freely offered online Arabic learning module for parents by successfully submitting an online registration form. Two of these parents did not confirm their enrollment: that is, they did not complete the other necessary steps for creating an account on the LMS and accessing the learning module (such as checking their email for a confirmation email,

validating their email address, setting a password, logging into the LMS, and then finally accessing their module). Of the 16 parents who confirmed their enrolment, only six completed the first tutorial lesson, which aimed at orienting parents on how to navigate the online Arabic LMS and introducing them to the Arabic learning methodology followed therein. No parents completed any online learning activities beyond the tutorial lesson. On average, parents logged into the LMS to access the online Arabic learning module two or three times over a span of three months ($n = 18$, $\bar{x}=2.5$, $s = 2.85$): with the smallest number of logins being zero and the largest number of logins being 12.

However, even the parent who logged in 12 times did not complete the tutorial lesson.

Considering the above, it is evident that none of the parents who participated in the study completed a significant portion of the online Arabic learning module, which was designed to empower them linguistically. That is, none of the parents completed any lessons aimed at teaching Arabic vocabulary, grammar, sentence structure, or cultural elements to beginners. From interview data, most parents stated that they couldn't fully participate in the online Arabic learning module due to a "lack of time" or "being busy" with various matters. Table 5 summarizes how parents interacted with the online Arabic learning module for parents. These findings will be further addressed in the Discussion.

Activity	Number of Parents
Enrolled in online Arabic learning module for parents	18
Confirmed their enrollment	16
Completed the first tutorial lesson in module	6
Completed additional lessons beyond tutorial	0

Table 5: Summary of participant interaction with online Arabic learning module for parents

Interactive homework assignments

Students in Grades 1 to 6 received 10 assignments to complete with their parents over the span of the school year. According to logged LMS data, approximately 46% of students and parents did not complete any assignments, and only 8-9% of students and parents completed all assignments (see Figure 17). For Kindergarten, however, students only received four assignments to complete with their parents. Approximately 77% of Kindergarten students and parents did not complete any assignments, while only one family completed three out of four assignments.

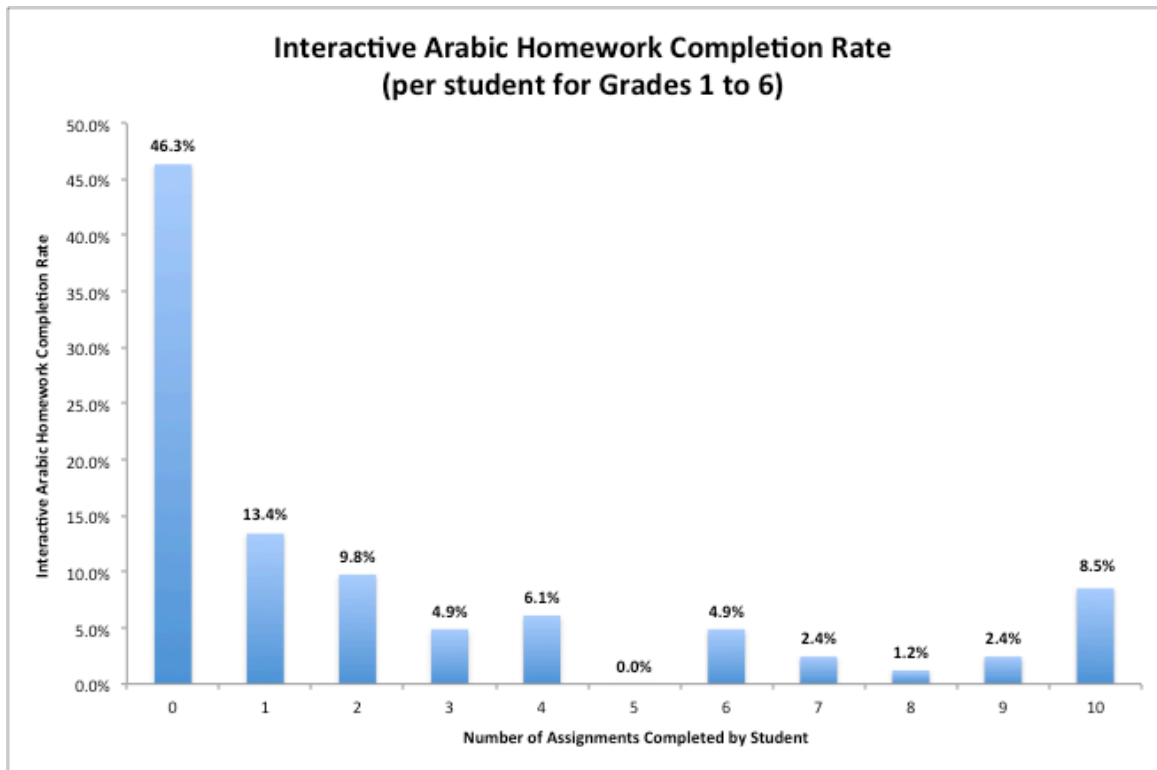


Figure 17: Interactive Arabic homework completion rate (per student in Grades 1-6)

When comparing students by grade level, Kindergarten had the largest percentage of students and parents who did not complete any interactive Arabic homework (77%),

followed by Grades 5 and 6 (around 60% and 62% respectively). Grade 1 students and parents had the lowest assignment non-completion rate (around 27%).

For students in Grade 1 to 6, the completion rate for the first interactive Arabic homework assignment was just under 48%. However, as time progressed, the completion rate decreased to 23% for the fourth assignment and then steadily decreased further until it became 10% for the final assignment (see Figure 18). Grade-by-grade comparisons of interactive homework completion revealed similar decreasing trends for student completion rates over the course of the year.

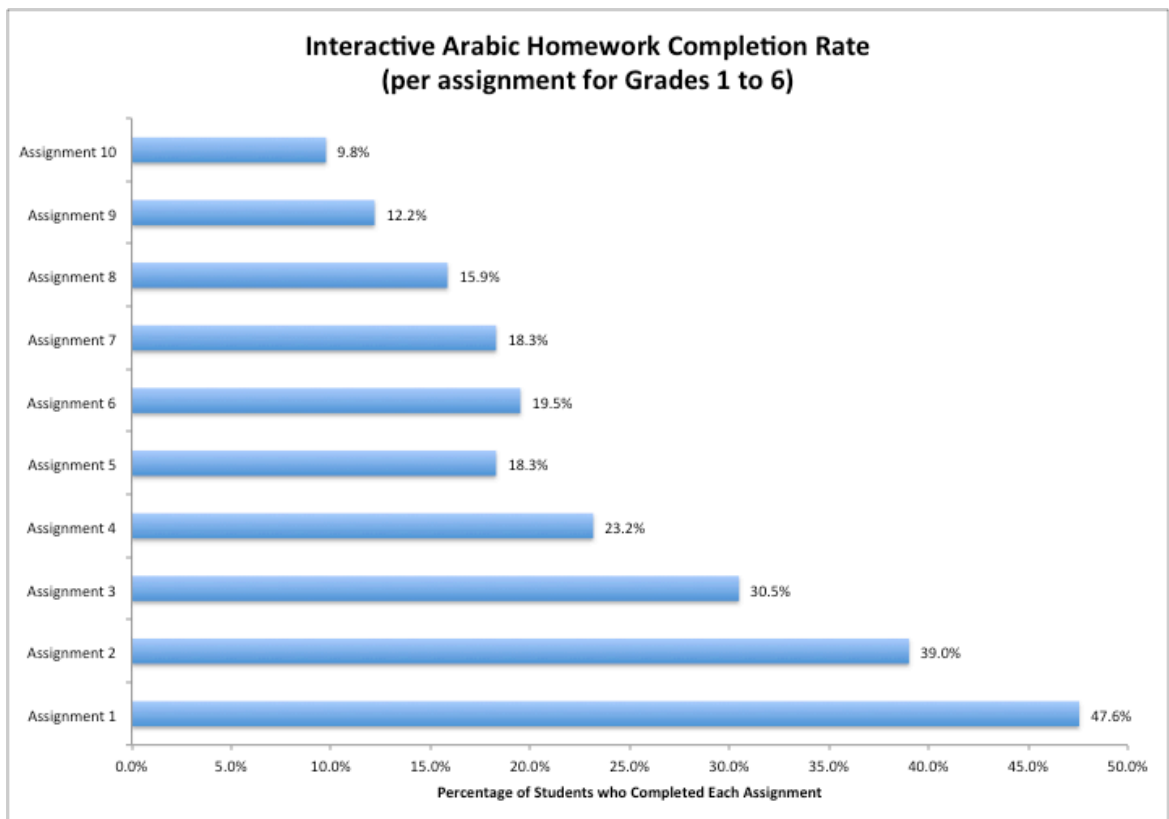


Figure 18: Interactive Arabic homework completion rate (per assignment for Grades 1-6)

According to end-of-year survey results, most parents stated that they were not as involved in their children’s Arabic language learning and interactive Arabic homework as they could have been due to not having time and being busy with work, family, full-time

studies, and the like. One parent commented: “Arabic is definitely on our priority list, however [balancing] between Qur'an lessons, homework, and extra-curricular activities has made it challenging to bring it to the forefront.” The next most-commonly mentioned reason was a lack of confidence in one’s own Arabic abilities: phrases such as “I don’t know Arabic” or “Arabic is not our first language” were quite frequent from parents. Additionally, one parent shared her philosophical view against homework to justify not fully taking part in the online interactive Arabic homework: she said, “My view is that homework should be completed by children, and parents should help them as needed.” In the context of online Arabic homework, many parents suggested that technical difficulties with using the online LMS prevented them from being totally involved.

According to student surveys, about 65% of students reported that their parents were either not very active or only somewhat active in their Arabic language learning this year and 60% of students reported that their parents never or rarely completed interactive Arabic homework with them. When asked to give reasons why their parents were not able to involve themselves in their Arabic learning and interactive Arabic homework as much as they could have, more than half of respondents said that their parents could not dedicate the time and were very busy with work, studying, taking care of children, and other household matters. Only a few students suggested that their parents’ lack of Arabic knowledge impeded their participation and support of their Arabic learning at home.

b) Attitudes towards technology

Despite the low LMS usage rates, when asked about their experience with the online Arabic LMS during interviews, participants identified many positive technological

features that enhanced and supported their learning experience. The most relevant and oft-mentioned characteristics are discussed below.

VoiceThread recording feature.

The most popular feature on the online Arabic LMS, as expressed by participants, was the VoiceThread recording feature. While many students liked it because it was fun to interact with a microphone and hear oneself, a few students said it assisted them with self-reflecting on their spoken language and improving it by comparing it to an exemplar:

[The voice recording] helped me [...] with the structure of my Arabic sentences [because] you could replay it and see if there are any mistakes in it and what you need to improve on, and then and then you can keep trying that over and over until you get what is, like, a good sentence.

Another student mentioned that the voice recording forced her to repeat the spoken Arabic phrase or sentence a few times until she felt confident and mastered it. Parents also expressed similar sentiments about how the voice recording offered feedback that facilitated self-reflection on one's own spoken Arabic and encouraged the repeated use of the language. One mother reported that her son would tell her: "I don't like [the recording]. I want to do it again".

Moreover, one parent pointed out that the voice-recording feature prompted a more active type of learning, where learners are more engaged with the language task and are required to pay more attention to instructions and concepts previously viewed in the mini-lesson and notice the finer details of the spoken language in order to submit a polished recording: one nearly free of errors and sounding quite fluent. This parent said:

I think what I found really effective was the ummm [...] like at the very end you had to record: you had to actually say what ... what you had learned and then record it. I think that was really good. It forced us to be engaged and forced him to be engaged. It was very active learning. Umm it wasn't just memorizing words

or memorizing letters and then trying to repeat it ... we were actually using the concepts that were in the lesson.

Overall, it seems that having to submit an audio recording as part of an Arabic assignment encouraged a more active engagement with previous material and attuned self-reflection on one's performance in order to assess whether the recording met the assignment's criteria.

Clear and structured instructions for online learning.

Parents and students appreciated the simple, clear, and structured instructions for each homework assignment since they made completing the task less stressful and more straightforward. For example, some parents thought the VoiceThread screencasts, which accompanied each assignment, did an excellent job of breaking down the sequential steps that learners needed to follow to complete the assignment. As one parent said:

I do remember trying to do one assignment with him [...] and we did go through it together and it was very structured, ... it was very laid out, it was very easy for me to follow [...] because everything was laid out in Slide #1, Slide #2, Slide #3.

Non-Arabic speaking parents generally recognized that this structured assignment format supported their own online learning of Arabic and their ability to support their children with it.

However, some parents wished for additional textual scaffolds for learning Arabic in the form of English translations of individual words and phrases, noting that ambiguity could arise even when clear visuals are included alongside Arabic words. For example, one mother expressed that while doing the interactive homework assignments with her child, she was often unclear about the meanings of some words and was afraid of misleading him:

You know [...] from my own learning, I would probably try to guess [the meaning] for whatever they are showing in the picture. [But] sometimes, you can't understand what they want to tell you. [...] If I had to teach him, I would be worried that I would be saying the wrong thing... that this word [...] I'm reading it wrong ... that this word means something that it doesn't. Do you know what I mean?

For other parents, it wasn't individual words that they didn't understand but the meaning of whole sentences in context (as in the case of songs, poems, and longer sentences). One parent stated that understanding Arabic grammar and sentence structure – and not vocabulary – was difficult for her and that she would have appreciated more direction in those areas:

It's nice to have the words and to know what they are and what they mean, but they change when you combine them and put them in a phrase, depending on whether it is masculine or feminine, or past tense or present tense, so that's something that we grappled with a little bit. Umm so if you could put something in there to help with that, I think that would be ... that would help us as parents.

As Arabic language tasks increase in complexity, adding translations and explanations in an international language, like English, alongside the Arabic text would remove ambiguity and greatly support parents in assisting their children with Arabic.

VoiceThread mini-lessons and screencasts.

Some non-Arabic speaking parents found benefit in the VoiceThread mini-lessons and screencasts that were included with every assignment because they could refer to them and review them when needed. That is, they served as scaffolds that parents could utilize to become confident enough with their Arabic language abilities so that they could jointly do the assignment with their children. One parent described how she had to refer to the VoiceThread mini-lessons before doing the assignment to compensate for gaps in her Arabic knowledge:

There were a few words that I am just like “What does that mean?” so I had to look, right? So I actually had to listen: it’s not like I just came there and I could do the conversation. I actually had to listen to your screencast before I could start.

Another parent mentioned that she repeatedly referred back the VoiceThread mini-lessons with her child while doing the assignment for more support:

When we had to do the conversation recording at the end, I didn’t feel confident or comfortable enough to go through the lesson and then just do it. We would always go back to those slides and it was a lot of just going back because we ... I didn’t have that enough and neither did she to just do that conversation ... we almost - I would call “cheated a little” *laughing* ... We would even write it on paper the other things and practice it and then record it because neither of us had that vocabulary enough to do it.

While the above parent describes the act of referring back to the screencast for assistance as “cheating”, it is actually an instance of using the learning resources for scaffolding, as intended.

In addition, some parents expressed that the mini-lessons and screencasts provided enough instructions to do the assignment and stated that their children were not confused as to what they needed to do. One parent described the typical state of confusion her daughter faces when she has homework that lacks clear accompanying guidelines:

[Sometimes] she comes home with “I don’t know what to do here”. Like [...] I know they get explained what to do at school, they understand, they bring it, but either they forget by the time they get home or they didn’t understand it. [...]

Other parents likened the online Arabic learning to having a personal Arabic teacher for their child at home. Reflecting on her son’s experience with online Arabic learning, one mother said:

He felt you were kind of at home with him: he could always hear your voice and go back to those lessons. [...] So it is like having the teacher come home with you because I’m not that ... I don’t have that role at home. So it is nice to hear that he felt that you were kind of there to help with if he needs it.

Self-paced learning.

Some parents believed that the self-paced nature of the online Arabic homework assignments reduced the stress often associated with completing homework. When asked whether the online Arabic homework was burdensome, one parent said: “Not really, because it was not like ‘Oh, it’s due today’ or ‘It’s due tomorrow’. It was just like, whenever you have time, you can go on and do it.” Considering how busy some families are, having flexible assignments relieves families of anxiety associated with adding one extra task to an already busy schedule. One parent described how homework could potentially disrupt her family’s routine:

I think part of the problem is when ... when things fall outside of a routine, it makes it challenging to accommodate. Umm, especially for us who have a constant routine ... you know, we’re “go, go, go, go” right up until 8PM, you know? To have things thrown at us last minute or ... that I find really throws us off the mark ...

Interactive Arabic learning games.

When interviewing students, I learned that the inclusion of interactive Arabic learning games on the online Arabic LMS was the most memorable and enjoyable component. For most students, it wasn’t the interactive Arabic homework that they remembered the most but the games that were included as part of the interactive Arabic letters course on the LMS. When asked about what they remembered most, one student stated: “There [were] lots of games to help you learn Arabic [such as the] I-spy [and] memory game.” Another student highlighted the interactive parts of the Arabic learning games she liked: “I liked the [Arabic letters] course mostly, [with] the one Arabic letter and there would be more activities about it. [...] Cuz, like, it was fun for some reason.”

Students also described what they didn't enjoy. For example, some students did *not* really like the learning activities on the website and argued for a more game-like Arabic learning experience. One student said: "I feel like [if there was] a video game or something, I bet the whole class would be playing. [...] That's what gets people's attention." Considering the above, it seems many students would be inclined to take part in a more gamified online language learning experience because it captures their attention and is more enjoyable.

Communication channels within the LMS.

Some participants mentioned they appreciated that there were multiple ways to contact me within the online Arabic LMS if they needed assistance with their assignments at home or if they had any technical issues. One parent described such channels as lifesaving:

Like if there was something they didn't understand, they could, you know, chat with you. I, I liked that because ummm even at the U of A, you know the library has that feature ... and I remember once, I needed to cite an article that I had lost, and I couldn't find it. And then, and I ... and I sitting there panicking because it was so important but then I just chatted with this person, and they found it for me and it was so quick and it was amazing. And I'm like, *that* is a great feature - that experience of like "No, we're not gonna like wait till tomorrow to find out or - if it's the weekend - Monday to find out". No we can find out right away. So, I, I do really like that feature.

Despite this expressed appreciation, I found that these online communication channels on the LMS were underutilized: only a handful of students and parents sent me messages and inquiries throughout the year. For example, occasionally a few parents contacted me telling me that they forgot their child's username and password and asked me to resend it. Other times, students sent me quick messages telling me that they couldn't submit their assignments or that something wasn't working properly on the

website and I would help them with that the following day. Nonetheless, this feature would likely be essential for any online Arabic LMS so that users feel that they get human support while remotely doing their online Arabic assignments.

Few technical difficulties.

Parents reported very few technical difficulties using the website. Generally speaking students were able to login to the website easily and access its content by entering their username and password. Only some younger students needed parental assistance to login but this was the exception. One mother said that even her daughter in Kindergarten could login independently but needed assistance troubleshooting other aspects unrelated to the Arabic LMS's design:

I think the login and the password thing ... [children] are good at [that] ... I mean, [considering] what I see from [my daughter]. They are good at that because they also have access to computers at school [...]. But, I mean, [...] like if I'm using a laptop ... [when] starting the laptop, sometimes there is no battery. [As a parent], you are doing all that [troubleshooting], so the kids are dependent [on you] in a way.

Only one parent reported difficulties using the LMS from mobile and tablet devices. This particular family had no access to a functional laptop at home and had to rely on an iPhone to access the website. In particular, this mother reported that she had trouble downloading the mobile VoiceThread app and leaving voice comments from her mobile device:

My problem last year was that [my son] could not access [the website] at home because we were having like ... tech ... like technology problems - we didn't have the right laptop, we tried getting him the tablet, I tried downloading [the VoiceThread app] on the iPhone. [...] So maybe because there was that disconnect in trying to get it set up at home, I ... maybe I wasn't able to take full advantage of what that website was set out to do [...]. And I had microphone problems and that was a little bit frustrating. [My son] tried downloading [the Voicethread app] on his iPhone but [...] the operating system wasn't up to date or something because he had an older phone. So it didn't allow him to do everything

that he was supposed to and that was frustrating, so ... [our engagement with the website] kind of fizzled out there at the end because it wasn't as easy to do at home as it could have been.

Another student, who used an iPad, reported no trouble downloading the VoiceThread app on it; however, she complained that her iPad would randomly freeze and turn off even when fully charged, and that often prevented her from doing her assignments.

Hence, most issues reported by participants were those linked to *accessing* appropriate technology and not to the friendly usage of the LMS. Nonetheless, it seems that any the frustration associated with using an online Arabic LMS can deter parents and students from fully engaging with the online learning tasks.

c) Impact on parental sense of empowerment

In this sub-section, I will present findings that depict the extent to which the online Arabic learning intervention impacted parental sense of empowerment in relation to their ability to support their children with Arabic language learning. Below, I will address two facets of parental empowerment: linguistic and communicative.

Linguistic empowerment

To draw a holistic picture of parental sense of linguistic empowerment in relation to supporting their children with Arabic language learning, this sub-section will report on it from two perspectives: (1) the parental perspective, and (2) the student perspective.

Parental self-assessments of linguistic empowerment and degree of involvement in supporting their children with Arabic learning at home

When asked whether their Arabic language proficiency improved over the span of the year: 30% of respondents said “No” or “Definitely not”, 34% of respondents said “Yes” or “Definitely yes”, and the remainder were uncertain (see Figure 19).

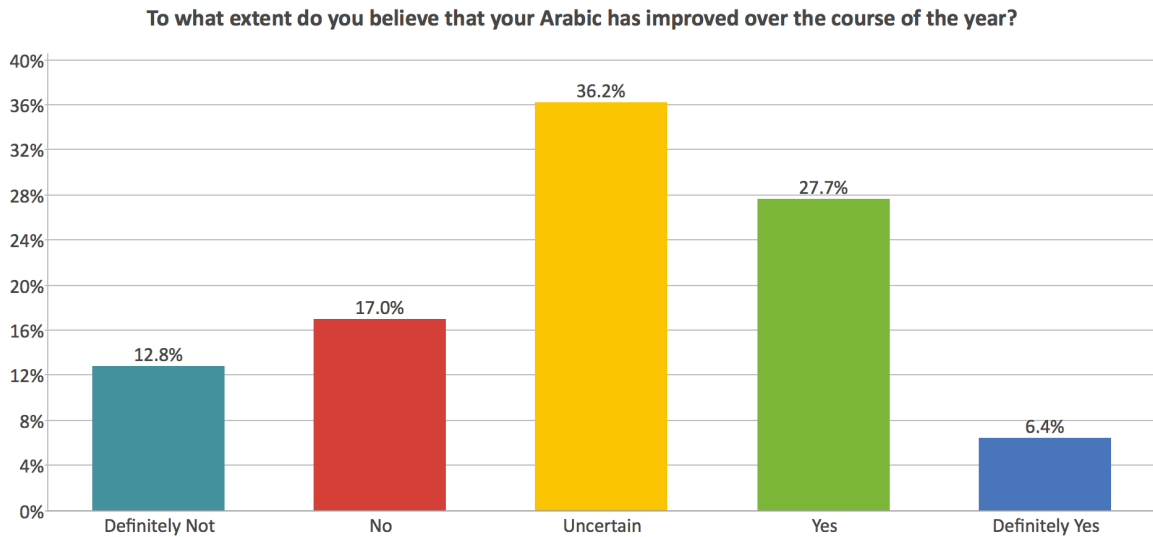


Figure 19: End-of-year parental self-assessment of the improvement in their own Arabic proficiency

Despite this, 76% of respondents reported that they felt some level of confidence in their ability to support their children with Arabic language learning at home. However, high parental confidence was mostly reported in supporting their children with low-level language skills. Additionally, some of these parents said that they couldn't assist their children with Arabic learning unless the Arabic diacritical marks (i.e. short vowel marks) were indicated within the word - as they wouldn't be able to read it properly otherwise. The findings are very similar to those obtained from the beginning of year parent survey (refer back to Figure 14). It is worth noting that only 27% of respondents felt comfortable assessing their children's Arabic performance against Arabic curricular outcomes.

When asked to report on the impact of the online Arabic LMS and the interactive Arabic homework on their level of comfort with (1) their own Arabic skills, (2) their own abilities to support their children with Arabic, (3) their own abilities to assess their children's Arabic language proficiency, most parents (between 55% and 72% of respondents) either agreed or strongly agreed that their confidence levels had increased in

all aforementioned areas. Parents who disagreed were a very small minority (no more than 6% of all respondents) and the rest were uncertain of the technological intervention's impact on their confidence levels.

When asked about their level of involvement in their children's Arabic learning and interactive Arabic homework assignments this year, 38% of respondents expressed that they were moderately or very actively involved in their children's Arabic learning, while 30% reported that they did the interactive Arabic homework with their children most of the time or always. Interestingly, 77% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that their involvement with their children's Arabic learning strengthened their relationship with them.

When asked to describe whether the online Arabic LMS and interactive Arabic homework impacted their sense of empowerment (either positively and negatively), the most common response was that parents consequently became more familiar with the Arabic language curriculum and content being taught at school and therefore were better equipped to assess their child's Arabic language performance and oversee their homework completion at home. Other parents reported that they learned some Arabic and had become more confident in their ability to support their children with Arabic at home. Additionally, some parents reported enjoyable experiences and strengthened relationships with their child from doing the online interactive Arabic homework. However, some parents thought the assignments were too difficult for them because they did not have the Arabic background and wished there were more supports offered to them such as English translations of Arabic vocabulary and phrases. It must also be mentioned that some parents couldn't comment on whether they thought the LMS and interactive Arabic

homework impacted their sense of empowerment because they hadn't used it throughout the school year. Also, one parent questioned why students couldn't just learn the expected Arabic content in class and wondered why there was even a need for the LMS and the interactive Arabic homework in the first place.

Student assessments of their parent's linguistic empowerment and degree of involvement in supporting them with Arabic learning at home

At the end of the year, students were asked to share whether they felt that their parents (1) showed greater interest in learning Arabic this year, and (2) showed a greater involvement in their Arabic language learning at home. They were also asked if they thought the technological Arabic learning intervention impacted their parents' level of involvement. Generally speaking, respondents were divided on all these matters, with a sizable segment unsure about whether any real change or impact was seen (see Table 6 below for a summary the findings).

Statement	Disagree*	Uncertain	Agree**
Your parents showed greater interest in learning Arabic	29%	46%	25%
Your parents seemed more involved in supporting you with Arabic language learning	31%	29%	40%
Technological Arabic intervention impacted your parents' level of involvement	30%	38%	32%

Table 6: Student views of parental sense of empowerment and involvement

* This column includes students who “disagreed” or “strongly disagreed”

** This column includes students who “agreed” or “strongly agreed”

However, 50% of respondents believed their parents were more involved supporting them with subjects other than Arabic, and only 15% of respondents disagreed (see Figure 20).

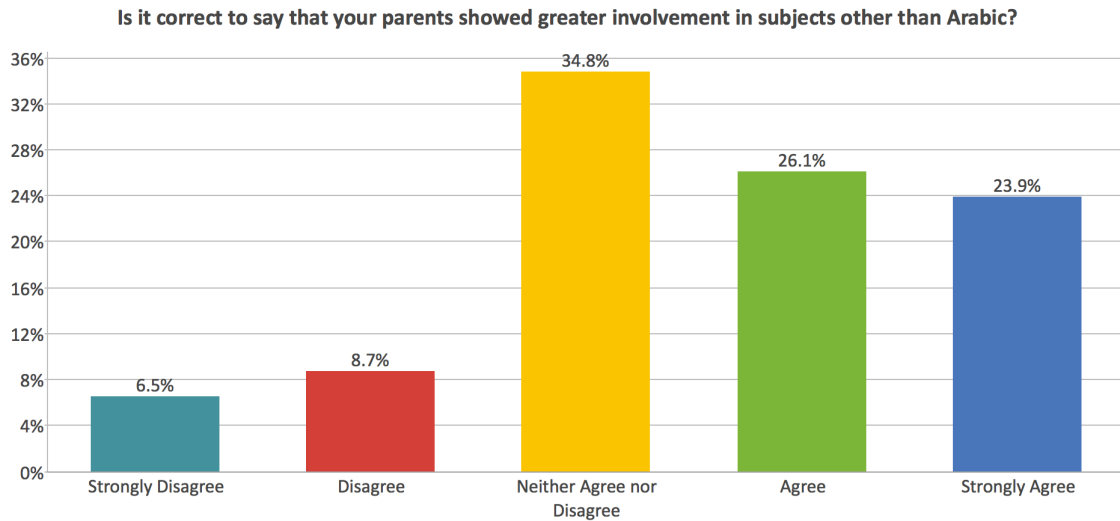


Figure 20: Student views on whether parents were more involved in supporting them with non-Arabic subjects

Communicative empowerment

According to end of year parent survey results, only 33% of respondents were moderately or very familiar with the Arabic Language and Culture curriculum followed at school. Moreover, the majority of respondents believed that the online Arabic LMS and the interactive Arabic homework had made them more familiar with the Arabic Language and Culture Curriculum (68% and 59% respectively).

From interview data, some parents expressed that the online Arabic LMS enhanced communication between school and home because it kept them informed of what Arabic content their children were learning in class and what topics and skills they were expected to review and practice at home. For example, one parent expressed much

disappointment that the Arabic LMS was not being implemented again in the following school year:

[Last year,] I also felt [that the Arabic LMS] helped to make me more aware of what he was learning in the classroom. Like [...] I knew he was working on [Arabic] conversations at one point, I knew he working on salutations at one point, I knew he was working on greeting parents at one point, how to [speak about] family and stuff like that. Whereas now [without the Arabic LMS], I feel that I don't really know what they are covering. There's no [communication]: there's that piece that's missing. So, [he] has had Arabic now for 6 months [...] ... I've never seen work come home, I've never heard a conversation, I don't know what projects he's working on. So that [...] one piece is missing. [And last year,] even though I wasn't helping him - or I couldn't help him -, at least I kind of knew what he was learning, right? And I knew what the topics were being covered, and I felt that that was helpful too.

Hence, although this parent wasn't able to support her child with Arabic learning when Arabic LMS was implemented due to various barriers, it still seems that it empowered her because it generally kept her aware of her child's Arabic learning progress.

C) Factors impeding higher engagement with online Arabic learning intervention

The findings presented in the previous two subsections suggest that while parent participants in this action research project realized how technology could potentially overcome linguistic and communicative barriers to their own empowerment, the implementation of the study's online Arabic learning intervention did not yield higher parental involvement or empowerment in relation to supporting their children with Arabic language learning. This section will primarily rely on interview data to present some of the main factors that may have impeded higher engagement with the online Arabic learning intervention, which was aimed at empowering parents in supporting their children with Arabic language learning at home.

a) Structural and task design factors

This section will address the structural and design aspects of some elements of the online Arabic learning intervention that may have impeded participant engagement. In specific, two aspects will be discussed below: (1) the collaborative nature of interactive Arabic homework and (2) the fact that learning activities on the Arabic LMS were not graded.

Collaborative nature of interactive Arabic homework.

Many students and parents expressed positive sentiments about having to do interactive Arabic homework assignments together. The most common response was that students and parents enjoyed the experience and had fun learning together. One parent reflected on her experience doing the assignments with her daughter as follows:

[We] practiced it [together] and we created a little script. And then when we recorded it and it ran smoothly and we did our part, it felt like “Oh, that was good. Let’s keep this one”. Whereas, that was the good part about it because we could record it many times. Or sometimes we would just start laughing [because we] pronounced the word wrong and we could tell it was wrong - it was fun actually in a way, right? We had a lot of laughs; we had a lot of bloopers - that was the good part about it!

One student reported similar feelings about doing the assignments with her parents:

Umm ... like we had fun ... we would circle things, we would use the colours on [VoiceThread]. They would make mistakes and then we would record something funny on too ... I wanted to do it. It was fun.

It seems that for these parents and students, doing homework together was filled with laughter and it potentially strengthened the bonds between them.

Other families had positive experiences with the interactive homework because it allowed them to support one another in learning Arabic. For example, some students reported that they found the interactive homework experience beneficial because they

appreciated their parents' assistance. One student mentioned that because her parents knew Arabic, they could correct her when she made a mistake doing the Arabic homework. Alternatively, other parents enjoyed the experience because their child would teach them Arabic. Regardless of who was supporting the other, the sense of empowerment stems from family members mutually supporting one another and learning together. One parent tied her empowerment to feelings of accomplishment: "It was empowering because it was ... it was nice to work with [him] and do that. We accomplished it. We did something. We learned something."

However, not all parents appreciated the joint nature of the interactive homework assignments; in fact, some found it burdensome. Some students had difficulty getting their parents to partake in the homework assignments and sign off on them because they were often busy. One student suggested that independent Arabic LMS assignments might have been better:

I think it would [have been] better if the assignments were more independent like ... instead of always having [...] to have a parent with you to like umm hand in the assignment, just like do it yourself sometimes, ... cuz like, to be honest, [for] most people [...], their parents [spend] the entire day like cooking dinner and doing other stuff ... so they don't really have the time to focus [on] the assignment ... [and] that might deter the students from doing the assignment. So if you like had more independent, then I think it would probably work better.

Other parents echoed this feeling and highlighted a clear disconnect between the online Arabic interactive homework assignments' aim and their practical implementation; one mother said:

In theory, I think [interactive Arabic homework is] very beneficial, [but] in reality it was an obstacle because I couldn't sit down long enough to learn it in order to communicate with him and maybe I ... maybe I ... and I didn't have the time [...]. I know why it's important, because in theory yes, that's what should be happening - and that makes perfect sense. But in reality, that didn't happen. If there was a homework assignment where [my son] could sit with a friend,

somebody in his class and then they could have that conversation together [...] or if it was an individual conversation he had to have, if it was just him speaking because he knows what he has to say, and he's had examples and practice in class and all that, then [...] I could definitely make sure that he was getting that done. But for me to sit and have that conversation with him, and again like I said before, I have to learn it first and then communicate with him in order to have an assignment completed, and that would have taken time that I couldn't carve out necessarily. [And] I know [that this] defeats the purpose of parental involvement... *laughing*

The above parent makes a convincing argument that partaking in interactive Arabic homework assignments may not be a realistic expectation for parents who lead busy lives. By requiring parents to complete the assignments with their children, educators may be placing unnecessary burdens on some parents.

Moreover, while the mini-lessons and screencasts on the online Arabic LMS provided clear instructions for doing the assignments and contained the essential Arabic vocabulary and phrases that students needed to use, some parents felt they simply did not have the time to learn the content with their children to support them. In fact, one parent viewed it as burdensome:

I must feel like I have to teach myself too before I do [the Arabic assignment] because I don't have that background, whereas for math, [...] I wouldn't have to look in something or read it or understand it. [For math,] I can do it because I have [the background knowledge], and [for] Arabic I don't have it. [For Arabic], I don't feel like it can come quickly if I were to help, I would have to do the whole ... put it in the time first to figure it out myself and help.

Although the mini-lessons and screenshots served as Arabic scaffolds for doing Arabic homework at home, requiring parents to involve themselves and support their children with doing such assignments is burdensome because parents lack the basic Arabic knowledge to do the Arabic task in the first place.

Online Arabic learning: Graded or ungraded?

During the interviews, families were asked whether they thought grades should have been assigned to the online Arabic interactive homework, since it is likely that grading the activities would have resulted in a higher completion rate. Interview data suggest that there was a nearly even split between parents who were against assigning grades to the homework and parents who favored assigning grades. Those who opposed grading homework made three main claims: (1) grading is unfair to students whose circumstances do not allow for the completion of assignments at all or in a timely manner; (2) it is a poor assessment practice that conflates student effort with achievement; and (3) it may have damaging psychological affects on children. As for parents who favored assigning grades to online homework, they did so because they believed that grades (1) promote student accountability, (2) increase student motivation, and (3) attach importance to learning tasks.

Based on parents' arguments in favour of grading homework, it is likely that grading the online Arabic learning activities would have resulted in increased engagement with the online Arabic learning intervention. For example, a few of the parents who were in favor of assigning grades to homework expressed that this practice teaches students to be more accountable. When asked about what end grading could serve, one parent answered with one word, "responsibility", and then he said:

[Nurturing] responsibility of the child and the family ... this is what [the aim of assigning grades to homework] should be: [that] you are responsible for doing something. [Since], you were given homework, and you were given adequate time [to complete it], and other people are doing it, and then you didn't do it, so you should be responsible. It should be [about] becoming responsible for what you're supposed to do.

Parents also indicated that assigning grades to homework was a good practice because they believed it would motivate their children to complete the Arabic learning activities. For example, one parent stated:

I think kids are more likely to complete a task if they feel that [...] “This is due. [...] I’m gonna get marked on it.” I feel even [my son] is motivated by marks. Like if he gets a [mark], he tells me [...]: “I got so much. How many percentage does that [count as]?” So I think that [...] if they get a mark at the end, that definitely is a motivation.

In trying to explain why children seem to be naturally motivated by marks, one parent linked it to their competitive nature and made the following argument:

For me, [marks are] just [...] a means or a tool for motivating - so that the child feels motivated. Like, nowadays, when [children] play soccer, [teachers] have them play soccer believing that the score is not important. They try to calm children down, diminish their enthusiasm and passion, and deter them from saying things like: “Oh, we lost!” or “We won! We won!” so that they don’t make fun of each other. They try to avoid and prevent such reactions from kids, by saying that “the score is not important.” But how do you expect kids to improve and exert effort if the score is not important or if marks do not count?! Do you understand when I am saying? [...] Naturally, students and children learn this way - by competition - and they ... they must find a reason to exert effort and do their studies. If the teacher says “This is homework but you have the choice to do it or not do it”, students will say, “I won’t do it”. In fact, students will *always* say, “I won’t do it.” You will never find someone who will say, “No, I’ll do it.”

A few parents mentioned that human beings are hard-wired to hoping for reward and fearing punishment, and as such using marks to extrinsically motivate students should be a no-brainer. Referring to Islamic theology, one parent argued for motivation through marks and explained his thoughts as follows:

It’s human nature. We are human beings. [...] Even God himself tells us that there is Paradise and He warns us of Hellfire, and [He] promises us a certain number of good deeds for doing things. Like, even with all of this, we don’t want to assign marks to things? This is the nature of human beings.

Many students, whom I interviewed, confirmed that they were indeed motivated by grades – as their parents suggested. When asked if they would have treated the online

interactive Arabic homework assignments any differently had they been graded, most of the students replied that they would have either done more of the assignments, or at least tried to do a better job on them. One student strongly claimed that everyone in her class would have done the Arabic assignments had they been graded because that is the typical effect marks have on her class.

Central to the discussion of grades, motivation, and accountability is the idea of worth, value, or importance: that is, things that are graded are more worthwhile (or are deemed more valuable or important) than things that are not. A few students said that they treat marked assignments more seriously than unmarked assignments. One student stated that he gives more care to graded assignments because he realizes they “count”:

If [the assignment] was for marks, I’d probably like review it before I hand it in. [And] I would probably try more ... way more harder on the assignment that is for grades [...] because it counts on your report card.

Some students feel that adding marks to activities or tasks make their completion more worthwhile than other un-graded activities. One student, while describing a school project, said:

Like sometimes, [the teacher] is just [...] like, “Ok so this is not for marks, so you can do it [if you want to]”. So, first of all, it’s wasting half your time when you can learn something else [instead]. And second, you [...] buy so much supplies for this thing and then after [all that], it’s like not for marks ... so why are you doing it anyway?

The general sense I got from speaking to students was that non-graded assignments are low on their list of priorities. When asked about whether he would do an assignment that wasn’t graded, one student said:

I would do it but like [only] when I’m bored ... when I ... when I ... or like when my mom tells me “Oh, go do something”, I would do that [assignment] like instead of reading a book. Because I really ... I really don’t like reading books.

Because students feel that ungraded assignments are not “worth” anything per se, it seems that they do very little to nurture accountability in students. In fact, one mother suggested that not assigning grades to assigned work implicitly conveys the message that completing the work is non-consequential:

I feel any assignment that is assigned should be associated with a mark or grade. So if you assign homework, yes, they should be marked on it. I mean, that’s a skill they need ... you need to be able to go home and have an assignment done ... that’s how I feel. Even in the younger grades, I mean, there has to be something ... there has to be consequences. So if they know that “whether I do this or I don’t do this, it won’t affect my mark ...”, I don’t think that’s a good attitude. [...] If [completing the assignment] doesn’t affect your year-end grade, the kids shouldn’t know about it because that’s ... like, I mean, that removes the motivation to do a good job or to do it [altogether].

Some students echoed similar thoughts on the relationship between grades and student accountability. One student said her teacher warns the class that “she can count anything as marks” and that it is often enough to motivate the entire class to do their homework because they never know when the teacher will count it.

While grades are important for motivating students, some parents expressed that assigning grades is even more crucial for motivating parents to support their children with their homework. One parent explained that when homework is evaluated, parents are more inclined to ensure that their children do their homework because they want them to do well:

[When] parents are not being given that ummmm criteria that, you know [...] “Based on this, your child will be evaluated”, [they] don’t have that ummmm incentive [...] to make their kids do that work. [...] I think there [also] must be some form of incentive for parents to be motivated.

It seems that, like children, even parents differentiate homework assignments according to their “worth”: that is, graded assignments are more worthwhile to complete with their children than non-graded assignments. One parent whom I spoke to indicated that had the

online Arabic assignments been graded, she would have dedicated more time to completing them with her child. Hence, it seems that assigning grades to homework assignments motivates both students and parents to complete it and keeps both parties accountable.

b) Communicative factors

The online Arabic learning intervention aimed to overcome communicative barriers between school and home by acting as an online medium that can inform parents of their children's Arabic assignments, curriculum content, and learning progress; however, it remained greatly unutilized by parents. While online communication channels between school and home (such as those employed in the online Arabic LMS) can potentially eliminate communication gaps that arise from traditional paper-based communication methods such as student forgetfulness, they also run the risk of being unused by parents if they increase the effort required to access the information. For example, one parent explained her preference for receiving communications via "Remind" (an app that allows teachers to notify parents via text-message notification sent directly to their mobile devices) over using a secure Web portal such as XYZPortal as follows:

Who's not on their phone, right? Everybody ... everybody's here checking their phones "Oh they got a message" ... "Ok, there's no school on Monday ... PD day", whatever right? [...] We still know that there [are] a handful of [paper-based] messages that don't make it home directly right? So, a direct communication [tool] like that is helpful. But then if I have to go log on to XYZPortal to figure out for myself, I might not wanna do that all the time because I have got a million things happening: that might be the last thing on my mind to go on XYZPortal and see what's happening.

It seems that not all electronic communication channels are equal, and even parents recognize this. Those communication channels most utilized by parents are likely to be the ones that require the least effort to access.

In other cases, parents may even prefer physical communication tools to digital ones because of ease of access and immediacy. In this study, many parents who were interviewed expressed that they preferred the paper agenda to XYZPortal (or any other online portal or LMS for that matter) because the latter does not require logging on. The following excerpt depicts how requiring secure authentication deters parents from regularly accessing XYZPortal:

Yeah, because you gotta find time to sit down and remember what the password was - unless I'm using it everyday ... which I'm not as a parent. To be honest with you, I still haven't read [my child's] report card from last year. It's sitting on XYZPortal, I have never accessed it [...]. If it was sent as a hard copy, I would have got it in the backpack, I would have read it already and I could, you know, put it away.

Even students acknowledge the hindrance that logging in creates. One student said, "Nobody ever checks XYZPortal." Another student argued that teachers themselves don't really post many things on XYZPortal because it is cumbersome, and consequently students don't check it either. It seems that if the sender regularly utilizes a particular communication tool, it is more like that the receiver will utilize it as well.

Other factors such as age, comfort with technology, occupation, and critical perspectives toward technology and screen time may determine the extent to which a communication channel is utilized or unutilized by parents. An older sibling, whom I interviewed, stated that age and culture were key factors in her family's communication preferences:

Well I guess it depends on the age group you're dealing with, right? If it's me, ok I would definitely prefer the online, right? But if it's like my parents or like some other people their age, they ... cuz they're more traditional, they're not into technology. For them it's easier to communicate through letters or like paper.

For others, the nature of their work influence their communication preference; one parent said:

Maybe because it's related to my work, you know? [...] I'd be on the PC, maybe because of that ... maybe because of that I find [email] very [convenient]. Someone who is not really in this [field and] in front of the computer [...], maybe they do find it [difficult]. That's [why] I say [...] if you wanted to send something to me, I would prefer email.

While there may be some inherent reasons why some communication tools are preferred over others (such the sense of immediacy and ease that paper-based and mobile communication mediums bring forth), external factors and personal preferences come into play as well.

c) Philosophical factors

Considering that my online Arabic learning intervention required students and parents to engage with it beyond school hours via the Internet, I asked families questions to share their thoughts about homework and online learning environments in general. Interview data revealed that parent participants had various philosophical views on (1) homework, (2) their own role in their children's education, and (3) the role of technology in learning. Understanding these various perspectives is important for any educator wishing to garner parental support for online Arabic learning interventions, especially if the success of such interventions relies on parental involvement. Each of the above philosophical views will be addressed below.

Parental views on homework

Most parents whom I interviewed expressed that they were in favor of homework. For them, homework was mainly a means for students to practice and reinforce what was learned at school. Nonetheless, other benefits of homework were mentioned during interviews: it protects children from negative influence of digital entertainment devices and screens; it communicates student learning activities and academic progress; it develops and instills responsibility and work-ethic in students and prepares them for the world of higher education and work; it stresses the importance of life-long learning; and it brings families together. When asked about the ideal amount of homework, parent proponents of homework stressed that it should be somewhat regular but not overly burdensome. The lower limit expressed by parents was 15 minutes daily while the upper limit mentioned was one hour daily. Generally speaking, many parents said they would be happy if their children received half-an-hour to an hour of homework a few times a week. That being said, one parent didn't give an upper limit on homework: he welcomed as much of it as the school could offer so long as it kept his children busy with something at home.

However, a sizable number of parents in this study strongly opposed homework for a variety of reasons. For example, some claimed that homework took away from their children's holistic education. To them, learning didn't just happen in school: they argued that academic learning is just a single facet of a child's well-rounded upbringing. One mother said:

I think every child needs extracurricular things to do ... like after they come home from school. They need [...] physical activities and other things - [...] not a whole ton of homework, you know, that keeps them just in their books all the time. [...] I don't think that makes a child complete. You need the extra things that they do

outside as well [for] building on their physical strength. It also helps with their mental strength.

Another parent echoed similar thoughts:

[Homework] should be, you know, taking a little bit of their time because children have other things that they do and they need to learn also. You know, children need to learn a lot of things when they are at home, right? [...] Children have to learn [...] to cook in the house, they have to learn to keep a home properly, they have to learn to swim, they have to learn to do their cycling, biking, they have to do some sort of physical activity too [...]. So how do you [...] fit it in [when there is a lot of homework]?

Some parents argued that very young children shouldn't receive any homework because it prevents them from playing outside and staying active. One mother emphasized that kids need to be kids: "I think they need to play. In the summer, [my kids are] just playing outside, they're just completely like little monkeys outside and it's great. And that's what they need to do."

Moreover, parents who opposed homework also believed that it unfairly burdened them with the role of teaching their children the curriculum and created unnecessary anxiety between them and their children. For example, one mother was strongly against any homework that demands parental involvement because it leads to an inevitable struggle with her child:

I don't have that relationship where he is willing to learn for me - there is always [...] been that tension where "I'm mom", so [he says] "Don't tell me what to do!", right? I would [ideally] want him to know how to do things independently, [where] I could [just] say: "Do you have homework? You know what you need to do? Go and do it. When it's done, put it away." - and it's done. [Homework] should be something that he can do by himself and [is] not meant for us to struggle through [...] together.

She further added that because teachers sometimes assign homework that students cannot do independently, parents are left to teach their children what the teacher did not teach at school:

My philosophy in regards to homework, it should be [...] meant to be as a practice obviously, and it should be done independently. If [my child] can't do it independently, if it's something that I have to sit and teach him at home, it's not homework, right? And if he's struggling with it at home, that means he is struggling with it in school. [It's the teacher's] role to teach [my] child those outcomes. [If I were the teacher], I wouldn't want him [...] to go home and frustrate himself and his parents and his family and consume all this time [after] being in school for such a long time, then going home and having to work some more.

Another parent described how she occasionally had to reteach her child a math lesson because she couldn't do her math homework independently, and she stressed that such an expectation is overburdening for many parents:

Like she'll bring a math sheet home someday [...]. Usually, the math sheet [...] is something they have already been taught and she is only doing [it as] review and if she got stuck on one question and she needs help, I wouldn't mind [helping her]. But I [sometimes find myself] having to almost go through this whole worksheet [with her] and we spend hours [...] re-teaching it all. [In such cases], I feel that she is not ready to do that sheet [and] I feel like there needs to be more done in the class. So, at that point, I would say [...] it's too much asking a parent to do all that. [...] Not every parent is [...] either capable, or want[s] to, or has the time to do that.

These parents seemed to suggest that if homework is to be given, it should not be anything new because that would leave students and parents trying to complete the assignment in the absence of a teacher guiding its completion.

Additionally, one parents stated that the time-bound nature of assignments creates an added stress to achieve and complete academic tasks at home and often infringes on family time:

Children should not be stressed out about homework because what I find with my children, if they have an assignment to hand in, if they have something [that] is time-sensitive, umm it becomes very consuming in the time that should be spent with the family. Even though it's family time when you help with the homework and so on and so forth, but children at this age they shouldn't have that [kind of] stress.

Another parent indicated that doing regular homework had minimal long-term academic impact and that the strain it places upon students and family time is unjustified:

In the big picture, in the long-run, in the end of things, it's not going to make a big difference [whether] they get one assignment every two weeks or if they get one assignment everyday. You know, in the long-run, [...] it doesn't make a huge difference.

Generally speaking, parents who opposed homework did not welcome it in their households because they believed it infringed on family time, added unnecessary stress on their families, and denied their children from holistic learning opportunities at home and chances to play freely. While these parents did not demand homework from the school, they still expected their children to do their homework so long as it was not burdensome. For them, their ideal amount of homework was far less than that voiced by parents strongly in favor of homework

Parental views on their role in their children's education

While the perceived benefits and drawbacks of homework seem to have influenced the views of parents who welcomed and opposed it respectively, it can be argued that parental involvement in homework was also impacted by their philosophies surrounding their own role and involvement in their children's education in general and Arabic learning in particular. From interviewing parents, I discovered that their beliefs governing the extent of their supportive role in their children's education varied widely. Some parents believe that they should be directly involved in the day-to-day learning of their children at school and at home; some believe education is the school's role alone; and others support joint educational partnerships between school and home. However, I will limit my discussion below to two main views that may have impeded parental

involvement in their children's Arabic language learning, which I will name as follows: "Quranic education first" and "Hands-off parenting".

Quranic education first

In this study, some parents separated religious and moral upbringing from academic learning and they argued that Islamic (or Quranic) education was the sole responsibility of Muslim parents. One father stated:

My priority is for them to know the Quran first, you know, because if we died now, who will be praying for us? [...] So, if they don't understand the *Surahs* (i.e. the chapters of the Quran), if they don't understand how to recite *Yaseen* (i.e. the 36th chapter in the Quran), if they don't understand how to properly make a *dua* for us, then [who will pray for us?] [...] If someone doesn't know Arabic, [...] there's no way he can recite [*Surat Yaseen*]. [...] For [my children], I want them to have a deeper knowledge of the Arabic first to know the Quran.

Moreover, some of these parents believed that education is primarily their responsibility rather than the school's. One parent stated:

My role in my children's education is paramount. Umm, and it will not take second place to any school or any program of education. So the first people who are responsible for education [are] the parents. That's how I see it.

If one considers the weight some parents assign to their children's Islamic and Quranic education – which often takes priority over academic study – then one can understand why they may not become involved in most homework from school, including online Arabic homework.

The importance parents attach to Quranic learning could also lead to reductive thinking about the nature of Arabic learning and literacy. For many parents, especially non-Arabic speakers, Arabic literacy and Quranic recitation and memorization are one and the same. For example, when parents were asked how they supported their children with Arabic learning at home, the most common response was to give them opportunities

to correctly recite and memorize the Quran with a teacher: either through online Skype lessons, or face-to-face Quran classes at the local mosque throughout the week, or regular formal teaching at home by a parent. In such Quran classes, beginning students, who cannot yet decode the Arabic Quranic script, must first complete a basic Arabic reading primer such as *Al-Qaa'idah Al-Nooraaniyyah*¹⁷ or other similar primers¹⁸; thereafter, they work towards correctly reading the Quran itself from cover to cover with a teacher and ultimately memorize it. Quite a few parents reported that their children spend most of their evenings at the local mosque learning Quranic recitation. One mother said: "We do have Quran class 4 days a week, but I've cut her back to 2 [days a week] because it was becoming a bit much for us. [...] So, I've cut her down to 4 hours [a week]." Many of these parents reported that the focus of learning Quranic recitation and memorization doesn't leave much time for any formal Arabic language support. One parent said: "Other than reading Quran, which is routine - he does that 3 times a week - there isn't much in place for Arabic at home."

According to some parents, it is quite common to hold celebrations for their children when they complete reciting a portion of the Quran or finish reciting it in its entirety, and this tradition seems to be common amongst Muslims from non-Arabic

¹⁷ *Al-Qaa'idah Al-Nooraniyyah* is a 31-page primer of that teaches the basics of learning the Arabic alphabet and decoding or reading Arabic words, which was designed by Sheikh Noor Muhammad Haqqaani. For more info, refer to Sai (2017) and www.furqancenter.com.

¹⁸ Such as *al-Qaa'idah al-Baghdadiyyah* or *al-Qaa'idah al-Madaniyyah*.

speaking cultures. Hence, non-Arabic speaking families publically celebrate when their children are able to recite the Quran even though they can't understand the meaning of what they recite. It seems that Arabic literacy for most of the non-Arabic speaking Muslim families is fundamentally restricted to decoding and enunciating Arabic script and it overlooks the other essential language skills such as vocabulary acquisition, reading comprehension, listening comprehension, and speaking.

On the other hand, Arabic-speaking parents had a broader definition of Arabic literacy: one that extended beyond the mere decoding of Quranic script. To them, Arabic literacy meant being able to listen and read with comprehension, to write, and to readily converse with others in Arabic. Unlike non-Arabic speaking parents who merely view Arabic as a tool to read the Quran and primarily direct their efforts in supporting their children in that direction, Arabic-speaking parents viewed Arabic as an essential part of their daily interaction and support their children accordingly. None of these Arabic-speaking parents mentioned that they sent their children to Quran school in the evenings like their non-Arabic speaking counterparts; instead, they supported their children with Arabic by maximizing their children's exposure to Arabic at home. One parent said: "In terms of Arabic, we try to speak in Arabic at home. They only watch cartoons in Arabic." Moreover, they also mentioned that they formally teach them Arabic through specific Arabic curricula tailored for native-speakers of Arabic. In essence, these parents recognized that unless they combated the overwhelming influence of the English-speaking environment on their children by creating an "Arabic-only" environment at home and bearing the burden of formally teaching their children Arabic themselves, their children would not acquire native- (or even near-native) proficiency in Arabic. As

mentioned in earlier sections, the challenge of maintaining an Arabic-only home environment is one that Arabic speaking parents have great difficulty overcoming.

Hands-off parenting

In this study, it was found that parents who opposed homework usually adopted a “hands-off” approach in dealing with their children’s schooling in general and homework in particular, which could explain their lack of involvement in supporting their children with online Arabic learning at home. For some, their lack of involvement was a direct result of cultural upbringing. For example, one mother attributed the wide difference between her own level of involvement in her children’s homework and her husband’s to their dissimilar cultural upbringings:

I like to think of myself as their consultant rather than their manager. Yeah. *laughing* [...] I feel like ... I like to be aware of what’s required and I do look [it] over but I’m not going to do their homework for them. [...] I help if they have questions ... like, if they don’t understand something I help, [...] but I am really against doing it for them or being part of that. I just ... I don’t know ... and it’s different because sometimes my husband takes over the whole [thing], the whole assignment, and my children are like “Back off. We don’t wanna do it this way.” So it’s funny how ... I guess it’s also a different philosophy because he’s from Pakistan [and I am from Canada], and their learning philosophy is different there.

She added that her upbringing influenced her philosophy on parental involvement in homework:

I remember my dad was really hands-off and we all did really well at school. So I guess, I kind of have the same attitude whereas my husband’s attitude is more like ... like an umbrella over what [the kids] are doing.

Another mother shared similar homework experiences with her parents growing up:

Unless there is a big problem I don’t get too involved. I find my parents were not involved and I got by “As” and I got my grades because I liked to do [homework]. [...] I mean, my parents never did homework with me - they had no clue of what was going on. They knew what grade I was in but that was it. *laughter* But umm and they were busy, right? [Multiple] kids ... [my] father [was] working, he was going [to University]; he had his own things, right? So [...] the work that we

all did [in school] was because we wanted to [do it] and we made that decision, right?

Some parents also indicated that the decision not to be highly involved in their children's homework was a conscious choice with clear pedagogical aims. One mother expressed that her lack of involvement in her children's schooling and homework was a deliberate choice meant to empower her children and help them become independent learners:

Unless the teacher has come to me and said "They are having trouble with this", I am usually one of those who lets them do it themselves and want them to have the pride in doing well and that satisfaction for themselves. [...] I want them to come to that satisfaction of learning for themselves. [...] So my empowerment is just to let them be free ... "Free range children" - just a little bit, especially in schooling.

Another mother justified her limited involvement in homework as a means to nurture responsibility in her child:

I think he's old enough now that [...] we let him do things a little bit more independently than we did in the past. We rely on him to bring the information to us, more just to put that responsibility on him so that he understands that he's responsible for it. Ummm, and then help him and support him as he needs it, [such as] helping with homework in the evening [...] if he is having trouble grasping concepts, and that type of thing.

Interestingly, some parents had a religious basis for minimizing involvement in their children's homework: they wanted her children to develop their own deep-rooted intrinsic accountability towards their Creator. One mother explained the relationship between her philosophy on homework and nurturing religious accountability as such:

I'm not going to be chasing them down for their stuff [and homework]... they have to face the consequences. I mean ... that's my philosophy in life, so it's the same about school. [...] Life is about consequences, I mean ... in everything, we try to give our kids consequences for their actions; so, I feel like if I'm over their shoulder and making sure they do stuff, then how are they going to learn?

She then added, while addressing her daughter who sat beside her during the interview:

I don't see the point, like ... you have to motivate yourself in life. I'm not going to be standing behind you. You're answerable to *Allah*, you're not even answerable to me, generally. That's how I look at it.

In this study, although it was found that parents who opposed homework generally limited their involvement in their children's schooling and homework, the opposite was not necessarily true. In fact, many of the parents who strongly demanded homework did not participate in completing homework with their children either. One mother, while in favor of homework, claimed that she didn't fully support her children with online Arabic homework because educating her children was seen as the school's responsibility alone:

Arabic to me, is ummm... when they [were] doing it at school, it was like any other subject: they've got their teacher, they're learning it at school, it wasn't my responsibility to make sure [they knew it]. [...] That's how I [...] looked at it. They're learning it at school, they're getting all [the support] they need, so I didn't even [...] think [that] I [had] to play that [supportive] role [at home].

Another parent went even further and stated that she believes that “the school raises the kids” and “teaches them everything they need to be taught” and suggested that most parents share this belief: that education is the school's responsibility alone.

Parental views on technology's role in teaching and learning

During interviews, families were asked to share their views on digital learning and online homework in contrast to traditional paper-and-pencil tasks, and while students generally welcomed anything digital, parents were more critically conservative on the matter. To students, “digital” was synonymous with fun and was therefore generally preferred as a medium of learning and homework. Many students I spoke to preferred online homework because using digital technology made the task seem less like “work”. One student said:

[With digital homework,] it'll feel like less of work than ... than like something ... it will be less like something you have to do. Like, I mean ... you wouldn't think of it as work, you'd think of it as an activity that's fun. [...] If you use like pencil and paper, [...] you just think, like, you're sitting down and doing work for, like, a certain amount of time.

In contrast, many students felt that using a physical pen was bothersome and unwanted:

If your teacher gives you homework to practice [...] it's kind of annoying because then you have to do it on [...] paper and then write [...] it in Arabic, I don't think many kids are good at that, and [...] then [you] have to erase it, and then ...

Student apprehension towards using a physical pen also extended to studying from physical books: when I asked one student whether he would ever personally read from a textbook to study at home, he emphatically said "No". Similarly, another student strongly opposed the incorporation of textbooks into her learning at home.

A few students also offered pedagogical reasons for using digital technology in learning. For example, some acknowledged that technology could potentially enhance Arabic language learning with rich multimedia scaffolds that parents could not offer at home:

Student 1: [Technology] could definitely help because some parents can't actually speak Arabic ...

Student 2: And if you could hear the Arabic and you could know what they were saying, you could learn how to pronounce it properly, how to speak it properly. [...] Because you don't only want to know how to read and write, you wanna know how to speak too. [...]

Student 3: But some things on the computer doesn't pronounce it properly.

Student 1: But if it's teacher, like how Mr. Sweileh used to do it, I'm pretty sure he could pronounce it properly [and record it] *laughing*

Another student suggested that such teacher-recorded multimedia scaffolds could possibly play the role of the teacher and provide support to students, who are struggling

with particular Arabic concepts, at home. Nonetheless, enjoyment and fun appears to be the primarily justification for desiring digital learning and homework.

Parents, on the other hand, were more cautious about abandoning traditional modes of learning for digital ones. While seeing the benefit of digital medium and tools, parents also saw their potential shortcomings and drawbacks. For example, some parents implicitly expressed that the excessive use of technology and over-exposure to screens are behind children's low attention span. One father lamented how his children do not have the patience and attention needed to conduct traditional learning using paper and pencil:

There is a contradiction - or maybe a tension - between not letting [children] use electronics and giving it to them to use as a learning tool [...] Because [my own son] can sit for an entire hour in front of the computer while on Raz Kids, but at the same time, he cannot stand sitting for 5 minutes interacting with physical paper. If I were to ask him to sit on the table and write a sentence, try to write something, he will not be able to sit for long nor will he want to write anything: he will sit then he get up and play over there, then he will hit his older brother, play here, and go there - he can't concentrate! But with a computer or an iPad, he can sit for hours! And this is the issue: do we open the doors and allow such contradictions to arise by giving kids technology?

He then added that there is a real fear of digital learning becoming normative:

At the same time, [students] make demands from us saying "You must let us use these electronics and tech tools." [...] Even the paper will disappear because of the use of these technological tools.

For this father, it seems that encouraging digital learning perpetually drives a vicious cycle that ends with the disappearance of physical print and the normalization of digital learning in the minds and practice of students.

Other parents echoed such sentiments and argued that technology debilitates children and puts them at a disadvantage because they can no longer carry out basic literacy tasks without technological support. One mother stated that students are being

taught to be helpless in the fields of literacy and numeracy because of the early introduction to technology in classroom and the over-reliance on technology as an assistive-tool:

I don't like excessive [...] technology. [...] I don't like where people want to take technology these days in Education. [...] Like everything [is] about technology and it really bother[s] me. [Nowadays], children [have] really bad handwriting and that [is] attributed to [...] having poor motor skills, [but] they [are] given [...] a laptop or an iPad to type out their answers [...] for evaluation purposes. [...] Like for us, like when we were growing up, we had to write no matter what motor skills we had, we had to improve on our handwriting, we had to learn how to write neatly, legibly and in time when we were given exams. [...] Why can't kids do that these days?

She added:

And then say math skills. [...] When we were growing up, we didn't have the use of calculators in class, and now [children] have calculator in grades 6, 7, and 8. [By doing so,] I think we are limiting children [...] of the capacities that they really have. Umm, it's what you call "Learned Helplessness". Have you heard that term? Like, we are [...] teaching them to be helpless [without technology] so that they can take advantage of that.

Additionally, one parent stated that technology is not value-neutral as it directs the learner to develop some skills at the expense of others (i.e. those that could be alternatively nurtured and practiced if technology was absent), and he gave the example of his own handwriting:

I can tell you, even my English writing skill [...] is really poor now, which is really bad - like the way I print. [...] I have to physically train myself to kind of go down and write properly because I'm now shortcutting it. [...] I think, it's very important to recognize that technology does change the way that you're [learning]. Like now, you know, it's like "typing away", right? So, I type now everything, and when I'm writing, I'm having trouble - kind of - even writing in [a] straight [line].

The non-neutrality of technology was most evident when parents were asked about their ideal mode for learning Arabic (i.e. digital or non-digital). While many parents recognized that certain Arabic language skills (such as oral communication and reading)

are most suited for digital learning, they strongly argued that Arabic writing could not be taught in a digital medium. One mother addressed this concern by saying: “How is a child going to learn how to write if they are just doing digital learning? Right?” Generally speaking, however, parents believed that both modes of learning – digital and non-digital – are crucial for a balanced development of language skills. One parent advocated a balanced learning approach as follows:

I always like the balance, like ... I like using [digital] technology too but I think there has to be a balance because [with] technology they are not writing [the language] as much. [Technology supports] a lot of reading and verbal skills [but] I think they need the writing part too. So the only way you can do that is with pen and paper. So I feel that there needs to be a little bit of that and not necessarily *just* that. A little balance ... I don't like either extreme actually. I need a balance, so I say both.

Other parents were less worried about technology and claimed that it is neutral in itself: its responsible and proper use determines its impact on children. One father described technology in instrumental terms and gave the following analogy: “[Technology] is just like a knife: you use a knife to cut tomatoes, to cut a piece of fruit, and you can use a knife to cut your hand.” While this father was speaking in reference to the “good” websites and the “bad” websites on the Internet, it can be argued that he was likening technology to a neutral tool that can be used positively or negatively by the user. For such parents, the disadvantage of technology can be overcome with proper adult or parent supervision.

d) Age-dependent self-regulatory and motivational factors

During the interviews, I asked parents the following question: “Can an online Arabic learning intervention – such as the Arabic website set up last year – be successful without parental involvement? If not, what is the minimum level of parental involvement

needed for its successful implementation?” The discussions that sprang forth from this question revealed many important connections between online learning, its successful implementation, parental involvement, and student motivation. This section will discuss the age-dependent self-regulatory and motivational factors that must be met for the successful implementation of an online Arabic learning intervention, namely: (1) student responsibility; (2) student intrinsic motivation; and (3) parents acting as external sources of self-regulation and motivation.

Student responsibility

When parents were asked the question above, *very few* believed that an online Arabic learning intervention could indeed be successful *without* parental involvement, but the vast majority did not think so. Those who said that online Arabic learning could be successful set one important condition: namely, that students be “responsible”; while those who didn’t believe so essentially claimed that most elementary students are not responsible enough to lead their own independent learning at this age. Nonetheless, both groups of parents believe that a major component for the success of online learning is student responsibility.

To many parents whom I interviewed, student responsibility is inseparable from student independence. That is, students cannot be deemed “responsible” if they are dependent on others to remind them (or force them) to do their schoolwork. For example, one mother, while speaking about her own role in supporting her child’s education, makes a strong connection between becoming responsible and doing things for oneself unassisted:

Umm, I think he’s old enough now that we ... we let him do things a little bit more independently then we did in the past. We rely on him to bring the

information to us, more just to put that responsibility on him so that he understands that he's responsible for it. [...] Umm ... last year, I know we had challenges with him academically. So, I made it a point to find out exactly what was going on at school. This year, he seems to be doing a little bit better, so I have given him that space, I've given him that independence where I don't necessarily make it a point to talk to his teacher all the time or you know ... umm, I've sort of ... like I said, we want him to be a little more independent when it comes to his learning. And we'd like him to take ownership and responsibility, as he gets older.

Another mother linked her son's level of responsibility with his ability to do homework independently:

This responsibility must be nurtured and taught at school. They should learn responsibility from school. Like, last year, [my son] had more seriousness when it came to his studies. He would sit down and say: "I have homework" and do his homework. He was much better than this year.

In a similar fashion, one parent described the student agenda as a tool that nurtures student responsibility because it demands that students independently write down their daily or weekly tasks and organize their time accordingly. Hence, a major sign of student "responsibility" according to most parents is the ability to do more "important" matters (such as homework) unaided without frequent parental reminders, nagging, and surveillance.

Conversely, irresponsibility can be linked to doing less important matters before more important matters. For example, various parents thought that preferring play to work was a clear sign of irresponsibility in children. One parent believed her own children were irresponsible and therefore unable to do homework on their own because they only desired to play:

Parent support is necessary: [...] parents [must] push the kids to do [this] kind of work because in this age [...] kids [are] mostly interested to play. [...] Parent support is necessary to push the kids to remember [to do their homework]. [We have to] remind [them]: "You [have] to do [your] homework" because if the parents don't say [that] then the kids don't do the homework [on their] own.

Similarly, one father spoke of the irresponsibility of his own children in the following manner:

I will talk about my kids, I don't know about other people's kids. So when [my son] throw[s] his bag [upon coming home], the first thing he [does is] he goes to sit by the PS4. He doesn't [...] ask his mom: "Feed me", [or] "Give me something to eat"; he doesn't go to washroom; [he] doesn't want to go to wash his face to relax... no. The first thing he [does] is go sit by [the] PS4. [...] So when you think that they have time, they won't spend it to do the online [Arabic learning] course. They will just go and play games and watch movies, right?

This same father added that, even in matters of religious observance such as prayer, his kids were not responsible enough to fulfill their religious obligations because they need constant reminders:

This is the third night I have to get [my son] up from the bed to pray *Isha* (i.e. the night prayer) then go to bed. I don't want this because I told him the other day "I want you to have [your own accountability]: before you go to bed you make sure that you have prayed *Isha*, right? If I have to tell you [to pray all the time], what should I tell you? Why should I tell you? One day is fine - you forgot. Two [days] is fine. But, three days in a row?"

Parents generally linked their children's ages and maturity levels with their ability to responsibly complete their schoolwork on their own. When asked whether their own children could independently do the necessary work outside of school to be successful (i.e. without parental support and reminders), most parents answered with the negative. Rather, they believed that their children were far too young and immature to initiate any sort of independent home study on their own. For example, one father said that he had to remind his children to do their homework and monitor them because "they are not mature enough to be totally independently responsible." He then described how he typically makes his son do his homework:

You essentially have [to] sit him down and sit with him and do the assignment with him. You can't simply say: "Go and do your homework", or not say anything

at all and leave them to take on that responsibility on their own. You have to tell them “Do it!” and you must also sit with them until they finish.

Another parent suggested upper elementary as the age level at which children begin to display signs of responsibility:

Probably up to Grade 3, they probably can't. [At that age], we do have to supervise a bit more, but they don't get much homework then anyways. But I think from Grade 4 [onwards] ... I don't think I ever had to ask [my older daughter (in Grade 6)] ... I don't I've ever had to chase her down [to do her homework]. Like, I ask [my younger son]: “Do you have homework?”

Another mother echoed similar thoughts on the relationship between age level and responsibility:

When they're younger, [parents] would need to be there [offering support] a bit more. And, cuz with [my daughter] right now, I'd have to be there more. Umm, [as for] Grades 5,6,7, [...] I think they can do better on their own - it depends on the age.

Some parents, however, conveyed that even children in junior high school lack a responsible work ethic. One mother said about her son in Grade 7:

If I wasn't on him, or my husband wasn't on top of him, I honestly believe especially with his age right now, I think that he would just be like “Oh, I don't have to do nothing”, “Oh, no one's watching me,” you know?

Not surprisingly, the level of responsibility required for independent learning and study was only found in a few select elementary students. Parents who expressed that their children could responsibly do their schoolwork unassisted were mostly parents of older students, who I personally know – from teaching them for many years - to be quite mature in their thinking and conduct. These students were described as possessing unique qualities that made them more responsible: some terms used by parents for such children are “perfectionists”, “more intelligent”, or “more mature”. One mother said:

In a hundred kids, [...] like 10 kids [are] more intelligent [and] they do [their] work [...] independently, but not all the kids do work independently. [...] So parent support is compulsory [for elementary kids].

Student intrinsic motivation

Aside from age and maturity levels, central to the discussion of whether students can independently carry out learning tasks is the idea of intrinsic motivation. Many of the parents interviewed do not believe students are intrinsically motivated to do any independent study at home: online or offline. One mother plainly said: “There’s no motivation for kids to [...] stay on top of [their homework]”. In speaking about her son’s ability to study on his own, another mother blamed his inability to do so on his lack of motivation:

There aren’t many external factors that would prevent him from learning. There aren’t any learning disabilities, there aren’t any socioeconomic factors, there aren’t any excuses per se, right? He sleeps well, he eats well, he’s well-rounded student - there is not very much emotional baggage, right? So in those attributes I think he does have what he needs to be successful. It’s the passion he lacks.

Some parents tied the lack of intrinsic motivation to age level. For example, through speaking about her son’s motivation for studying, one mother suggested that young children generally lack any real purpose for doing schoolwork and cannot really understand the significance of studying various subjects due to their young age:

I think for [me], my motives obviously for learning Arabic were that I wanted to be able to learn the Quran. [My son’s] motives ... I don’t know that he necessarily has any at this age, but that was our motive for putting him in [Arabic class]. Umm, and I don’t know if I don’t know that he’ll understand at this age what... what it means. You know, like, we want him to learn it ... but it ... it’s the same reason we want him to learn math, right? We want him to learn English, we want him to learn science - it’s exactly the same. So, for him, he’s going to generalize and to say “Well I want to get good marks in all my subjects.” Umm but we haven’t necessarily explained to him, “Well, this is why math is important, and this is why language arts is important, and this is why Arabic is important.” Umm, but maybe it is something that ... you know, maybe *we* as parents need to explain more to our kids.

According to this mother, since younger students lack the mental capacity for developing and comprehending some of the real and significant purposes behind schoolwork and

academic study, those students who actually complete their schoolwork are likely doing so because they are extrinsically motivated by marks, social praise, reward, punishment, or other external factors.

The above statement rings true when examining the experiences parents have with motivating their children. One mother said that in the absence of intrinsic motivation, her son would only do his schoolwork in the presence of extrinsic rewards or punishments:

Unless he wants to learn that [himself], it will be an external factor telling him “Learn that”, right? I mean, [...] if nobody said “[...] You need to learn math” or “[You need to learn] spelling” - because I know he is weak in language - [he wouldn’t]. So if nobody told [him] “You need to write a story”, he would never write a story, right? Because that’s not something he’s interested in doing. So, in [...] that respect, there must be an external force saying that “You need to know this, so go and know this.” In those cases, he’ll only do the bare minimum: he will do what it takes to get by, right? He won’t go further, how like other students will do more and [more] - he won’t. [...] He won’t go above and beyond that unless there is an external factor saying: “You need get to work”.

Specifically, many parents readily mentioned edible treats as being quite effective extrinsic motivators. One mother described the following scenario involving her 6-year-old son:

Today, I think [...] maybe it was the whole school or just their grade, they had to give like a dollar at the beginning of the week that they would get a Freezie today. [...] And [my son] has been looking forward to that for the whole week. [...] And then I told him that “You know, you’re teacher told me that if you don’t get to school on time tomorrow and if you are not there in the assembly on time, then you’re not gonna get the Freezie.” So that was an incentive for him: he woke up in the morning and he was ready on time, like “I’m gonna get my Freezie!”
laughing So something like that ... whatever motivates them to learn is, you know, what we are looking at the end of the day.

Another parent described how her young daughter was motivated by raisins:

Those raisins, I think [the Quran teacher] gets raisins [and] gives [them] as a treat for the kids who are well-behaved and all that. So I mean, raisins are something that are really ... just readily available in anybody’s house, right? But just getting those raisins from [the Quran teacher] makes a lot of difference to [my daughter].

[...] Yeah, so she's like "I got raisins because I was the quietest of all." [...] It's just that those small things that they get [are] a big token of appreciation.

While extrinsic rewards are effective motivators for children, some parents dislike their use and often face moral dilemmas related to their application at home. One mother said:

What matters to [children] is the extrinsic motivation, right? Even at home, we have to do ... I constantly have to [offer my son extrinsic rewards], and every night I go to sleep thinking like "This is not right", but every morning I wake up doing the same thing, you know. I'm saying "If you are good today, you can watch an episode of Iron Man", right? *laughing*

The above mother probably believes she is manipulating her son and therefore feels guilty whenever she promises him some sort of reward for positive behavior. However, she continues to do so because this method of motivation works for her son and she hopes that using extrinsic rewards could potentially transition children from lacking intrinsic motivation to possessing it:

There's extrinsic motivation and intrinsic motivation, and what we are looking at is we want kids to be intrinsically motivated. What I am saying is we can bring out that intrinsic motivation through extrinsic motivation. So what's wrong in that? [...] Like [...] for kids, [an intrinsic motivator] doesn't work at that age, right? What we want ... we want to develop them up gradually, right? So, [...] we want to build kids up, responsible in their own learning in that way. So, at this age, I feel that kids [best respond to extrinsic motivators].

In a similar fashion, some parents, realizing that their children lack intrinsic motivation, wish that schools would resort to extrinsic punishment to motivate students to be more serious about academics. One father commented on how his son would rarely bring his Arabic materials home and blamed it on lack of strictness in schools, and then suggested that some sort of punishment should be enforced on students:

I remember [my son] sometimes [brought his Arabic home], but very infrequently, not consistently throughout the year. [...] This is a problem that stems from [...] the lack of strictness at school. There is no strictness at school.

As I mentioned, the kids are spoiled - very spoiled. Like, if they were disciplined or punished for this sort of thing “Why didn’t you take Arabic binder home?” - because how am I supposed to know [as a parent]? Sometimes, I am unable to know that you gave him something to take home or not. Maybe they lost it at school or maybe they left it at the shoe rack. So, I wouldn’t know that he didn’t bring it home nor would I know that you gave him something to take home, and things get lost in the middle. If there was this sense of serious and strictness from the teacher, he will say to himself “I need to take this home, otherwise, the teacher will follow up”, and if there is negligence on the part of the student, they will be punished. The concept or principle of punishing students is not present at school - I don’t think. Rather, they probably don’t believe in applying it [in the West]. [...] They don’t believe that students should be disciplined. [...] Not physical discipline - I don’t mean through hitting. Perhaps by denying them some privilege or something they like.

This father and his wife then added that being extremely lax with students - as practiced nowadays in schools - puts parents in an unfortunate situation, where they have to unwillingly force their children to do their homework. The father stated: “If [teachers] had this strictness, it would be different [at home]. It would be the opposite actually, and there would be no problem. It ultimately depends on the teacher.” The mother added:

We have to force them to carry out their studies. [...] As parents, the willingness and ability to help our children is there, and as for time, we try to find time to support our children if they are eager to learn and do the schoolwork at home. But the problem is with their motivation. What can you do? You can’t use physical force with kids. Like, if you force them to sit down, [they] will only do it unwillingly [...] and [they] won’t benefit at all. [They] will only do it to get out of it as quickly as possible.

Hence, there seems to be a few moral dilemmas arising from the lack of intrinsic motivation in children: some parents reluctantly resort to extrinsic rewards to motivate their children and feel that they are unjustly manipulating or bribing their children; other parents know that their children will not become responsible learners without punishment and strictness, but they are unable to implement such measures in the West - neither at school nor at home.

Additionally, some parents linked student motivation to personal interest and aligned this view with their own experiences with their children. For example, one mother mentioned that her son would only work on - and demand her involvement and support in - subjects that he likes:

If it's something he is interested in, if it's a science experiment, if it's a math [activity] - you know - if it's something that he is willing to go [do], then I won't hear the end of it. Then I have to go to the dollar store and buy all the supplies: I need to, you know, buy all the Lego sets so he can build the next new thing, or whatever it is, then that's [...] him guiding his own learning in that respect. [...] With Arabic, [...] there's no passion. [Although] I think he finds it interesting [and] I think he sees the relationship between Arabic and reading the Quran - so there is an application there - but other than that, [there's nothing]. That's [the subject that is] almost his minimum mark

Even students expressed that motivation is driven by interest. One student said she loved doing math homework because she was more comfortable dealing with numbers than words:

I think that whenever I get math homework, I get even more [motivated]. I get super happy because math is my favourite subject [...]. I like solving the [math] problem because it's about numbers and [...] there [are] not many words in it. [...] You don't have to be busy [...] focusing on how do the words match together. Like, sometimes when I have English projects, [...] I'm like "It doesn't make sense. The sentences ...", and then I always have to go to the teacher and ask. But then in math, [...] it's more [about] the numbers.

Interestingly, one parent cautioned that effective discipline is important to prevent student motivation and interest from diminishing with time in classroom settings. This parent speculated that collective negligence from classmates in relation to Arabic learning is enough to demotivate students already possessing a keen interest in learning Arabic:

Even if one of the kids has a strong interest in learning Arabic, this interest will dwindle away with time. The child will even lose his motivation to learn when he sees everyone else around him not caring to learn. And when things advance very

slowly, he will not feel that he is learning. [Teachers must be] more serious and demanding [of students].

While maintaining student motivation is difficult as it is in face-to-face settings in the presence of a teacher, some parents believe that online learning poses an even bigger challenge to students who wish to learn Arabic. For example, one mother felt that online learning lacked structure, to which she linked her failed attempts at learning Arabic online:

I don't really like to do things online - like learning things online [...]. I feel like, [...] it's too free, like it's not like in a classroom. I'm not held accountable and I know myself personally - like I won't do it. I've tried. I've signed up for programs online. I almost paid like "X" amount of dollars - Ok, I'm not going to say how much I almost paid - just because I'm like: "You know, maybe if I pay for it, I'll learn it. I'll sit here and I'll do the lessons." [...] Maybe I just don't have the focus to just sit there and learn something new. [...] There's so much information out there too, and [...] that's why I don't like the online stuff because I know I need something structured.

Although the lack of structure of an online course may overwhelm learners, who may feel they have to make sense of the learning content by themselves, the absence of a teacher to keep students accountable for their learning, motivate them along the way, and keep them on track may be even more troublesome – especially for young learners. One father explained that he prefers face-to-face instruction to online instruction for his children because a teacher is more able to gauge his children's motivation and keep them engaged and focused on their learning:

Online learning has its own advantages and [...] disadvantages. But I do prefer more like instructor-student [or] face-to-face learning. We do prefer that a lot [...] over the online instruction. [...] The online instruction is not [...] awful, but you know, they are children, [and] if they are studying something and they get tired and fed up, they can easily go away [while doing online instruction] and leave it. If they are with their teacher, if they know they are with someone, they show more commitment, and the teacher can see their [...] psychological feelings: maybe they need to relax a little bit, maybe they need to [...] have kind of an ice-breaker [...] to re-energize them. But when you leave them with online

instruction, then when they feel tired [they say]: “Ok, I don’t want to study this thing”, and [because] they are on the Internet [...] they [can] open another browser [and start] playing a game, [and when] they see you coming they change [it] back.

One parent argued that online Arabic learners must have a very strong motivation and dedication to learn independently without a teacher guiding and encouraging them:

[Online Arabic learning] will be worthwhile only in one circumstance: only if there is a real passion and motivation and real commitment to learn Arabic [from the learner]. Otherwise, that person must go to school [and] take lessons with teachers face-to-face. [...] Learning through the Internet [...] requires much commitment and discipline, where the individual says to himself: “Ok. Starting at 7 O’Clock, I am going to study for half an hour or 40 minutes.” And the person needs to follow up with himself, keep himself accountable, and assess himself. I think this is difficult for most people.

Another difficulty faced by students who study online is demotivation due to the lack of peer support and encouragement. One mother and daughter spoke about how motivational it was to take an Arabic course together and help one another along the way:

Parent: I think partnerships are motivational, for sure. [...] Like, we are taking our Arabic grammar course, so I guess we are each other’s partner in a way. So we motivate each other, right? [...]

Student: Yeah, well sometimes I don’t know stuff and she can help me and then I understand it better. And if [...] she doesn’t know something, I help her and we can understand things better by talking to each other [about] it. And, it’s something we both learned at the same time, so we know what we need to know and what we need to figure out and understand.

Parent: Yeah, [...] mashallah (i.e. “it’s wonderful”), she [is] quite bright. She helps me more probably than I help her [...] *laughing*

In a similar manner, some parents have expressed that motivation is contagious amongst learners. One mother said that she became motivated to learn Arabic herself upon seeing her child learn Arabic online and do the interactive Arabic homework.

Some participants expressed that, considering the solitary nature of online learning, few learners will see it to the end unless it is designed to be highly fun and

engaging. When asked what would make the online Arabic LMS more engaging, some parents suggested gamifying it with points, stars, and levels for the upper elementary crowd. For example, in a group interview, some parents stated the following:

Parent 1: Even like a leaderboard, you know, one star for each assignment. [So], you're getting the stars. Ya.

Parent 2: I just think that then [students] are comparing [themselves] to other kids [almost like] a competition. So, every kid wants to win the competition, you know? [...] At the end, [...] if they know that they are gonna get something or they think they're gonna get a nice mark or whatever at the end, of course they are gonna do it.

Parent 3: Well it depends what grade. Well like, for like [...] Grade 5 and 6, right, they can do it. And then if they have [a] leaderboard or [if try] unlocking the next level, you know - the game style - that would definitely motivate the Grade 4s, and 5s, and the 6s.

In earlier sections of this paper, I described how some students had similarly expressed that they wished the online Arabic LMS was more game-like (or at least included more games) because that would motivate them to learn more Arabic (see pages 149-150).

Parents acting as external sources of self-regulation and motivation

Considering all that has been expressed above surrounding online learning and motivation, it is understandable why most parents doubted that an online Arabic LMS could be successful without their support. When asked “What is the minimum parental involvement needed to ensure the successful implementation of an online Arabic LMS?”, parents’ responses centered around two main ideas: (1) providing students access to technology, and (2) following up and encouraging students to do their regular online learning activities.

On the one hand, parents who believed that their children could responsibly and independently carry out all the online Arabic learning activities stipulated that their

children merely need access to the technological tools necessary to do their online learning (such as Internet, computer, microphone, and headphones) as well as regular time to log on to the online Arabic LMS. One father said that if the online Arabic homework instructions were clear and straightforward enough, his children would only need access to a computer and Internet:

It's just a matter of giving them a kind of instruction [...] about your assignment and the task. [...] They should be able to do that [work independently] because [...] we bought an iPad for both of them [and] my wife [...] installed some of this Arabic stuff in there, so they should be able to do that without our [support]. I mean, the only [thing] for us [to do is] we have to give them a timeframe, "You have to do this now...", you know? [If we] guide them, I'm sure they will do that. [We just need to facilitate] the environment for them, yeah. [...] I consider that is the minimum requirement from the parent side. You know, provide the learning environment for them and guiding them.

On the other hand, parents who doubted their children's ability to do the online Arabic learning on their own said that they needed to constantly remind their children to do their online learning, follow up with them, and make sure they did it. For example, one mother said that giving her son regular reminders is what she has to do to ensure he does his homework for all subjects without exception:

I think, for us, at a minimal level, when we are talking about homework or assignments, it [is important] just being there to remind him, "You have Arabic homework, have you started it yet?" And that's it. That would [do it]. I think that's still [the minimum expectation] at this age. I think that's still the minimum - which, I mean, we do that with every single [assignment], regardless of what course it is. *laughing*

Another mother stated that she would have to oversee and monitor her child from afar until the online assignment was completed:

I might have to know what he had to do so I could just supervise him without actually sitting with him to make sure that it's completed. [...] I think parents need to, like to a certain extent, [...] monitor if there kids are completing their homework. [...] Like, if I get a note that [says] "This is due", and [I would be] more likely to follow up on it, I feel.

Implicit in the above mother's response is the importance of communication between school and home: if parents are unaware of what online learning tasks are required to be completed, they are unable to ensure that their children complete them. One mother emphasized the importance of knowing when her child's assignments were due as follows:

The minimum would be at least me being aware that something needs to be done by the end of the week or whatever, and then just ensuring that he did it - that's the minimum. Saying, "Did you get that assignment done? I know you have something coming up on Friday. Did you get it done? Did you get it done?" and just maybe encouraging him to complete to the best of his ability. If I didn't think Arabic was important but I knew he had something coming up, the minimum I could do is just [ensure] that it did get done.

However, the majority of parents whom I spoke to stressed that the minimum level of parental involvement should *not* involve sitting with their child and doing the homework with them as that would be too time consuming. One mother had the following to say:

To be honest, I'm not sure if I had to invest like 45 minutes every week and do [Arabic learning with my child], I'm not sure if I would honestly do that. Like life [...] is really busy. I mean, I might have more time now [and] I could probably do it now, but last year was really tough. And my husband was out of town for 4 days a week, and with Quran class and everything, it was just like [too much].

Another mother stated that parental involvement needs to be as minimal and hands-off as possible because not all parents can afford the time required to work on Arabic homework alongside their children:

There is such a variety of parents: those who can [support with Arabic and] those who can't; those who have time [and] those who don't; there are some who work late at night [and] some who don't. If you look at all those issues, I say [parental involvement] should be limited.

Furthermore, they emphasized that all that is needed from parents is "presence".

According to one father, parents should be *visible but distant* to ensure that their children

feel that someone is holding them accountable for the completion of the assignment and there to help if needed, and they should get their children started on the right track:

You have to start [the assignment] with them [...] and watch them from time to time and see “What did you do? Is there anything you find difficult or something?” and be [...] available if they have questions and not just go away. You have to be in the room with them, not beside them, but you have to be present.

Additionally, some parents mentioned that younger children needed more parental support than older kids. In fact, one mother stated that younger children would not be able to do any online learning without their parents sitting with them and assisting them throughout because some technical aspects of online learning are too difficult for young children to do alone:

[Parents] would have to commit [time] to spend with their child. Because like I said, that website that you set up last year, [although] it was pretty easy to access, easy to [navigate], [my son] was [still] in Kindergarten. I mean, [...] now he might be [able to use it somewhat], but even [...] with the instructions of what he has to do, he would definitely need help – [especially] in recording [his assignment]: when to click pause or when to, you know, like stop [recording]. Things like that, he would definitely need help. [...] I think kids would be able to do work independently on their own from Grade 4 onwards. Right? I don’t know. It’s my personal understanding

Because intrinsic motivation is also an issue with younger kids, one mother stated that parental involvement is a must at that age:

You should be motivated [for online learning and] you should be able to study [...] on your own and be able to [...] get through your subjects. Yeah, for someone [my daughter’s] age, [parental involvement may not be necessary]. But definitely for the younger kids, I would say that, you know, parent involvement [...] is necessary.

Another mother stressed that without parental commitment any online learning intervention will not be fruitful:

I think there needs to be a commitment from the parents at the very beginning. And not by commitment, I feel like, not just by saying like “Oh, ya ya, we are

very interested” or “Oh ya ya, I think this would work.” Like, there needs to be a very firm commitment in place that “Yes, if this is gonna happen, I am gonna follow it through with my child.” And if that’s in place, then it’s very like that that’s gonna happen. [...] I feel like we have to take the onus on us parents now for kids this age because we don’t expect them to instigate us to be like “Ok, let’s [do our homework]”. [...] They are not going to be the initiator, right? So I think that needs to be in place.

Overall, it seems that merely offering elementary school-aged students access to appropriate technology is insufficient for the successful implementation of an Arabic online intervention; rather, some minimum level of parental involvement in supporting their children’s Arabic online learning is needed. For young children engaged in online Arabic learning, parents must act as external sources of academic self-regulation and motivation, and as such, their involvement is required.

Discussion

The main question I am trying to answer in this study is: “*To what extent can instructional technology empower parents so that they can support their children’s Arabic language learning at home?*” In this section I will argue that instructional technologies – irrespective of their purpose - can only empower parents to the extent to which parents invest time and energy into them. That is to say that unless parents commit to utilizing the provided technological interventions, they will fail to be empowered by them. Moreover, I will also argue that without parental involvement, technological interventions aimed at supporting children with their Arabic language learning at home will not achieve the intended goals. Expressed differently, blended learning models that employ Internet-based technologies for extending Arabic learning to the home environment cannot succeed without parental support and involvement. To make this case, for each technological tool employed in this study, I will first discuss its nature, main aims, factors for successful implementation, and primary reasons for failure, and I will then contend that without significant parental involvement, each technology cannot achieve its purpose and will eventually fail at supporting students’ Arabic language learning at home. The main parts of my discussion are summarized in Tables 7, 8, and 9 below.

Arabic LMS for Students	
Nature	Online asynchronous multimodal Arabic learning platform
Main aims	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide Arabic learning opportunities for students outside of school • Organize learning material online • Communicate with students and guardians
Factors for successful implementation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student access to technology for using LMS • Learners must spend regular and significant periods of time on LMS doing learning activities and communicating with teacher • Parents must check the LMS regularly for news from the teacher and updates on child's Arabic learning progress
Primary reasons for failure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students discontinue online learning • Parents abandon LMS as a communication tool

Table 7: Summary of discussion of online Arabic LMS for students

Online Arabic Learning Module for Parents	
Nature	Online asynchronous multimodal Arabic learning platform
Main aims	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assist parents in developing basic linguistic competency in Arabic
Factors for successful implementation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parents must spend regular and significant periods of time on LMS doing learning activities and communicating with teacher
Primary reasons for failure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parents discontinue online learning

Table 8: Summary of discussion of online Arabic learning module for parents

Online Arabic Interactive Homework	
Nature	Combination of Web 2.0 tools hosted within an online Arabic LMS
Main aims	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Familiarize parents with Arabic language curriculum • Allow students to showcase their Arabic learning • Build parental confidence in their own ability to support their children with their Arabic learning
Main factors for successful implementation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access to technology for doing online Arabic homework • Establishment of regular time for doing online Arabic homework • Student participation • Parental participation
Primary reasons for failure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students not motivated to do online Arabic homework • Parents cannot (or will not) dedicate the time or energy to support their children with online Arabic homework

Table 9: Summary of discussion of online Arabic interactive homework

1) Arabic Learning Management System (LMS)

The Arabic LMS used in this study was an online asynchronous multimodal Arabic learning platform and it aimed to offer students the chance to continue their Arabic learning after school hours by organizing rich multimedia Arabic learning material online for quick access at home. Considering that students in the Arabic Language and Culture program do not get enough instructional hours to achieve reasonable Arabic mastery over the span of their schooling, the Arabic LMS could potentially give them the opportunity to supplement their formal Arabic instruction with “deliberate practice through self-regulated informal learning” online at home (Eaton, 2012, p. 6). As described in the literature, the Arabic LMS clearly supports a blended learning model, which offers just-in-time learning and access to educational materials beyond formal hours without worrying about constraints of time or space or the availability of instructor (Curtain & Dahlberg, 2016; Ditters, 2006; Kong, 2017; O’Donovan, 2005; Shrum & Glisan, 2016).

Moreover, as a communication tool, the Arabic LMS aimed to empower parents by keeping them aware of their children’s Arabic learning and assignments so that they can better support them at home by following up, encouraging, and assisting if needed (Selwyn et al., 2011). For some parents, especially those who may not be competent in Arabic at all, merely knowing what their children need to practice in Arabic may be enough to empower them to remind their children to study and uphold regular learning routines at home (Currie-Rubin & Smith, 2014). Additionally, using an LMS for school-home communication necessarily bypasses the student’s often-unfaithful role in delivering messages to and from school and thus yields more reliable, timely, and

accurate communication between teacher and parent. Hence, if parents strictly utilize the Arabic LMS as a communication tool, they may feel more in control of their child's affairs as they are no longer at mercy of their children when it comes to receiving important information relating to their child's Arabic learning progress. The Arabic LMS could therefore support parents who desire increasingly more control over their children's education and wish to be more directly involved in supporting them as co-teachers at home (Project Tomorrow, 2011).

The Arabic LMS could also serve as an asynchronous communication tool that allows students and parents to immediately and actively access the teacher for any instructional or troubleshooting needs. Many features of the Arabic LMS, such as the instant messenger, contact form, and chat, allow parents and students to take on a more active, engaging, and participatory role in the learning process by initiating two-way communication with the teacher instead of merely being passive recipients of digital information (Selwyn et al., 2011). By providing such interactive communication channels within an Arabic LMS to parents and students, they can remain motivated and engaged in the online learning process (Tindle et al., 2015).

For an Arabic LMS to be successful in supporting students with their Arabic learning at home, both students and parents have important roles to play: on the one hand, students must be able to (1) access the LMS from home via appropriate technological tools (such as an Internet connection and a computer, tablet, or mobile device of some sort) and (2) devote regular time intervals for studying and practicing their Arabic on the LMS and seeking assistance from the teacher through the communication channels

provided therein; on the other hand, parents must visit the LMS frequently to be kept in the loop of any important updates posted by the teacher.

While the study findings indicated that most students had no trouble accessing the Arabic LMS and very few students had issues using and navigating it through a mobile device, students generally failed to remain engaged with using the Arabic LMS over the course of the study period. As shown in the Findings section (see Figure 16), students seemed to access the LMS less regularly as time passed by, and the surges in the number of logins witnessed from time to time can be readily explained by the novelty effect (which was initially provoked upon introducing the LMS to students, again upon releasing assignments after long breaks from school, and also upon announcing the Arabic letters course). This observation corresponds to that reported in literature about the novelty effect of online media: while its newness can create temporary and situational student engagement, its effect is often short-lived and not strong enough to counter the sense of loneliness that students feel while studying online (Sun & Rueda, 2012). The novelty effect is more pronounced for younger students, who lack the self-regulatory skills needed to self-direct their learning and independently engage with learning material online and who rely on their parents or other adults guide them through and motivate them to persevere (Currie-Rubin & Smith, 2014; Curtis, 2013; Sun & Rueda, 2012).

As for parents, they did not regularly engage with the Arabic LMS for a variety of reasons. Interview data showed that many parents were unaware of their children's Arabic learning on the Arabic LMS even though they were regularly informed of this via physical newsletters, electronic email reminders, and in-school workshops. In fact, some parents didn't even know that an online component had been integrated as part of their

children's regular Arabic learning. For example, when asked about their experiences with the online Arabic learning, some parents couldn't recall anything specific and upon further probing, it became clear that they were hearing about online Arabic learning for the first time. For such parents, it seems that the nature of the online medium itself was not the cause of miscommunication; rather, it was the nature of their own work and busy lifestyle that prevented them from keeping up with their children's schooling. In fact, on the end of the year parent survey, the most common reason reported by parents rationalizing their lack of involvement in their children's online Arabic learning was not having time and being busy with work, family matters, full-time studies, etc.

Though it is easy to attribute poor parental engagement on the Arabic LMS to parental apathy or occupation, it could be that the Arabic LMS was neither interactive nor democratic – and therefore not truly empowering – so it could not fully sustain parental engagement. Selwyn et al. (2011) argued that true parental engagement on an LMS only arises when there exists two-way communication between school and home, which facilitates active participation from both sides to support the learning act. In the case of the Arabic LMS, while some two-way communication tools existed, they were never meant to give parents the power to effect drastic change to the manner of learning Arabic online; rather, these two-way channels merely gave parents the means to communicate with the teacher to report and resolve any issues with implementing the online Arabic learning intervention as planned. That is, the Arabic LMS acted more as a one-way communication tool that parents would use to (a) check the LMS, (b) receive information from the teacher, and (c) respond by supporting their children with Arabic homework. In essence, the Arabic LMS traditionally framed and regulated parental involvement and

engagement in a top-down manner, where I – the specialist teacher - provided *the* solution for my students' Arabic learning, and parents were merely seen as *passively* responsible to support its implementation at home (Beecher & Buzhardt, 2016; Selwyn et al., 2011). Since the Arabic LMS aimed to regularly inform parents of learning expectations so that they could feel more aware and in control of their children's learning and therefore more capable of encouraging them and supporting them with homework, it reflects the belief that parental empowerment is linked to “self-empowerment” and “responsibilisation” as opposed to democratic participation (Selwyn et al., 2011, p. 322).

Additionally, some parents, who had initially engaged with the Arabic LMS, expressed that their engagement dwindled because going online to access information about their child's Arabic learning was an added burden. Such parents preferred more immediate modes of communicating with the school such as the student agenda, direct email, and notifications via mobile apps because – as one parent described them - they are “instantaneous, [...] in your face, [and] you see [them]” and there is no expectation on parents to go out of their way to seek the information themselves online. Low parental engagement with the Arabic LMS can be better understood if we examine parents' engagement with the school's information portal, XYZPortal. According to interview data, many parents disliked XYZPortal and did not check it because it placed an added burden on them to access information from the teacher (such as actively typing in the URL, recalling one's username and password, logging in, and navigating to the correct section of the website). Like XYZPortal, the Arabic LMS is an online portal that also requires parents to go out of their way to utilize it and engage with it; hence, it is not surprising that parents did not engage with the Arabic LMS for similar reasons.

Many LMS vendors recognize that the success of an LMS rests on parental engagement and have identified motivating parents to regularly use the LMS as the biggest challenge they face (Tindle et al., 2015). Academic literature also links the time spent by parents on online school portals to student academic success (Curtis, 2013). In the Arabic LMS, it seems that its success also rests on parental engagement. In the absence of parental engagement, (1) parents become unaware of their children's Arabic learning expectations and feel powerless to motivate them at home, and (2) young students cannot sustain their own engagement while learning online due to their lack of self-regulatory skills and dependence on external sources for developing good study habits. While the Arabic LMS aimed to empower parents by mitigating communicative barriers between school and home, it may have exacerbated these communicative barriers due to its remoteness as a communicative tool. For such technological interventions to be successful, they need to be supplemented with other two-way communicative channels that are more immediately convenient for parents such as mobile apps and text notifications (Beecher & Buzhardt, 2016; Bobbitt et al., 2013; Hall & Bierman, 2015; Rudi et al., 2015; Thompson et al., 2015) and that encourage a more active democratic parental role in the learning act (Schneider & Buckley, 2000; Selwyn et al., 2011). Hence, empowering parents with technology is not as simple as providing them with another communicative channel. Without addressing issues of parental preference, motivation, and engagement, such technological interventions are bound to fail.

2) Online Arabic Learning Module for Parents

Being a component of the Arabic LMS, the online Arabic learning module for parents could also be characterized as an online asynchronous multimodal-learning

portal, which attempted to help parents in developing basic linguistic competency in Arabic so that they could feel more confident about supporting their children with Arabic language learning at home. As reported in surveys and interviews, most parents in the study were non-native speakers of Arabic, who only used Arabic in religious contexts such as when reciting the Quran, during prayer, exchanging Islamic greetings, or while calling upon God using very specific Arabic litanies. Moreover, 73% of parents considered themselves Arabic beginners and believed that they could only support their children with basic low-level language skills such as decoding and writing Arabic script and vocabulary practice but nonetheless lacked the confidence to do so. The case of parents in this study is no different than that of parents in other Language and Culture Programs in Canada (or FLES or FLEX programs in the United States). While such parents constitute the majority of parents whose children are taking a second language in North America and arguably need the most linguistic support, they are neglected by academics and second language teaching professionals alike as little is done to linguistically empower them to support their children with second language learning at home (Canadian Parents for French, 2013; Rhodes & Pafahl, 2009).

Such online learning modules for parents have been incorporated into parental education programs in the field of telehealth to support parents of children with special needs. By offering just-in-time learning and communicative and collaborative opportunities between parents and the instructor, online learning modules fulfill two functions for parents: (1) they allow parents to acquire the skills necessary to support their children, and (2) they connect parents to an online community of like-minded parents with common goals and struggle and who can provide each other with mutual

support (Kong, 2017; O'Donovan, 2005). In other words, these online learning modules support parents both pedagogically and emotionally through facilitating timely access to learning content, the instructor, and peer-support networks via technology. In a similar manner, the online Arabic module for parents aimed to provide parents with the necessary linguistic skills needed to empower parents to support their children and to create a community of parents who could support one another in learning Arabic online. The online Arabic module in this study was conveniently accessible to parents at any time and any place, utilized rich audio-video elements to reinforce home e-learning (O'Donovan, 2005), and employed some communication tools to facilitate interactive discussion online between parents themselves (e.g. blog posts and comments) and to provide access to the Arabic instructor (e.g. instant messaging and chat). Moreover, the online Arabic learning module provided enough scaffolds for parents so that they were supported at every step along the way.

While an online Arabic learning module for parents could potentially offer parents the linguistic and emotional support needed to enable them to confidently assist their children with Arabic learning at home, one main condition must be met for its successful implementation: parental engagement. That is, parents must dedicate regular and significant amounts of time on the online Arabic learning module to carry out the learning activities, communicate with the teacher, and interact with other parents learning Arabic online. However, in this study, parental engagement with the online Arabic learning module was extremely low: out of the 18 parents who enrolled, only six of them completed the first tutorial lesson, while the rest showed no significant learning activity, collectively logging on 2-3 times on average over a span of three months. Since none of

the parents who enrolled in the online Arabic learning module successfully completed it, the attrition rate was 100%. According to the parent survey, almost all parents had access to a computer, email, the Internet, and the online LMS and were comfortable using them; therefore, the parental attrition rate cannot be attributed to poor technological know-how or lack of access to technology needed to successfully complete the online Arabic learning module. When asked why they couldn't complete the online Arabic learning module, most parents interviewed attributed it to "lack of time" or "being busy" with various matters.

While it is true that most parents are busy and often do not have time to engage in online learning for their own self-betterment, this reality alone cannot entirely explain the failure of an online learning intervention for parents. In the literature, attrition rates as high as 92-97% have been reported in MOOCs, where most learners drop out because (1) the course is free and there is thus no real barrier to enrolling and no real cost of withdrawing, and (2) the great emotional isolation experienced by learners in MOOCs overpowers their self-regulatory skills and prevents them from enduring in online learning (Gütl et al., 2014; Onah et al., 2014). Similarly, high attrition rates have been reported for technology-assisted parental education interventions with internet-only delivery modes, while optimal parental engagement is seen in blended-learning parental education models, which incorporate face-to-face and online components (Hall & Bierman, 2015). It seems that while online technology can offer rich supports for just-in-time learning of concepts and skills, it fails to provide the emotional support and personal connectedness crucial to persevering in online learning. As an example, if one compares the face-to-face introductory Spanish conversation course in Goren's (2003) study to the

online Arabic learning module in my study – both of which had similar aims and similar audiences (i.e. parents with beginning-level competency in the second language) – it is clear that the former was arguably more successful and favorable to parents because its delivery format (i.e. face-to-face instruction) better supported the emotional needs of parents learning a foreign language.

As it relates to parental education programs, some delivery formats are seemingly more ideal for maintaining parental engagement and retention than others: online-only delivery modes are poor at sustaining parental motivation and engagement in the face of the overwhelmingly solitary nature of online learning, while teacher- and peer-support found in face-to-face programs can better meet the emotional needs of parents and can personally encourage them to see the learning to the end. Nonetheless, it should be clear that any parent education program – fully-online, blended, or face-to-face – cannot meet its goals if parents become disengaged somewhere along the way. Ultimately, parents, who lack motivation to continue their personal learning, may create any convenient excuse to quit altogether.

3) Interactive Arabic Homework Assignments

In the study, a series of interactive Arabic homework assignments were designed using various Web 2.0 tools and deployed on the online Arabic LMS for students and parents to complete together. The main purpose of these assignments was to: (1) allow students to showcase their own Arabic learning to their parents; (2) familiarize parents with the Arabic language curriculum and become more aware of what their children are learning in the classroom; (3) give parents the opportunity to support their children with Arabic language learning at home; and (4) empower parents by boosting their confidence

in their own Arabic linguistic abilities and making them feel more capable of supporting their children with their Arabic learning.

As mentioned in the previous section, most parents who participated in the study considered themselves beginner Arabic learners having little confidence in supporting their children with Arabic at home. Moreover, according to the initial parent survey, only 12% of parents were familiar with the Arabic Language and Culture curriculum followed at school and only 15% felt confident enough to assess their children's Arabic performance against curricular outcomes. Despite this, around 80-90% of parents reported that they would regularly support their children with Arabic language learning at home and participate in doing the interactive Arabic homework with their children. These statistics describe a parent population with a strong willingness to support their children with Arabic in any capacity but lacks the confidence and linguistic skills to do so.

The rationale behind using interactive Arabic homework as a learning intervention rests on an experiential role-based paradigm for empowering parents (Camilleri et al., 2005; Carpenter, 1997; Delgado-Gaitan, 1991; Hunt & Robson, 1999; Janiak, 2003; Nakagawa, 2003; Shepard & Rose, 1995; Woods, 1992; Wright & Wooden, 2013). The empowering potential of interactive Arabic homework stems from its ability to provide parents with positive experiences in which they can use their own Arabic skills to successfully support their children with Arabic at home. As argued by Shepard and Rose (1995), parental involvement in activities directly supporting their children's well-being and learning could gradually empower parents and make them more confident in their own capacity to effect positive change for their children and themselves. That is, parental empowerment can only occur if parents actively try to

support their children in a particular area and feel some success in doing so: it is this newly-discovered success that builds confidence and motivates parents to take further steps in their own “cycle of self-affirmation” (Camilleri et al., 2005, p. 74). Hence, by completing Arabic homework with their children, parents may no longer feel limited by their own modest Arabic abilities and may even develop the courage to support their children with future Arabic assignments.

For interactive Arabic homework to be implemented successfully, a few key factors must be in place: (1) families must have access to the technology necessary for doing the online Arabic homework, such as an Internet connection, a computer, tablet, or mobile device, and a microphone; and (2) students and parents must be willing to dedicate a regular period of time to complete the interactive Arabic assignments together. While most families had access to technological tools needed to complete the assignments and the majority of parents expressed a strong willingness to complete the interactive Arabic homework alongside their children (as reported in parent surveys), the completion rate for the interactive Arabic homework was quite low. According to interactive Arabic homework completion data, which was logged from the LMS, around 46% of Grade 1-6 students and 77% of Kindergarten students did not complete any assignments. Interestingly, if we breakdown these statistics further, the highest percentage of students who did not complete any interactive Arabic assignments were the youngest (i.e. in Kindergarten) and oldest students (i.e. in Grade 5 and 6) of the sample. Additionally, the completion rate for interactive Arabic assignments decreased steadily with time. When the first assignment was released 48% of Grade 1-6 students completed it, but by the end of the term, only 10% of students completed the last assignment. Based

on the homework completion rates alone, it can be concluded that the interactive Arabic homework intervention was not successful as both students and parents failed to regularly participate in completing online assignments.

Considering the data above, student and parent non-participation in interactive Arabic homework is likely attributed to the following reasons: (1) student lack of motivation, and (2) parental agency. That is, on the one hand, most students – particularly those in older grades - lacked the intrinsic motivation to complete the interactive Arabic homework assignments; and on the other hand, most parents were not able to dedicate the time to support their children with the interactive Arabic homework assignments, which negatively impacted the homework completion rates of all students - especially the youngest students in the study sample, who have the most difficulty using computers, troubleshooting technical issues, accessing the internet, and navigating online websites. Taken together, student lack of motivation and parental non-participation may also explain the gradual decrease in assignment completion over time. The sections that follow will discuss these two factors in detail.

a) Student lack of motivation

Considering the unpopular reputation homework holds in the minds of students, a low interactive Arabic homework completion rate is not surprising. Since young children are unable to truly appreciate homework's intrinsic personal and academic value and may only realize its immediate costs, homework to them is merely added *work* that takes away from their family time, social life, and leisure activities (Coutts, 2004; Hong et al., 2004; Warton, 2001; Xu & Corno, 1998). If the value, goals, and significance that students attach to homework governs the choices they make regarding its completion (Warton,

2001), it follows that young students generally do not persist in doing their homework. Students, who were interviewed in this study, shared similar negative sentiments about homework: they likened it to stressful work and stated that they did not enjoy doing it.

Additionally, to better understand student motivation in relation to homework, not only must one consider how “work-like” a homework assignment appears to be but also how “fun” it is. During interviews, when asked whether they preferred digital homework to paper-and-pencil homework, most students preferred the former because it reminded them less of work. Nonetheless, while students seem to be more eager to carry out online digital homework than traditional paper-and-pencil homework, merely adding rich multimedia and interactive elements to the Arabic homework assignments and deploying them online was not enough to motivate students in this study to regularly complete them. That is, online homework is still *homework* – it still seems like *work* to students. In fact, few students genuinely expressed that the online Arabic homework was fun. While they may have liked some of the interactive features of the assignments such as the VoiceThread recording and audio playback, students didn’t consider them fun per se. According to student survey data, when asked what they enjoyed most about the online Arabic LMS, the most popular response was the online letters course, which included various learning games such as I-Spy, memory game, interactive quizzes, and letter tracing. Most students remembered the Arabic learning games because they were fun. Hence, while “online” or “digital” elements may render homework assignments less “work-like”, they do not necessarily make them fun. Truly fun activities engage students and leave a memorable imprint in their minds. From a student motivational standpoint,

the “fun” factor of a homework assignment may be more important than its digital or online nature.

It follows that to maximize student motivation while completing online Arabic homework, it may be worthwhile to ensure that the homework itself is fun to do – or at least seems fun - through gamification. While still at the heart of heated debate in educational circles over its impact on intrinsic motivation and academic achievement (Ames, 1992; Bogost, 2014; Chou, 2015; Deci et al., 1999; Deterding, 2014; Dicheva, Agre, & Angelova, 2015; Faiella & Ricciardi, 2015; Glover, 2013; Goehle, 2013; Goehle & Wagaman, 2016; Linehan, Kirman, & Roche, 2014; Nah, Zeng, Telaprolu, Ayyappa, & Eschenbrenner, 2014; Pesce, 2014; Pollanen, Cater, & Kang, 2015; Ramirez & Squire, 2014; Rigby, 2014; Ryan & Deci, 2000; Schunk, 1991; Sheldon, 2012; Tekinbaş, 2011; Uskov & Sekar, 2014; Werbach, 2014), gamification was arguably welcomed by both students and parents in this study. According to interview data, many students and parents suggested that the Arabic LMS and homework assignments could be made more engaging by adding points, badges, leaderboards, and other game-like elements: parents and students alike believed that these elements could stimulate student competitive tendencies, which would make online learning more fun and meaningful. It is also worth noting that when students were asked what could be done to improve the Arabic LMS and homework assignments, many proposed adding more Arabic digital learning games as well as incorporating elements of other *gamified* learning systems, which were used in *previous* school years, such as the “Dinar” system (a token economy system used in my Arabic class to encourage students to speak Arabic) and avatars and points like those in

ClassDojo¹⁹ (a gamified online platform classroom management and providing feedback to students in real-time). Considering the above, there is evidence that students in this study associate fun and memorability with a gamified classroom learning experience and would likely be more inclined to participate in online Arabic learning and completing homework if gamification was in place.

On the other hand, critics of gamification may claim that advocating gamification as an antidote for student demotivation during online learning and homework activities will merely reinforce the modern student-belief that “Learning must be fun (or game-like)”. In our digital age, in which students are surrounded by - and constantly exposed to - screens, gaming consoles, digital entertainment, and gamified reward systems, the threshold for “fun” is higher than ever and students may even *expect* that learning must be as fun. Moreover, scholars have argued that students who become dependent on external rewards for motivation may only opt for doing “fun” learning activities at the expense of “boring” activities that may be more meaningful, beneficial, and supportive of nurturing self-regulatory skills (Zimmerman & Schunk, 2008). Bearing in mind that most gamification systems in the field of education employ external rewards to motivate student (Dicheva et al., 2015), the decision by educators to gamify student online learning may only lead students to resist partaking in learning that is not “fun”. As such, those wary of this trend would rather see educators combat the culture of edutainment by

¹⁹ See www.classdojo.com

adopting more traditional learning techniques that unplug²⁰ students from digital technologies and external rewards.

Keeping both arguments above in mind, an important question to ask is: “Can young students be motivated to partake and persist in online Arabic learning without external motivators?” That is, if elementary Arabic educators do not externally motivate their students, will students readily complete online Arabic learning activities and homework on their own? Academic literature on self-regulation and motivation in young students points to the contrary. Researchers believe that because younger children have

²⁰ The “Unplug” movement - which aims at encouraging people to disconnect from digital technology as a means of freeing themselves from endless digital distraction, slowing down, finding quiet moments of reflection, reconnecting with friends and loved ones on a more personal level, and leading healthier and more balanced lives - has gained momentum in recent years. “Unplugging” has been likened to going on a “Digital Detox” (www.digitaldetox.org) or a “Digital Diet” (www.thedigitaldietbook.com), or religiously observing the Sabbath (www.sabbathmanifesto.org). This idea has also found its way into education circles as some educators, academics, and policymakers have (1) criticized the blind adoption of latest digital technologies and teaching tools in schools, (2) called for unplugging the classroom from such technology, and (3) advocated teaching mindfulness techniques to help our students unplug and overcome their technological addiction. For more info, see Atwater (2013), Bird, Teaching and Learning Center, & Schary (2015), Dominiczak (2016), Graham (2001), John et al. (2015), Kardaras (2016), Mann (2012), Shows, Albinsson, Ruseva, & Waryold (2016), Turkle (2012), and Young (2009).

larger restrictions on their working memory, they are severely limited in their ability to self-regulate – as it is a cognitively demanding task - and therefore need external sources of “other-regulation” as a stepping stone to true self-regulation such as: teacher modelling, coaching, and scaffolding (Pintrich & Zusho, 2002); parental support and encouragement (Corno & Xu, 2004; Gonzalez-DeHass et al., 2005; Paris & Newman, 1990; Pintrich & Zusho, 2002; Ramdass & Zimmerman, 2011; Xu & Corno, 1998; Xu et al., 2010); or extrinsic rewards (Ames, 1992; Ryan & Deci, 2000; Schunk, 1991).

Similarly, the findings from this study suggest that young students are limited in their ability to do homework independently in the absence of external motivators such as grades and parental encouragement. For example, when asked about grades, students indicated that they would have put more effort into doing the online Arabic homework had it been assigned marks since grades motivate and give tasks extrinsic worth.

Similarly, parents noted that if the online assignments were worth grades, they would have been more committed to supporting their children with completing them at home. In the case of the online Arabic homework, it seems that higher completion rates could have been attained through graded assignments, which would have externally driven more students and parents to complete them.

While grades and other rewards may be strong motivators for students in online learning environments, *deliberate* parental involvement is arguably the greatest source of external motivation and other-regulation for younger students and may be strongly linked to the success or failure of online learning interventions. Research on self-regulation points to the importance of parental involvement in encouraging student self-motivation and academic self-regulation. When parents support their children with homework they

provide a safe place for students to become more confident in their own self-regulatory skills and internalize positive learning traits (Battle-Bailey, 2004; Gonzalez-DeHass et al., 2005; Xu et al., 2010). In fact, many of the homework strategies used by children such as monitoring their time, paying attention to the task, remaining motivated, and countering negative emotions that emerge are often learned from parental modelling (Xu & Corno, 1998). Additionally, parental involvement is even more important in an online learning context to combat the fading novelty effect (Currie-Rubin & Smith, 2014; Curtis, 2013; Sun & Rueda, 2012). As explained earlier, while children may be temporarily excited about using technology, this excitement doesn't last long, and a stable source motivation is needed to help children persist in learning within a solitary (Joo et al, 2000; Sun & Rueda, 2012) and distracting online medium (Livingstone & Bober, 2004; Portier et al., 2013; Sun & Rueda, 2012). Thus, younger students who do not receive parental support with online Arabic homework will likely fail to complete it.

The results of this study support the above claim regarding parental involvement and online homework completion in two ways: (1) firstly, survey data reasonably suggest a relationship of dependency between homework completion and parental involvement; and (2) interview data support the claim that a minimum level of parental involvement is needed for the success of any online Arabic learning intervention. Firstly, according to survey results, 38% of parent respondents stated that they were moderately or actively involved in their children's Arabic learning and 30% of them did the interactive Arabic homework assignments with their children most of the time or all the time. At the same time, however, around half of the students in the study did not complete any homework assignments with their parents. While the above findings may be expected since the

homework assignments were *interactive* (i.e. both students and parents had to participate to complete the homework), there were no cases of students attempting to do assignments *on their own* without parental support. In other words, had there been cases where some students tried doing the assignments on their own (i.e. by recording and submitting Voicethread comments without their parents' participation), one could then claim that parental involvement is not always necessary; however, the absence of such examples in the study findings suggests that student homework completion is generally dependent on parental involvement. In other words, what links parental involvement to homework completion is not the interactive nature of the assignment (i.e. structural or pedagogical design of the online task) but the need of young children for external sources of other-regulation (i.e. parents) to complete assignments. Simply put, the survey results are better explained by the claim that parental involvement was *necessary* for homework completion because the students in this study developmentally lack the self-regulatory skills needed to complete online Arabic homework on their own. Had this same study been carried out in a junior high or high school setting, the results might have been quite different. There might have been similar levels of parental involvement but higher homework completion rates because older students are more able to academically self-regulate while doing homework and would have attempted to do their homework even if their parents couldn't participate.

Secondly, most parents who were interviewed agreed that there was a minimum level of parental involvement needed for the success of any online Arabic intervention for elementary students. During the interviews, I often asked parents the following hypothetical question: "Had the Arabic LMS and online homework assignments been

designed in such a way that parental involvement was not necessary (i.e. students could do the online learning tasks and assignments on their own without their parents' direct participation), would your child have been able to independently succeed in online Arabic learning without your support?" Most parents agreed that their children lacked motivation to do so. In other words, there was a general parental consensus that online learning interventions like the Arabic LMS would not be successful without parental support because elementary students generally lack the responsibility and motivation to do online learning or homework on their own: they must be constantly encouraged, reminded, and even forced to do their online learning at home. The minimum level of parental support outlined by most parents was a commitment to oversee assignment completion without direct parent participation, which involves providing the appropriate study environment, adequate technical resources, and necessary encouragement, external motivation, and emotional support to complete online learning tasks and homework assignments. In short, to ensure the success of an online Arabic learning intervention, parents must be at least *minimally present*, keeping their children accountable for practicing and reinforcing their online Arabic learning at home.

b) Parental agency

If parents acknowledge that their involvement is necessary for their children's success in online Arabic learning, why were many parents not able to participate in the capacity they had hoped they would? For example, while 80-90% of parents in the study foresaw that they would be able to support their children with Arabic learning and complete online homework assignments with them during the school year, only around one third of them actively or frequently did so. What could explain such a discrepancy

between parental intentionality and action? According to most parents in the study, circumstance is to blame. Whilst the majority of parents who were surveyed and interviewed strongly supported homework and additional learning opportunities for their children at home, they attributed their inability to support their children with online Arabic learning and homework to a lack of time and being busy with life.

Although parents in the study may outwardly fault time and circumstances in a fatalistic manner, non-participation in Arabic homework could be interpreted as an exercise of parental agency. In their study of the various roles that American parents enact in supporting their children with math homework, Schnee and Bose (2010) introduced the notion of “null actions” (i.e. instances of apparent lack of action) to describe and explain parental non-participation (or non-involvement) through a lens of parental agency. To them, parental “null actions” should *not* be seen as unintentional, circumstantial, neglectful, disengaged, or disinterested; rather, whenever parents seem uninvolved in their children’s education, their behaviour should be reinterpreted as ensuing from a deliberate parental choice:

While certain acts of engagement may align with teacher, school, and curricular expectations, [...] other acts that may cause parents to be perceived by practitioners and researchers as uninvolved or disengaged are in fact reasoned and concordant with parental goals for their children’s learning. [...] *Both* are acts of parental agency *in support* of children’s [...] learning (emphasis added; Schnee & Bose, 2010, p. 94).

Applying this notion to the case of online interactive Arabic homework, parents who did not participate in completing Arabic homework with their children may have done so because they decided that their participation was not conducive to fulfilling their children’s Arabic learning goals, while parents who completed the assignments believed that their participation was in accordance with the Arabic learning goals they set for their

children. For example, in the study, most parents, especially those from non-Arabic speaking homes, expressed that their primary means of supporting their children with Arabic was enrolling them in Quran classes at the local mosque or via Skype - and in some of these families, children attended Quran classes four times a week for a couple of hours each evening. To such parents, Arabic literacy *is* Quranic literacy, and any activity that takes time away from their children learning correct Quranic recitation and memorization may be seen as impeding the Arabic learning goals they set for their children. It is therefore very likely that – for this group of parents - non-participation in online interactive Arabic homework was not an act of negligence but a deliberate choice to focus on activities that better met their goals for their children’s learning. From a teacher’s standpoint, however, this group of parents could be deemed as “uninvolved” because their actions were not aligned with the expectations of the teacher, school, and curriculum.

Additionally, Schnee and Bose (2010) found that parental null actions are often resorted to in two particular situations: (1) when parents believe that expected parental actions (i.e. those expected by teacher, school, or curriculum) would not fulfill their children’s learning goals due to existing or perceived impediments, and (2) when they desire to nurture self-reliance in their children. In the first case, perceived barriers may limit parental agency: “parents may desire to be involved but make an intentional decision not to be because they judge the existing, or perceived, barriers to be sufficiently robust” (Schnee & Bose, 2010, p. 104). In their study, existing or perceived impediments took on various forms: linguistic and cultural barriers arising from the new immigrant experience and unfamiliarity with curriculum expectations and content matter (Schnee &

Bose, 2010). In this study, these same impediments may have prevented parents from fully taking part in online interactive Arabic homework. Seeing that they lacked the necessary Arabic language skills to complete the homework, support their children with it, or assess their children's performance against the curricular outcomes despite the many online supports and scaffolds on the LMS, parents may have felt disempowered and decided to abandon attempts at supporting their children with Arabic altogether. In a way, Schnee's and Bose's (2010) notion of "null action" due to existing or perceived impediments is analogous to parental disengagement from children's learning due to feelings of disempowerment. That is, parents may opt to do "nothing" because they feel disempowered or overwhelmed by various barriers that may prevent them from supporting their children and meeting their learning goals. And while parents might mask their non-participation in online Arabic homework with claims of "inability" due to time constraints and busyness of life, their behaviour could very likely be a symptom of ongoing disempowerment despite the many attempts to empower them – one suggesting that the online Arabic intervention is not meeting its parental empowerment goals.

For other parents, non-participation in online interactive Arabic homework may have stemmed from wanting to instil self-reliance and responsibility in their children. In this study, a small segment of parents - who were more open about their *intentional* non-participation than others and did not hide behind excuses such as time and being busy - vocally stated that they chose not to participate in the online Arabic homework because they held philosophical views disfavouring parental involvement in school and homework. Some of these parents adopted a hands-off approach in relation to their children's schooling with the hope that it would teach them responsibility and nurture

intrinsic motivation, while others simply had negative views towards homework and chose not to get involved to protect their children from its negative influences and promote a more holistic home education. Like the parents in Schnee's and Bose's (2010) study, who consciously chose not to help with math homework to nurture self-reliance in their children, the parents in this study could also be dismissed as "uninvolved" because the "null action [they] exercised in support of this goal may not always be acknowledged or viewed as concordant with the teacher's purpose" (pp. 103-104) - even though they had their children's best interest at heart. All in all, it seems that parental agency – not despondency – is what drives parental non-participation in their children's schooling, irrespective of the source driving it.

Hence, if parents are unable to, or decide not to, dedicate the necessary time and effort to support their children in completing online interactive Arabic homework assignments, can such learning interventions be implemented successfully? More importantly, can we realistically expect such online interventions to empower parents without their full involvement? According to survey data, the majority of parents (i.e. 59-72%) either agreed or strongly agreed that the interactive Arabic homework empowered them in various areas (e.g. their own Arabic language skills; their abilities to support their children with Arabic at home; their abilities to assess their children's Arabic language proficiency; their level of familiarity with the Arabic Language and Culture Curriculum followed at school). However, it seems reasonable to question the claims implied by these figures. If most parents did not really experience success in completing online Arabic assignments with their children and or did not have any role in supporting them, can they really claim subsequent empowerment? Such parental claims become even more

questionable once we consider the experiential role-based paradigm for parental empowerment - which was explained earlier in this section. According to this paradigm, parental empowerment leads to increased parental involvement with time, yet homework completing rates in this study rapidly declined as time progressed. Therefore, it is unlikely that the online interactive Arabic homework empowered parents at all. Rather, it is more likely that parental non-participation was an indicator of continued disempowerment in the area of supporting their children with Arabic learning at home. While parents may have appreciated the initiative and valued seeing some of the Arabic content that their children were learning in class, this awareness did not lead most parents to further support their children with their assignments or their Arabic learning in general.

Conclusion

From analysing the three technological tools employed in this study to empower parents (i.e. the online Arabic LMS, the online Arabic module for parents, and the online interactive Arabic homework), it was argued that the success of each tool in empowering parents depends on active parental involvement. In all three cases, parental involvement was required for overcoming specific barriers, whether they were communicative (e.g. communicative gap between school and home; unfamiliarity with Arabic language and culture curriculum) or linguistic (e.g. low self-confidence in relation to one's own Arabic language competency and ability support children with Arabic learning). For example, by frequently using the online Arabic LMS, parents can be informed about their children's Arabic learning; by completing an online Arabic learning module, parents may feel more confident about their own Arabic language competencies; and by partaking in online interactive Arabic homework with their children, parent can feel successful in supporting their children with Arabic learning at home. Without direct parental participation, parents cannot experience success while independently learning Arabic online or when supporting their children with Arabic at home, and without feeling successful, no subsequent increase in confidence or empowerment is possible.

From another standpoint, the successful implementation of these technological learning interventions for Arabic students in the elementary setting – specifically those interventions meant for supporting Arabic blended learning and the reinforcement of Arabic language practice at home (as in the case of the online Arabic LMS and interactive Arabic homework) – necessarily rests on a minimum degree of parental involvement. It was argued that because elementary students lack the intrinsic motivation

and self-regulatory skills to pursue and persist in online Arabic learning on their own, parental support was generally required as an external source of student motivation and other-regulation. Basically, without parental involvement, students might quit their online Arabic learning altogether.

Hence, it is evident that parental involvement is necessary for (1) parental empowerment and (2) the successful implementation of online learning interventions for students and parents alike. It follows that online learning interventions can only succeed and empower parents to the extent of their active involvement.

However, if we consider that the main aim of parental empowerment is to increase parental involvement in their children's learning, we run into a clear dilemma: (1) to increase parental involvement, one must empower parents; and (2) to empower parents, one can implement online learning interventions; but (3) to successfully implement the learning interventions, parents must actively be involved in them. The process of parental empowerment seems to pose a dialectical (or cyclical) paradox: while active parental involvement can bring about parental empowerment, it is also dependent on parental empowerment. So how then can we involve parents who feel disempowered especially if their active involvement is key to their empowerment? Can an educator or school facilitate parental involvement and empowerment simultaneously? For a visual model of the above paradox, see Figure 21 below.

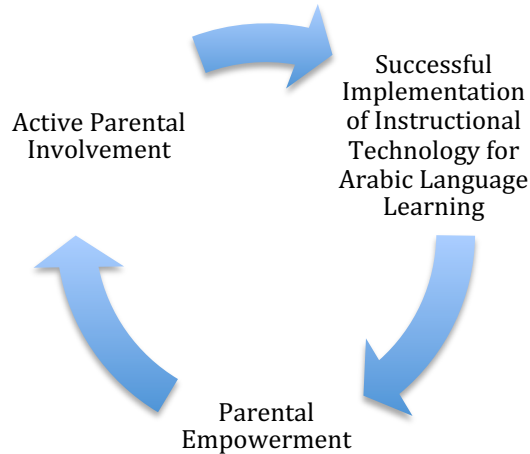


Figure 21: A cyclical “paradox of empowerment” arises when trying to empower parents with online (or blended) instructional technology in the context of Arabic language learning

The “paradox of empowerment” above can also be understood in light of the research carried out by Gruber and Trickett (1987), who studied a social experiment of empowerment in the context of governing an alternative public school in the United States and then stated their own “paradox of empowerment”. The authors concluded that:

there is a fundamental paradox in the idea of people empowering people because the very [...] structure that puts one group in a position to empower others also works to undermine the act of empowerment. The dynamics created by this paradox thus seriously limit the possibilities for this approach to empowerment.” (Gruber & Trickett, 1987, p. 370)

In other words, the tools, structures, and mechanisms used to empower others can inherently introduce barriers and challenges to the empowerment process. In this study, the structure of the technological learning tools used to empower parents in the context of Arabic language learning – namely online homework, courses, and blended learning platforms - also served to disempower them because they burdened parents with added home responsibilities and tasks necessary for empowerment such as: overseeing their children’s online Arabic learning at home, directly partaking in completing online Arabic

homework their children, engaging in their own online Arabic learning via an online course, and regularly visiting and logging on to the online Arabic LMS to check for updates about their children Arabic language learning. Ultimately, the instructional technology used in the study demanded active and arduous parental involvement as a prerequisite for parental empowerment, which was too much for most parents and therefore undermined the empowerment process.

Limitations of the Study

This action research study is limited in its scope, and caution should be exercised when attempting to generalize its findings to other educational contexts with dissimilar parent and student populations. The findings of this study are most applicable to school populations consisting mostly of non-Arabic-speaking Muslim families from the Indian subcontinent, whose parents are religiously driven to teach their children the language of the Quran. In a educational context with a majority Arabic-speaking parent population, however, the findings may be somewhat different because non-Arabic speaking parents and Arabic-speaking parents may have vastly divergent conceptions of Arabic literacy, and as such, their explicit actions in support of their children's Arabic language learning – as well as their null actions – may differ dramatically. For example, in largely Arabic-speaking school communities, it is likely that issues of parental empowerment in relation to supporting one's children with Arabic learning at home would be less pronounced: parents would be more able to help their children with online Arabic learning and homework; LMS log data would demonstrate higher parental online activity in support of their children; and homework completion rates would be much higher. Nonetheless, if an online Arabic learning intervention (such as an online Arabic course) was designed and

offered for such Arabic-speaking parents, there may still be high attrition rates; but these could very likely be attributed to high parental empowerment – not disempowerment – because parents may not feel the need to take the online Arabic course to begin with.

Moreover, the findings of this study relate mostly to implementing online Arabic learning interventions for supporting students in the elementary level. It was observed that parental involvement is crucial to the success of such intervention since students require parental encouragement and support as an external source of motivation and other regulation. While the online Arabic intervention failed primarily due to a lack of parental involvement, the same result cannot be predicted for parents of children at higher grades since they are better able to intrinsically motivate and self-regulate themselves academically while completing online learning and homework and are less in need of direct parental involvement.

Additionally, while the current study was conducted to explore the extent to which technological learning interventions can empower parents to better support their children with Arabic language learning at home, the findings may shed light on whether the same technologies can support and empower parents whose children are learning a second language other than Arabic in school. Nevertheless, it must be stressed that the religious and cultural perspectives that impacted parental involvement in their children's language learning may differ in other second language programs if the language being studied is not a heritage language. For example, for parent study participants, Arabic was central to their cultural and religious identity as it was key to accessing their sacred text; yet parents in other language programs may not associate such deeply-rooted religious and/or cultural values in learning the second language and may see its benefit as strictly

economic or intellectual. Such differences in parental perception of the target language's significance could greatly impact their commitment to supporting their children with learning it at home.

Since homework was a key concept in this study, the findings could be perceived to suffer from limitations attributed to other homework studies (Cooper, 1989a, 1989b; Coulter, 1979; Kohn, 2006a, 2006b, 2007; Wallinger, 2000). For example, Wallinger (2000) describes the limitation of homework studies as follows:

One of the problems that have become apparent in reviewing homework studies is the difficulty in controlling or even documenting all the variables that affect the assigning and completion of homework. [...] In order to carry out a significant homework study, many teachers and students must be sampled. Homework studies generally rely on self-reports or surveys from these two groups, and this has led to questionable reliability and accuracy of the information that has been collected. (Wallinger, 2000, p. 484)

Although Wallinger's note is valid, I do not believe my study succumbs to the same limitations found in many other homework studies in educational literature; rather its methodology address issues of rigor and reliability. Firstly, for a qualitative study, a relatively large number of students and parents participated. Secondly, many modes of data collection were employed: I did not limit myself to surveys and personal interviews; rather, I tracked the completion of online learning and homework through an online LMS, which served as an extra check for the accuracy and validity of other sources of data. Hence, since the amount of assigned homework and completion data could be accurately obtained using the tracking features of an online LMS, relying on students or teacher reports for acquiring such data was unnecessary. Lastly, the online Arabic homework was interactive (i.e. parents were involved in the process of completing the homework with their children); hence, parents served as an additional party whom I could

interview regarding homework practices. By adding an additional party, I was able to triangulate the logged LMS data, interview data, and survey data to obtain a more accurate picture of student homework practices. Although I may have not been able to collect the input of all students or parents who participated in the study nor could draw statistically significant correlations from collected homework data, I still believe my conclusions relating to online Arabic homework and blended learning are reasonably valid and accurate for my particular sample.

Implications for Research

1) Revisiting parental empowerment: What is parental empowerment? Is it even possible in the context of Arabic language learning? Do parents truly want it?

The study findings challenge our notion of parental empowerment and its feasibility in the context of supporting children with Arabic language learning. To parents in this study, parental empowerment in the context of Arabic language learning generally meant providing them with the appropriate tools, resources, and supports to give them the confidence and ability to assist children with Arabic on their own. However, the study findings suggest that merely providing tools or supports is insufficient: parents must experience success while using these tools before they can feel empowered. In other words, without active parental involvement, parental empowerment is not possible. Hence, as argued in academic literature, empowerment is an experiential process – not a thing that can be given (Cochran & Dean, 1991; Delgado-Gaitan, 1991; Rappaport, 1984; Rowlands, 1995; Singh et al., 1995; Vincent, 1996; Zimmerman, 2000). Educators

wanting to empower parents must think beyond offering them additional tools and helpful resources and ponder how best to motivate parents to use these tools.

Another factor to consider is whether these technological tools and interventions for supporting Arabic language learning can actually empower parents within the temporal and logistical constraints of schooling and daily life. For example, can a short online Arabic course like the one employed in the study empower parents enough linguistically to support their children's Arabic learning? While my findings were inconclusive due to insufficient enrollment and participation in the online Arabic course for parents, it is likely that even if parents were to pick up some Arabic vocabulary, sentence structure, and grammatical elements from completing the online course, they may still feel that they know much less Arabic than their children do and lack confidence to offer support. In reference to interactive homework, Antonek et al. (1995/2008) argue that regardless of the language resources and supports given to parents for completing homework with their children, it is unrealistic to expect that parents reach any level of proficiency that will truly allow them to assist their children:

Parents cannot be expected to learn the language along with their child. Although parents will develop some knowledge of the language through their interactions with their children, [the language supports] will simply not provide the necessary input to for a parent to make significant language gains. Moreover, parents will not have the continual language exposure and practice necessary for second language acquisition. (p. 218)

Given the many motivational and emotional barriers to completing an online course, most parents face too many impediments to actively involving themselves in technological learning interventions and experiencing empowerment.

Another question to ask is: "Do parents really want to be empowered?" and if so, what is the best manner to do so? I would argue that parents truly desire empowerment

for themselves and their children, however, they may not be able to or wish to involve themselves in the particular learning interventions or parent involvement programs that approach families from a deficit perspective. As pointed out by many educational researchers, many programs and interventions aimed at empowering parents and increasing their involvement in schooling are characterized as traditional, top-down, uniform, needs-based, preventative, dehumanizing, and disempowering because they do not recognize the inherent strengths and skills that families can bring to educating their children and necessarily place parents and practitioners on unequal footing (Carpenter, 1997; Cochran & Dean, 1991; Rappaport, 1981; Shepard & Rose, 1995; Zimmerman, 2000). Nowadays, parental involvement is mostly *demand*ed by teachers and government policies in very specific ways: teachers want parents to do certain tasks at home with their children but, at the same time, do not want parents to be critical of their professional judgment or influence their practice (Crozier, 1999). Consider, for example, school-home agreements, which essentially place burdensome demands on parents by delegating the teaching role to them:

[They] require parents to ensure their children attend school, are punctual, are prepared for the school work of the day in terms of having the necessary equipment, are appropriately dressed and do their homework [...]. Moreover, as part of the Agreement, parents will be asked to sign a declaration accepting responsibility for ensuring that their child cooperates. In addition, the documents will include details about discipline, behaviour, school ethos and bullying. The role of parents would now seem to involve less of calling teachers to account and more of monitoring and controlling their children (Crozier, 1999, pp. 233-234).

By shifting the locus of teaching responsibility to parents at home, such involvement programs stigmatize parents who are not able to carry it out:

The demands of the Home–School Agreements are likely to put parents, and in particular mothers, under increased pressure, including the potential fear of

reneging on their commitments and responsibilities, leaving them open to further criticism of being an irresponsible parent (Crozier, 1999, p. 235).

In my study, the interventions put into place to involve and empower parents are no different: they too required parents to work with their children at home, monitor their progress, and engage in so-called *self-empowerment* as they became responsible for learning Arabic as a second language and playing the role of Arabic teachers to support their children. While my intent was never to burden parents – in fact, the technology put in place was supposed to fill the place of a teacher at home and allow students to reinforce their Arabic learning outside of school – the particular use of such technology as a blended learning and homework tool demanded active and arduous parental involvement, which undercut parental empowerment efforts.

It may be more effective and worthwhile to design parental empowerment and involvement programs that are more family-centered and inclusive. Contrary to traditional models of parental involvement and empowerment, which offer one-size-fits-all activities that families can do at home, alternative parental empowerment and involvement models value family cultural and linguistic practices and recognize that each family's contribution to supporting their children's education is unique (Daniel-White, 2002). Moreover, such programs are bottom-up: the teachers do not dictate the intervention from above; rather, they co-design and implement it with parental interests and strengths in mind after initially consulting parents and listening to their opinions (Rappaport, 1984).

As I was collecting data during this study, I realized that much could be learned from parents about Arabic language pedagogy. It seems that they have many ideas about what could potentially support them and their children with Arabic language learning.

For example, one parent I interviewed suggested a content-based approach to teaching Arabic using popular Arabic TV shows, such as the Omar ibn al-Khattab soap opera which debuted on MBC (The Middle East Broadcasting Center) satellite channel during Ramadan 2012²¹, as a content medium and expressed that this would be something he would definitely partake in with his children because this is how *he* prefers to learn language:

One of the things that I want to do, like this is a dream, is that if I could watch the story of Omar ibn Al-Khattab - because I heard it's a great serial - with the family [...] Apparently, it's brilliant, right? So, I saw parts of it, and I'm like "Ok, I need to watch this with my family and then be able to have someone kind of help me understand how the language [...] works", right? I wanna be able to watch [it] - like I used to watch with my parents - like an Indian film that's filled with Urdu language and [I would] ask questions and engage, right? That's learning to me. And I'd love to do that [...].

He then elaborated on how such a teaching idea could be structured for students in an online format as follows:

You say "Here's the first 10 minutes of the first [episode] of Omar ibn al-Khattab, so you watch this 10 minutes, listen for the words, write in English what words you think it is ... ", right? "What do you think they are talking about?", "What did you recognize as words from class, and for this ...?" and you can break that scene down and say "Ok, what happened there and how did they do it?" and you can kind of build [it] up so that [a] person at, [...] say month 1 of just that session, right, not only understands that but has so many other parts of the learning that they are going to be naturally engaged in, right?

While developing, organizing, and deploying this type of material for online delivery at the level appropriate for beginning Arabic learning is technically and pedagogically challenging, such an interactive multimodal approach to language learning could potentially engage many parents and students.

²¹ For more info, see <http://www.mbc.net/ar/programs/omar/>

Another parent recommend teaching Quranic Arabic instead of conversational (or communicative) Arabic in the classroom. She explained that children would benefit more from Quranic Arabic than conversational Arabic because it is the former that they will be reciting and contemplating throughout their lives:

The thing is that ... [the] Quran is a part of their lives right? So if they were like ... at least they will be familiar with it. And when they are having Quran class and they are reading it, they might ... it's probably gonna play more of part of their lives. I mean [...] we want them to have conversations, but considering that it's only for 6 years, if they knew some of that, then ... then they would automatically be renewing it. Like if they knew, for example, what Surat al-Ikhlās meant, like ... when they read it in their prayers, they would be reviewing it, right?

This mother also added that parents would also be more inclined to learn Arabic is the online learning had a more Quranic-focus:

Like I'm more religiously inclined now. So I'm not ... like it had ... if [the online learning] was tied into the Quran, I'd probably jump on it more than if it was [conversational-based]

She then said:

If you wanna involve the parents more, maybe like ... because we are an Islamic ... like anybody who is sending their kids to [this school] is probably going to do so because they want their kids to be good Muslims, so they should be motivated from that side as well ... I'm not sure ... it's such a hard thing to say. *laughing*

These are but two ideas from parents that I could have potentially considered as solutions to the parental disempowerment problem – for some parents at least. And had I incorporated some of these parental views into my online Arabic learning intervention, perhaps more parents would have been willing to take part and support their children with their Arabic learning – or learn Arabic themselves. Nonetheless, implementing a single Arabic learning intervention that includes many diverse parental viewpoints (or multiple Arabic learning interventions each personalized for a particular family) is logistically difficult, but the act of interviewing parents, listening to their opinions and their

experiences, and embedding them into an online learning intervention is possibly a better approach to parental empowerment approach in the field of Arabic language learning.

2) Implementing Arabic online or blended learning interventions

While it is difficult to single out one factor that can explain the level of parental non-involvement seen in this study, the findings point to the complexity of implementing an Arabic online or blended learning intervention in the elementary setting - especially when its success rests on active parental participation and support. It is clear, however, that any existing or perceived impediments to supporting elementary children with Arabic learning at home will likely deter parents from fully participating in doing so and may actually derail efforts aimed at successfully implementing Arabic online or blended learning environments. Generally speaking, the many barriers to parental involvement can threaten any collaborative initiatives for reinforcing Arabic learning at home and strengthening home-school partnerships:

How these challenges affect parental engagement—that parents may opt to engage in null actions when they perceive that other actions might not help them to support their children—complicates the efforts on the part of school personnel to use the “home” components of the [Arabic] curriculum as a means to improving communication and collaboration between home and school (Schnee & Bose, 2010, pp. 110-111).

In fact, considering the busy lives that parents lead, the varying perspectives they hold on parental involvement in school and homework, and the numerous existing or perceived barriers that obstruct their involvement in their children’s learning, it may be unrealistic to rely on parents to provide the minimum support needed to ensure the success of most online Arabic learning interventions at the elementary level. Moreover, if parents cannot support their children in the capacity expected by teachers, are such attempts at promoting online Arabic learning even worthwhile for elementary students?

While I may not think that implementing online Arabic learning in the elementary context is particularly feasible, there may be some things that Arabic (and other second language) educators can do to maximize the likelihood of success of such efforts. Below are some specific suggestions for teachers wishing to implement Arabic online or blended learning interventions for their students:

- 1) Gather and consider parental input: At the beginning of the year, teachers can send out surveys to gauge technological and linguistic readiness of parents as well as their views towards homework, online learning, and Arabic language learning. These survey results can inform the design of online Arabic learning interventions with parental needs and interests in mind and support teachers in better communicating their goals with parents and bringing them on board. Online Arabic learning interventions that neglect parental voices are bound to fail due to lack of parental involvement (Swick, 1995).
- 2) Hold regular parent workshops: Before introducing any technological tool into Arabic teaching and learning, teachers should invite parents attend a parent workshop in which they (a) introduce the tool, (b) explain its rationale, (c) depict how it helps their children learning Arabic, and (d) teach them how to use it to support their children's Arabic learning at home. If deploying an Arabic LMS, teachers should clearly explain to parents how to use its various features, since not all parents are technologically savvy. Parent workshops should be held as often as needed throughout the year so that parents feel supported.

- 3) Reduce parental time commitment: Without a minimum level of parental involvement, online Arabic learning interventions for elementary students are likely to fail. At minimum, parents must facilitate a suitable learning environment at home for their children to carry out online Arabic learning and be minimally present keeping children accountable for their own learning. Nonetheless, parents should *not* be expected to learn alongside their children or directly support them with online learning tasks or homework. While online interactive Arabic homework may encourage parental involvement and facilitate parental empowerment in theory, incorporating such assignments into online Arabic learning may unnecessarily burden parents. Online Arabic learning tasks should be designed so that student can complete them independently.
- 4) Arabic learning modules for parents should be blended: When empowering parents through offering online Arabic learning modules, teachers should supplement the online learning component with interactive face-to-face sessions, where parents can practice their Arabic in a live manner and receive immediate instructor feedback. A balance between online and face-to-face learning is more likely to engage parents and reduce course attrition rates.
- 5) Choose an appropriate LMS: When delivering online Arabic learning content or courses to students and parent, teachers should use a LMS that is user-friendly, graphically appealing, has an intuitive interface, and allows parents to track their own learning progress. Moreover, the LMS should nurture democratic participation through the inclusion of two-way communication

tools such as online forums, chat rooms, instant messaging, and email. The LMS should connect parents and students together so that they can form an online community of like-minded learners who have the same learning goal and can mutually support one another academically, socially, and emotionally.

- 6) Incorporate interactive multimedia elements: Teachers should add audio, video, text, and images to online Arabic learning material. Online learners are more engaged when more of their senses are stimulated. Additionally, learners appreciate interactive learning elements such as navigation buttons, lightboxes (or overlays), clickable hot spots, quizzes offering immediate feedback, and branching scenarios.
- 7) Offer opportunities for self-assessment: Within the online Arabic learning system, teachers should provide learners with various learning experiences, resources, and tools that facilitate self-reflection and self-assessment. For example, quizzes and short assignments with accompanying feedback can give learners many opportunities to check their own understandings; visual progress bars can indicate student learning progress; voice-recording apps such as VoiceThread allow students to listen to and evaluate their own voice recording after submitting it; and clear exemplars and language models facilitate act as references and facilitate student self-reflection.
- 8) Maintain regular communication with parents: Teachers should regularly communicate with learners as they begin their online Arabic learning within the LMS. Learners who carry out online learning may feel isolated and

unsupported in the solitary digital medium and therefore need regular encouragement and support.

- 9) Choose appropriate communication channels: Teachers should utilize the most immediate, convenient, and intuitive means of communication when sending important updates and announcements to parents about their children's online Arabic learning progress. Parents typically prefer direct modes of communication with minimum number of steps to access information, such as physical letters, agenda notes, email notifications, or instant messages via mobile apps. Within the LMS, there should be two-way communication channels that facilitate interaction between teacher and learners as well as between learners and one another.
- 10) Request regular feedback: As the online Arabic learning intervention is underway, teachers should request parental feedback. Teachers should inquire to learn if students or parents are facing technical difficulties or believe that some elements of the Arabic learning intervention are not serving their goals. Some learners may not tell you unless you inquire first.
- 11) Provide as much support as possible: When assigning online Arabic learning tasks or homework, teachers should ensure the tasks are appropriately structured and scaffolded. Instructions must also be clear and concise. Learners should be guided to appropriate language resources that will help them in successfully completing their online Arabic learning.
- 12) Add game-based learning components: Teachers should design online Arabic learning activities that are fun and engaging. Online Arabic learning that takes

the form of homework is readily associated with drudgery and “work”.

Various types of online learning games should be added to the online Arabic learning system (e.g. memory games, interactive game-show-like quizzes, I-spy games, treasure hunts, race-against-the-clock-type games, etc.) so that Arabic learning occurs naturally and subtly through play.

13) Gamify the Arabic LMS: Teachers should incorporate gamification mechanics to elements of the Arabic LMS to motivate students to persist in their online Arabic learning. When implementing gamification, teachers should start with simpler gamification techniques such as adding points, badges, leaderboards, and progress bars before attempting to incorporate more complex mechanics such as avatars, quests, and narrative structures.

14) Assign grades: Teachers should grade students for their completion of online Arabic learning activities. Without grades, students may not value the online Arabic learning and may not be motivated to carry it out. Moreover, parents are more likely to support their children with Arabic learning tasks if they know they are graded.

Generally speaking, the above recommendations focus on how educators might deploy online Arabic learning systems that are more tailored to the needs and interests of students and parents. With added differentiation and personalization, such online learning interventions are more likely to engage learners and meet their curricular and empowerment goals for students and parents alike.

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Appendix A – Additional Screenshots from the Online Arabic LMS

The screenshot shows the homepage of the online Arabic LMS. At the top left is the logo for Mr. Sweileh, featuring a cartoon head and the name. To the right is a navigation menu with links: Home, Arabic Homework, Contact Mr. Sweileh, Need Help?, Parent Course, and Login. Below the navigation is a large 'Welcome!' heading. The main content area is divided into three columns. The first column is titled 'Interactive Arabic Homework' and includes a pencil icon and text stating that users will find interactive Arabic homework assignments to do with their child. The second column is titled 'Contact Mr. Sweileh' and includes a person icon and text asking users to send a quick message. The third column is titled 'Need Help?' and includes a question mark icon and text stating that users may find answers here if they are having trouble with the website. To the right of these columns is a login section titled 'Login Here' with input fields for 'Username' and 'Password', a blue 'Login' button, and a link for 'Lost your password?'.

Figure 22: Homepage of online Arabic LMS when user is not logged-in

The screenshot shows a contact form overlay on a dark background. The form is white and contains the following fields: 'Full Name *' with a text input field, 'Email Address *' with a text input field, 'Subject *' with a text input field containing the placeholder 'Enter your subject title here ...', and 'Message *' with a larger text area containing the placeholder 'Enter your message here ...'. Below the message field is a grey button labeled 'Send your message'. The overlay has a close button (an 'X' in a circle) in the top right corner. In the background, the navigation menu from the previous screenshot is visible, including 'Home', 'Arabic', 'Need Help?', 'Survey', 'Contact Mr. Sweileh', and 'Logout'. The Mr. Sweileh logo is also visible on the left side of the background.

Figure 23: Snapshot showing the contact form overlay that allows learners to send an email to Mr. Sweileh on the online Arabic LMS

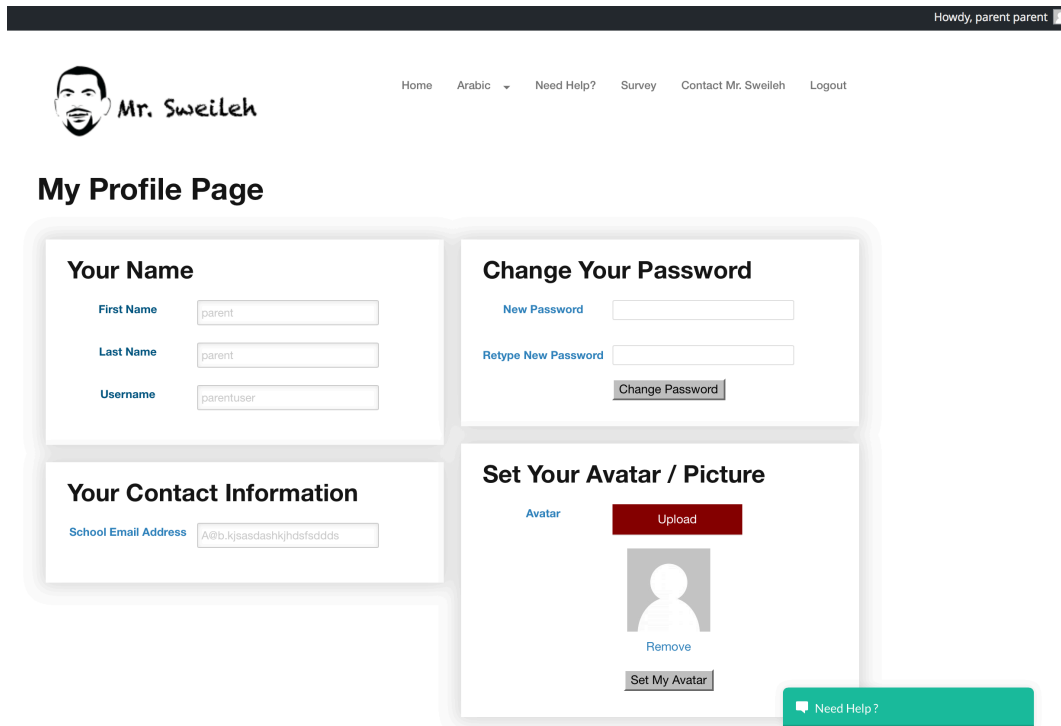


Figure 24: Snapshot of profile page on the online Arabic LMS

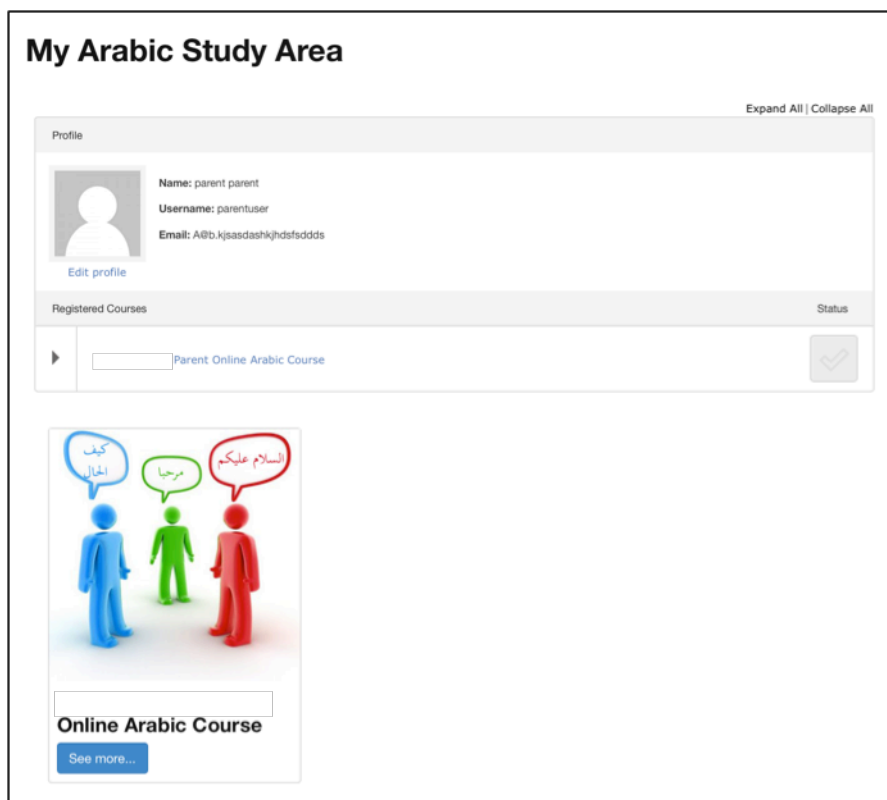


Figure 25: Snapshot of Arabic study area on the online Arabic LMS

Need Help?

How do I login [redacted]?

Step 1

Mr. Sweileh

Home Arabic Interactive Homework Contact Mr. Sweileh Need Help? Login

Need Help?

Click here

How do I login [redacted]?

Step 2

Mr. Sweileh

Home Arabic Interactive Homework Contact Mr. Sweileh Need Help? Login

Username Password Login

Lost your password?

Enter your email here Enter your password here

How do I login to [redacted]

Step 3

Mr. Sweileh

Home Arabic Interactive Homework Contact Mr. Sweileh Need Help? Login

username [redacted] [redacted] Login

Lost your password?

After you enter your email and password, click here

How do I login to [redacted]

How do I login to Voicethread? +

Where can I find my child's Arabic homework? +

Figure 26: Snapshot of "Need Help" FAQ page on online Arabic LMS (with FAQ item expanded to reveal annotated screenshots to help learners navigate the LMS)

Interactive Arabic Homework



Kindergarten



Grade 1



Grade 2



Grade 3



Grade 4



Grade 5



Grade 6


 Need Help?

Figure 27: Snapshot of "Interactive Arabic Homework" page on the online Arabic LMS

Interactive Arabic Homework – Grade 3

Course Content
















Lessons	Status
1 Homework 1 - Available Now	
2 Homework 2 - Available Now	
3 Homework 3 - Available Now	
4 Homework 4 - Available Now	
5 Homework 5 - Available Now	
6 Homework 6 - Available Now	
7 Homework 7 - Available Now	
8 Homework 8 - Available Now	
9 Homework 9 - Available Now	
10 Homework 10 - Available Now	

Figure 28: Snapshot showing interactive Arabic homework for Grade 3 on the online Arabic LMS

Topic Progress: ●●●●●●●●

← Back to Lesson

In this course, you will learn in the following steps:

1	Take a Look! Here you will see a picture or a video clip that represents the language function.	
2	Examine Language Ladder(s): Here you will see the complete language ladder(s) and would be able to click on certain interactive components of the language ladder. For example, if you choose to click on a phrase in the ladder, you may hear it being pronounced. If you hover over an icon, you may learn more what that icon means.	
3	Context Matters: Here you will study one particular context in which the communicative language function can exist. In other words, you will start looking at one particular language ladder for the communicative function. For example, if you are studying Arabic greetings and farewells, you may first look at how Arabic greetings and farewells change depending on the time of day. You may also examine Arabic greetings and farewells based on the emotion shown by the language speaker.	
4	Listen and Repeat: Here you will listen to the Arabic phrases and repeat them orally to become more familiar with them.	
5	Vocabulary Practice: Here you will study essential Arabic vocabulary related to the communicative function through a series of interactive exercises.	

Course Progress



Lessons

- ▼ 01 - Getting Started!
 - Getting Around
 - What is a Language Function?
 - What is a Language Ladder?
 - Icons and Symbols
 - How You Will Learn?
 - Let's Begin!
- ▶ 02 - Greetings and Farewells
- ▶ 03 - Introductions - Will be available in May 2015

Return to: Parent Online Arabic Course



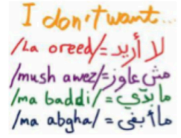


6	Grammatical Awareness: Here you will be brought to notice certain Arabic grammatical points that are important to keep in mind when using the communicative function. This will be followed by a few interactive exercises to test your understanding of the grammar rules presented.	
7	Cultural Richness: Here you will learn about some aspects of Arabic culture, which dictate how the communicative function manifests itself in real communication. This segment will invite you to appreciate the richness, complexity, and beauty of Arabic culture and tradition.	
8	From the Arab Street: Here you will learn some colloquial Arabic phrases that relate to the communicative function being studied. Here you will notice the difference between Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) and regional spoken Arabic. In this course we will focus on the Palestinian dialect - but we will definitely expose you to other dialects as well.	
9	Try It Yourself: Here you will carry out a few more higher-level language tasks involving the communicative function being studied.	
10	Did You Get It? Here you will test your ability to put everything you learned together. This part will take the form of an interactive online quiz.	

Figure 30: "How you will learn" page of the online Arabic learning module for parents

Grammatical Awareness: Al-Waaw

In Arabic, there is a linking word called "Waaw" و, which joins nouns together.

We have seen this linking word in some of the Arabic greetings we have learned so far:

السَّلَامُ عَلَيْكُمْ وَرَحْمَةُ اللَّهِ وَبَرَكَاتُهُ
أَهْلًا وَسَهْلًا أَهْلًا وَسَهْلًا وَمَرْحَبًا

Grammatical Awareness: Al-Waaw

When the letter "Waaw" و joins two nouns in Arabic, it groups them together.

You can think of it like the word "and" in English.

& = و

Grammatical Awareness: Al-Waaw

Let's look at some examples.

Click on each word to listen to it.

مَوْزٌ وَتَفَّاحٌ مَوْزٌ بُرْتُقَالٌ تَفَّاحٌ

و بُرْتُقَالٌ و و و

Grammatical Awareness: Al-Waaw

Drag and drop the words into the boxes to make different totals.

Click on a word to remove it.

مِئَةٌ أَلْفٌ

<== [] وَ []

Grammatical Awareness: Al-Waaw

Drag and drop the words into the boxes to make different totals.

Click on a word to remove it.

أَلْفَانٌ <== أَلْفٌ وَ أَلْفٌ

2000 1000 1000

Grammatical Awareness: Al-Waaw

Drag and drop the words into the boxes to make different totals.

Click on a word to remove it.

أَلْفٌ وَ مِئَةٌ <== مِئَةٌ وَ أَلْفٌ

1100 1000 100

Grammatical Awareness: Al-Waaw

Consider the example below. Listen to each of the Arabic words below by clicking on them.

Hover over the Arabic words to see their meaning

أَهْلًا + وَ + سَهْلًا <== أَهْلًا وَ سَهْلًا

When we welcome someone using this phrase, we are praying that Allah makes their stay easy and restful and that they also find themselves amongst family

Grammatical Awareness: Al-Waaw

Which of the phrases best describes the picture to the right?

300

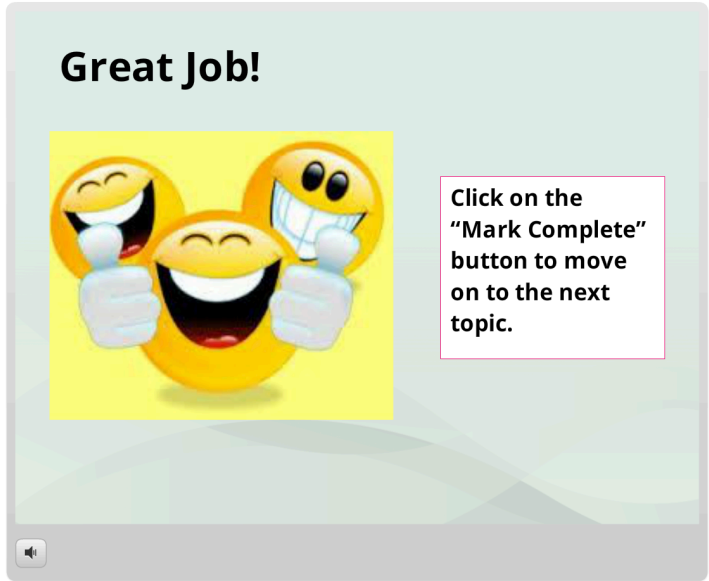
مِئَةٌ وَ مِئَتَانِ مِئَتَانِ وَ مِئَةٌ

مِئَتَانِ وَ مِئَتَانِ مِئَةٌ وَ مِئَةٌ

Figure 33: Snapshots of an interactive multimedia-rich grammatical awareness learning activity in the online Arabic learning module for parents

Topic Progress: 

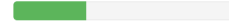
[← Back to Lesson](#)



Great Job!

Click on the "Mark Complete" button to move on to the next topic.

Course Progress



Lessons

- ▶ 01 - Getting Started!
- ▼ 02 - Greetings and Farewells
 - Take a Look!
 - Examine the Language Ladders
 - Context Matters - Time of Day - Greetings
 - Listen and Repeat
 - Vocabulary Practice
 - Grammatical Awareness - The 'Idaafah Construct
 - Cultural Richness - Supplication and Light
 - From the Arab Street
 - Try It Yourself
 - Did You Get It?
 - Context Matters - Level of Emotion - Greetings
 - Listen and Repeat
 - Vocabulary Practice
 - Grammatical Awareness - The Letter Waaw
 - Cultural Richness - Repetition and Number
 - From the Arab Street
 - Context Matters - Level of Emotion -

Figure 34: Screenshot of screen shown upon completion of lesson in the online Arabic module for parents

Appendix C – Process of Designing and Integrating the Online Arabic Homework

Assignments into the LMS

1. Create a PowerPoint presentation template that includes the following sections:
 - a. Homework Title
 - b. Homework Objectives
 - c. Pre-Task Mini-lesson and Related Reference Materials
 - d. Task Description
 - e. Homework Submission Slide(s)
2. For every interactive Arabic homework assignment, fill in each of the sections in the PowerPoint template with appropriate content (which depends on the nature of that particular homework task).
3. Upload the completed PowerPoint presentation into a VoiceThread
4. Add audio or video narration (along with accompanying annotations) to the VoiceThread in order to present and explain the interactive Arabic homework assignment to parents and students.
5. Embed the VoiceThread into a specific lesson within the LMS and give it a title (e.g. Interactive Arabic Homework #1)
6. Embed the post-task online survey (or feedback form) within the same lesson on the LMS.
7. Condition lesson completion with completing both the interactive Arabic homework task and the post-task feedback form.

8. Set a release date and completion deadline for the interactive Arabic homework assignment.
9. Assign the interactive Arabic homework to the appropriate group of students within the LMS (e.g. Grade 1 students).

By following these steps each time, I was able to consistently create short, structured, scaffolded, and engaging interactive homework tasks for students and parents. Assignments would be deemed complete only if (a) students and parents left an audio or video comment in the VoiceThread demonstrating their completion of the language task, and if (b) parents sign off on the assignment afterwards by completing the post-assignment online survey.

Appendix D – Survey Questions for Parents

Beginning of the Year Parent Survey

Please answer the following questions. The answers you provide will help me provide quality programming for your child and design Arabic learning resources that will support your child's learning and also assist you in supporting his/her learning at home.

Please note that this survey is **voluntary**. You may answer as many questions as you feel comfortable answering. This survey should take **no longer than 15 minutes** to complete.

If you decide to participate, please write your name below:

Your full name: _____

Linguistic Background and Home Environment

Q1. What is the main language you speak at home with your children? _____

Q2. What languages do speak?

Check all that apply and rate your proficiency on a scale of 1-5 (1 = "beginner" and 5 = "proficient")

Proficiency means "how well you can speak in and use the language"

Language	I speak this language		Proficiency Rating				
	Yes	No	Beginner			Proficient	
English	Yes	No	1	2	3	4	5
Urdu	Yes	No	1	2	3	4	5
Somali	Yes	No	1	2	3	4	5
Afghani	Yes	No	1	2	3	4	5
French	Yes	No	1	2	3	4	5
Persian	Yes	No	1	2	3	4	5

Other Language(s) you speak:

Beginner

Proficient

1 2 3 4 5

1 2 3 4 5

Reinforcing and Supporting Arabic at Home

Q6. How often do **you speak in Arabic** with your children at home?

Never

Rarely

Sometimes

Most of the Time

Always

Q7. What types of things do you **say in Arabic** to your children at home?

Q8. Could you please mention some ways you **expose your children to Arabic outside of school**?

Q9. What are some things you do to **support your child's Arabic language learning at home**?

Foreseen Involvement in Children's Arabic Language Learning at Home

Q14. Do you expect to be **actively and regularly involved** in your child's Arabic language learning this year?

Definitely Not

No

Uncertain

Yes

Definitely Yes

Q15. Could you please mention any possible reasons why you **might not** be able to involve yourself in your child's Arabic language learning?

Q16. Do you expect to **complete the interactive Arabic homework assignments** with your child at home?

Definitely Not

No

Uncertain

Yes

Definitely Yes

Q17. Could you please mention any possible reasons why you **might not** be able to complete interactive Arabic homework assignments with your child?

Technology, Accessibility, and Online Learning

Q18. Do you have access to a **computer** at home?

Yes

No

Q19. Do you have access to the **Internet** at home?

Yes

No

Q20. Do you have access to your own **personal email**?

Yes

No

Q21. To what extent are you comfortable with using a **computer**?

Not Very Comfortable

Somewhat Comfortable

Moderately Comfortable

Very Comfortable

Q22. To what extent are you comfortable with using **the Internet**?

Not Very Comfortable

Somewhat Comfortable

Moderately Comfortable

Very Comfortable

Q23. To what extent are you comfortable with using **email**?

Not Very Comfortable

Somewhat Comfortable

Moderately Comfortable

Very Comfortable

Q24. How many **online courses** have you taken before?

None

1

2

3 or More

Q25. To what extent are you comfortable with using online learning management systems?

(Learning management systems are online portals or websites for distance learning through the Internet)

Not Very Comfortable

Somewhat Comfortable

Moderately Comfortable

Very Comfortable

Availability of Follow-up Interview

Q26. Are you available to discuss your views in more detail during a **face-to-face interview**?

Yes

No

If so, please indicate availability: _____

Q27. Is there an **email address or a phone number** that I can contact you at for more information?

If so, please write it down below.

End of the Year Parent Survey

Please answer the following questions. The answers you provide will help reflect on the level and quality of online Arabic programming I have provided you and your children with this year. I will use your feedback to improve the online Arabic learning experience next year.

Please note that this survey is **voluntary**. You may answer as many questions as you feel comfortable answering. This survey should take **no longer than 15 minutes** to complete.

If you decide to participate, please write your name below:

Your full name: _____

Arabic Language Proficiency

Q1. Please rate your current Arabic language proficiency on a scale of 1-5 (1 = "beginner" and 5 = "proficient")
Proficiency means, "how well you can speak in and use the language"

Beginner
1 2 3 4 Proficient
5

Q2. To what extent do you believe that your Arabic **has improved** over the course of the year?

Definitely Not No Uncertain Yes Definitely Yes

Q3. To what extent do you now feel confident with **helping your children with their Arabic learning at home?**

Not Confident Somewhat Confident Moderately Confident Very Confident

Q4. Which areas of Arabic do you think you can help your children with now? **Check all that apply**

- | | | |
|---|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Letter and Vowel Recognition | <input type="checkbox"/> Reading Individual Words | <input type="checkbox"/> Reading Comprehension |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Tracing and Copying Letters | <input type="checkbox"/> Writing Individual Words | <input type="checkbox"/> Writing Meaningful Sentences |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Vocabulary Practice and Memorization | | <input type="checkbox"/> Listening Comprehension |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Speaking | <input type="checkbox"/> Conversations and Dialogue | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Grammar Rules | <input type="checkbox"/> Spelling Rules | <input type="checkbox"/> Cultural Aspects of Arabic |

Other areas (specify below):

Reinforcing and Supporting Arabic at Home

Q5. How often **did you speak Arabic** with your children at home throughout the school year?

Never

Rarely

Sometimes

Most of the Time

Always

Q6. What types of things do you now **say in Arabic** to your children at home?

Q7. Could you mention some ways you tried to **expose your children to Arabic outside of school** this year?

Q8. What are some things you did to **support your child's Arabic language learning at home** this year?

Arabic Language and Culture Curriculum Outcomes

Q9. To what extent are you comfortable **assessing your child's Arabic language proficiency**?

Not Very Comfortable Somewhat Comfortable Moderately Comfortable Very Comfortable

Q10. To what extent are you familiar with the **Arabic Language and Culture curriculum at [REDACTED]**?

Not Very Familiar Somewhat Familiar Moderately Familiar Very Familiar

Q11. To what extent are you comfortable **assessing your child's Arabic language learning progress against the Arabic Language and Culture curricular outcomes**?

Not Very Comfortable Somewhat Comfortable Moderately Comfortable Very Comfortable

Technology, Accessibility, and Online Learning

Q12. To what extent are you comfortable using a **computer**?

Not Very Comfortable Somewhat Comfortable Moderately Comfortable Very Comfortable

Q13. To what extent are you comfortable using **the internet**?

Not Very Comfortable Somewhat Comfortable Moderately Comfortable Very Comfortable

Q14. To what extent are you comfortable using **email**?

Not Very Comfortable Somewhat Comfortable Moderately Comfortable Very Comfortable

Q15. How many **online courses** have you taken so far?

None 1 2 3 or More

Q16. To what extent are you comfortable using online learning management systems?

Learning management systems are online websites (or portals) for distance learning through the Internet.

Not Very Comfortable Somewhat Comfortable Moderately Comfortable Very Comfortable

Involvement in Children’s Arabic Language Learning at Home This Year

Q17. To what extent **were you actively involved** in your child’s Arabic language learning this year?

- Not Very Active Somewhat Active Moderately Active Very Active
-
-

Q18. Could you please mention any possible reasons why you **were not** as actively involved in your child’s Arabic language learning this year?

Q19. How often did you **complete interactive Arabic homework** with your child this year?

- Never Rarely Sometimes Most of the Time Always
-
-

Q20. Could you please mention any possible reasons why you **did not** complete as many interactive Arabic homework assignments with your child this year?

Q21. To what extent do you believe that **your involvement in your child’s Arabic learning strengthened your relationship with him/her?**

- Strongly Disagree Disagree Neither Agree nor Disagree Agree Strongly Agree
-
-

Perceptions about the Effectiveness of the Learning Management System in Empowering Parents

Q22. To what extent do you agree that the **learning management system** supported you in becoming more comfortable with **your own Arabic language abilities**?

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neither Agree nor Disagree Agree Strongly Agree

Q23. To what extent do you agree that the **learning management system** supported you in becoming more comfortable **supporting your child's Arabic learning at home**?

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neither Agree nor Disagree Agree Strongly Agree

Q24. To what extent do you agree that the **learning management system** supported you in becoming more comfortable **assessing your child's Arabic language learning progress**?

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neither Agree nor Disagree Agree Strongly Agree

Q25. To what extent do you agree that the **learning management system** supported you in becoming more familiar with the **Arabic Language and Culture curriculum at [REDACTED]**?

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neither Agree nor Disagree Agree Strongly Agree

Q26. Please mention some ways the **learning management system** helped empower you as a parent?

Q27. Please mention some ways the **learning management system** failed to support and empower you?

Perceptions about the Effectiveness of the Interactive Arabic Homework in Empowering Parents

Q28. To what extent do you agree that the **interactive Arabic homework** supported you in becoming more comfortable with **your own Arabic language abilities**?

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neither Agree nor Disagree Agree Strongly Agree

Q29. To what extent do you agree that the **interactive Arabic homework** supported you in becoming more comfortable **supporting your child's Arabic learning at home**?

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neither Agree nor Disagree Agree Strongly Agree

Q30. To what extent do you agree that **interactive Arabic homework** supported you in becoming more comfortable **assessing your child's Arabic language learning progress**?

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neither Agree nor Disagree Agree Strongly Agree

Q31. To what extent do you agree that the **interactive Arabic homework** supported you in becoming more familiar with the **Arabic Language and Culture curriculum at [REDACTED]**?

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neither Agree nor Disagree Agree Strongly Agree

Q32. Please mention some ways the **interactive Arabic homework** helped empower you as a parent?

Q33. Please mention some ways the **interactive Arabic homework** failed to support and empower you?

Availability of Follow-up Interview

Q34. Are you available to discuss your views in more detail during a **face-to-face** interview?

Yes

No

If so, please indicate availability: _____

Q35. Is there an email address or a phone number that I can contact you at for more information?

Please write it below.

Appendix E – Survey Questions for Students

Initial Survey Questions for Students (Grades 3-6)

Please answer the following questions. The answers you provide will help me reflect on the level and quality of online Arabic programming I have provided you this year and the impact it has had on supporting your learning. I will use your feedback to improve the online Arabic learning experience for the rest of the year.

Please note that this survey is **voluntary**. You may answer as many questions as you feel comfortable answering. This survey should take **no longer than 5-10 minutes** to complete.

If you decide to participate, please write your name below:

Your full name: _____

Arabic Support at Home

Q1. How often **do your parents speak Arabic** with you at home?

Never Rarely Sometimes Most of the Time Always

Q2. How **actively involved have your parents been** in your Arabic language learning so far?

Not Very Active Somewhat Active Moderately Active Very Active

Q3. How often have your parents **completed interactive Arabic homework** with you since the beginning of the year?

Never Rarely Sometimes Most of the Time Always

Q4. How actively involved have your parents been **in supporting your learning of subjects other than Arabic** so far this year?

Not Very Active Somewhat Active Moderately Active Very Active

Q5. In what ways have your parents **supported your own Arabic language learning at home** so far this year?

Q6. Could you please mention any possible reasons why your parents **may have not** been as **actively involved in your Arabic language learning** so far this year?

Q7. Could you please mention any possible reasons why your parents **may have not** been able to **complete as many interactive Arabic homework assignments** with you so far this year?

Availability of Follow-up Interview

Q8. Are you available to discuss your views in more detail during a **face-to-face interview**?

- Yes
- No

Survey Questions for Students (Grade 3-6) – End of Year

Please answer the following questions. The answers you provide will help me reflect on the level and quality of online Arabic programming I have provided you this year and the impact it has had on supporting your learning. I will use your feedback to improve the online Arabic learning experience next year.

Please note that this survey is **voluntary**. You may answer as many questions as you feel comfortable answering. This survey should take **no longer than 10-15 minutes** to complete.

If you decide to participate, please write your name below:

Your full name: _____

Arabic Support at Home

Q1. How often **have your parents spoken Arabic** with you at home throughout the school year?

Never Rarely Sometimes Most of the Time Always

Q2. How **actively involved were your parents** in your Arabic language learning this year?

Not Very Active Somewhat Active Moderately Active Very Active

Q3. How often did your parents **complete interactive Arabic homework** with you this year?

Never Rarely Sometimes Most of the Time Always

Q4. Would it be correct to say that your parents seemed to show **greater interest in learning Arabic** this year?

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neither Agree nor Disagree Agree Strongly Agree

Q5. Would it be correct to say that your parents seemed to show **greater involvement in your Arabic learning at home** this year?

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neither Agree nor Disagree Agree Strongly Agree

Q6. Would it be correct to say that **technology affected your parent's involvement in your own Arabic learning** at home this year?

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neither Agree nor Disagree Agree Strongly Agree

Q7. Would it be correct to say that your parents showed **greater involvement in your learning of subjects other than Arabic** this year?

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neither Agree nor Disagree Agree Strongly Agree

Q8. In what ways did your parents **support your own Arabic language learning at home** this year?

Q9. Could you please mention any possible reasons why your parents **were not as actively involved in your Arabic language learning** this year?

Q10. Could you please mention any possible reasons why your parents **were not able to complete as many interactive Arabic homework assignments** with you this year?

Online Arabic Learning Experience

Q10. How **easy** was it to use the online Arabic learning management system?

- Very Easy Easy Neither Easy Nor Difficult Difficult Very Difficult
-
-

Q11. Would it be correct to say that the **online Arabic learning management system greatly supported your Arabic learning at home?**

- Strongly Disagree Disagree Neither Agree nor Disagree Agree Strongly Agree
-
-

Q12. Would it be correct to say that the **interactive Arabic homework allowed you to assess your own Arabic skills and learning at home?**

- Strongly Disagree Disagree Neither Agree nor Disagree Agree Strongly Agree
-
-

Q13. What did you **enjoy the most** about using the **online Arabic learning management system** this year?

Q14. What did you **enjoy the most** about doing the **interactive Arabic homework** this year?

Q15. What are some things that you **did not enjoy** about **your online Arabic learning experience** this year?

Availability of Follow-up Interview

Q16. Are you available to discuss your views in more detail during a **face-to-face interview**?

- Yes
- No

Appendix F – Sample Interview Questions for Parents

Theme: Parental Sense of Empowerment

What do I hope to learn?

- Do parents feel empowered in relation to supporting their children’s schooling/Arabic language learning?
- What supports do parents need from teachers and schools in general? What about in the context of Arabic language learning?
- What would make parents feel empowered?

Interview Prompts

- *“I’d like to talk about empowerment ... When you think about your child’s education or school, do you feel empowered as a parent? If “yes”, how so? If “not”, why not?”*
- *“Do you sometimes find it challenging to support your children in school? Arabic learning?” (Gauge frequency, severity, personal/affective impact etc., with more probing questions.)*
- *Are there things that facilitate supporting your children’s Arabic language learning at home?*

Theme: Technology as a Tool for Parental Empowerment

What do I hope to learn?

- Can technology empower parents in supporting their children in Arabic?
- Does technology help them overcome linguistic barriers? Communication barriers? Psychological barriers? Other barriers?

Interview Prompts

- *“Do you see a place for technology in supporting Arabic language learning? Explain.”*
- *“Has technology empowered you in supporting your child’s Arabic language learning? If so, how? If not, why not?”*
- *Do you sometimes find it difficult to know what’s going on in school?*

Theme: Positive Characteristics of Technology in Relation to Arabic Language Learning

What do I hope to learn?

- What are some characteristics of technology/online learning supports that parents appreciate?

Interview Prompts

- *“Please tell me about your experience with the online Arabic language learning last year?”*
- *“What do you remember about the online interactive Arabic homework?”*
- *“What do you remember about the online Arabic module/course?”*
- *“Did you enroll in the short online Arabic learning module last year? If not, why? If so, share your experiences.”*
- *“What supports (if any) do you wish were in place so that you could better support your child’s Arabic learning?”*

Theme: Parental Views on Homework and Blended Learning Environments

What do I hope to learn?

- Are flipped/blended learning environments worth implementing for second language learning?
- What are the minimum requirements for them being successful? How much parental support is needed?
- Are parents generally welcoming of supporting their children with schoolwork?
- Are there reasons why parents may not be supporting their children at home?

Interview Prompts

- *“How do you see your own role in your child’s education? Arabic language learning?”*
- *“Do you believe homework should be assigned? Should it count towards marks? Explain.”*
- *“Do you believe your child can do the work they need to in order to succeed without your help? Why?”*

Appendix G – Sample Interview Questions for Students

Sample Interview Questions for Students

Sample Beginning of Year Follow-up Interview Questions

- Why do you think your parents have not been able to help you with completing the online interactive Arabic homework?
- Why do you think your parents have not been able to help you with your Arabic learning so far?
- How comfortable are you with using the Arabic online website?
- What are some things you think that I can do to support you in your Arabic learning?

Sample End of Year Follow-up Interview Question

- Why do you think your parents have not been able to help you with completing the online interactive Arabic homework?
- Why do you think your parents have not been able to help you with your Arabic learning so far?
- What parts of the online Arabic learning did you enjoy the most this year and why?
- How was it like doing the interactive Arabic homework with your parents?
- Did you find the interactive Arabic homework helpful? Explain why or why not?
- If you could change any part of this year’s online Arabic learning, what would it be and why?
- If you could change any part of the interactive Arabic homework, what would it be and why?
- Do you feel that your relationship with your parents is stronger because of doing the interactive online Arabic homework?
- How has the place of the Arabic language in your home changed this year?

Appendix H – Post-Interactive Homework Survey for Parents

Post-Interactive Homework Survey Questions

1. How well did your child demonstrate his/her Arabic learning in this interactive Arabic homework assignment?

Very Poor

Poor

Fair

Good

Very Good

2. Do you think your child needs further support and practice to master the skill demonstrated in the interactive Arabic homework assignment?

Yes

No

3. If you have any other comments about your child's performance on this interactive Arabic homework assignment, please write them in the space below.

4. Please provide any other feedback about this interactive Arabic homework assignment below.

By signing below, I acknowledge that I completed this interactive Arabic homework assignment with my child and assessed his performance.

Parent's Full Name: _____


Child's Full Name: _____

Parent's signature _____

Date: _____

Appendix I – Correspondence with Parents

Consent Forms for Storing Student Information on the Arabic LMS and voicethread.com



Mr. Sweileh

September 12, 2014

Dear Parents/Guardians,

_____ This year, I have designed a website to support the teaching and learning of Arabic Language and Culture and Mathematics _____. You can visit the website at _____. Below, I will provide more detail on how my website will improve your child's learning experience at school and at home.

What is _____?

My website, _____ is a private online learning portal created for students _____. This website will primarily serve as a Learning Management System (LMS) for _____ students who are enrolled in Arabic Language and Culture and Grade 5 Mathematics courses.

How will _____ improve the learning experience of my child?

In the past, many parents have come to me and expressed how they wish they could provide more support for their children in their Arabic language learning at home. _____ will try to address this need by acting as an online portal where your child can access Arabic language resources and homework assignments. By encouraging your child to regularly visit _____, access Arabic learning materials, and complete homework assignments, your child can reinforce his/her Arabic language learning at home and greatly accelerate his/her Arabic language learning.

Moreover, _____ will serve as a full-fledged LMS where your child can securely log in with a username and password to complete mini online Arabic courses or modules surrounding a particular topic covered in class. Each module will be made up of a series of lessons and quizzes that your child must complete before he/she can move on to the next module. Your child can easily track his/her progress and receive feedback and additional support on the completion of these lessons, quizzes, and modules.

Similarly, if your child is taking Grade 5 Mathematics _____ he/she will have access to online math resources, notes, math simulations, quizzes, and homework assignments.

In addition, your child can easily communicate with me through the website's contact form, instant messaging system, or online chat if he/she needs support. _____ will also act as an additional communication channel by which parents can contact me. I believe that multiple means of communication can greatly strengthen relationships between school and home.

How will my child's personal information be used on _____?

_____ is a private, password-protected LMS for supporting your child's learning at school and at home. In order for your child to access the LMS, track his/her usage and learning progress, receive additional support, and securely communicate with me online, he/she must have an individual student account and unique login credentials. To uniquely identify your child upon logging into _____ some of your child's personal information must be stored on its server. However, please note that this data is private and password-protected and cannot be accessed by anyone other than your child and his/her teacher. So, all data that could potentially identify your child can only be accessed by your child and his/her teacher.

Since using [redacted] involves the storage of personal information on its servers, you must give consent to allow your child to use and register a student account on [redacted] (please see attached consent form). When using [redacted], the following personal information will be stored:

- Your child's first name and last name
- Your child's school email address
- Your child's online module, lesson, and homework completion data on [redacted]
- Your child's online quiz data on [redacted]
- Your child's login and usage statistics
- Any online communication between your child and his/her teacher (such as email, instant messaging, and text chat, and voice chat) that occurs on [redacted]

But again, please rest assured that this information will remain private, password-protected, and only accessible by your child and his/her teacher. Your child's personal information will not be shared with any 3rd party. You can read the privacy policy at [redacted] here: [redacted]/privacy-policy

What happens if I do not sign the consent form?

If you choose not to sign the consent form, then this means that I do not have your consent to use your child's personal information to create a student account on [redacted]. This will prevent your child from using [redacted] to access any rich interactive Arabic language or Mathematics learning resources hosted on the website. Moreover, your child will not have access to any modules, lessons, homework assignments, or quizzes on the website's LMS nor will he/she be able to track his/her learning.

Hence, by not signing the form, your child will not be able to practice his/her Arabic or complete any Arabic assignments or activities online at [redacted]. Moreover, your child will not be able to participate in any projects with his or her classmates that involve learning resources hosted on [redacted].

Should you need more clarification about [redacted] you can reach me by email at [redacted]. Thank you for supporting your child's learning at home.

Sincerely,

Belal Sweileh, B.Ed.
Owner and Administrator of [redacted]



Mr. Sweileh

[redacted] is a private online learning portal created for students at [redacted]. In particular, [redacted] will serve as a Learning Management System (LMS) for [redacted] students who are enrolled in Arabic Language and Culture and Grade 5 Mathematics courses. For more information, you may contact Belal Sweileh by email at [redacted].

Student Personal Information and Learning Management System (LMS) Tracking Data

[redacted] are facilitating [redacted] in requesting your permission to use your child's personal information to create a student account for your child on [redacted] and to support his/her learning of Arabic and Mathematics at home. The collection of personal information will be done in accordance with school policy.

Your child's personal information (full name, school email address) will be used to create a unique username and password for your child to login to [redacted] as well as a new student profile on [redacted]. Moreover, as your child uses and interacts with the various resources and sections on [redacted] additional personally identifiable information will be collected and stored to support your child's learning. For example, if your child completes a lesson, module, or quiz on the [redacted] LMS, his/her learning completion and quiz results are tracked. Moreover, if your child communicates with Belal Sweileh through the various communication channels on [redacted] (such as email, instant messaging, text chat, or voice chat), then this communication will be logged and stored.

Any personal information, LMS tracking data, or communication logs collected and stored on [redacted] servers will remain private and secure and will not be shared with any third party. Such personal information will only be accessible to Belal Sweileh and your child.

Your child's account on [redacted] will remain active for the duration of the school year. Should you wish to have your child's account deleted after the year ends, you may contact Belal Sweileh by email at [redacted].

You may also revoke permission, at any time by contacting Belal Sweileh by email at [redacted].

Please note again that your child's personal information, LMS tracking data, or communication logs generated as a result of your child using [redacted] will not be made public. Rather, this data will be privately and securely stored on the servers hosting [redacted] and are only visible to Belal Sweileh and your child.

The school will return the form to Belal Sweileh.

Under the *Personal Information and Protection Act*, your permission is required for the above to take place. I understand that by completing this section I consent to sharing my child's personal information with [redacted] for the purposes described above and in the attached letter from [redacted].

To be completed only if consent is given.

Student's Name: _____ Grade: _____ School: _____

(Print first and last name)

Parent/Legal Guardian(s)' Signature(s): _____ Date: _____

September 11, 2014

Dear Parents/Guardians,

This year, I plan to use an online tool called **VoiceThread** (www.voicethread.com) to enrich the teaching and learning of Arabic Language and Culture. VoiceThread allows students to have rich interactive conversations about any type of media online. Below, I will provide more detail on how VoiceThread will improve your child's Arabic learning experience.

How will VoiceThread improve my child's Arabic learning experience?

For example, in Arabic class, I can use VoiceThread to present your child with a picture of a garden and then ask him/her to describe it in Arabic. What is very amazing about this tool is that your child can describe the garden by leaving a voice comment with a microphone, a video comment with a webcam, or a simple Arabic text comment with a keyboard. In addition, your child can respond to comments of other students. So, your child will have the ability to practice and demonstrate his/her Arabic listening, speaking, reading, and writing abilities **online** in a very simple yet authentic, interactive, and collaborative way.

There are many other great uses for VoiceThread in the Arabic language classroom. VoiceThread is ideal for creating interactive storybooks and personal dictionaries; constructing audiovisual word lists for vocabulary practice; asking students to orally answer questions; having simple oral conversations and role-plays online; playing online language learning games; describing pictures and videos; designing interactive online Arabic homework assignments; creating student presentations; and many more. Most importantly, your child can use VoiceThread to create personal products to showcase his/her learning. So, not only is VoiceThread a tool for designing interactive learning resources and rich language activities for students, but it can also be used by your child to creatively demonstrate his/her own learning.

How will my child's personal information be used in VoiceThread?

VoiceThread is an online tool that allows your child to leave text, audio, and video comments on any type of online media. When using VoiceThread, information that may identify your child is stored on VoiceThread's servers. However, this data is private and password-protected and cannot be accessed by anyone who is not part of your child's classroom. So, all data that could potentially identify your child can only be accessed by your child, his/her teacher, and/or his/her fellow classmates.

Since using VoiceThread involves the storage of personal information on its servers, you must give consent to allow your child to use VoiceThread (please see attached consent form). When using VoiceThread, the following personal information will be stored:

Your child's first and last name

Your child's school email address

Any text comments, voice comment, or video comments your child creates within a VoiceThread

But again, please rest assured that this information will remain private, password-protected, and only accessible by members of the classroom community (namely the teacher and students). Your child's personal information will not be shared with any 3rd party. You can read VoiceThread's Terms of Use and Privacy Policy here: <http://ed.voicethread.com/termsfuse>

What happens if I do not sign the consent form?

If you choose not to sign the consent form, then this means that I do not have your consent to use your child's personal information for creating a VoiceThread student account. This will prevent your child from using VoiceThread to access any rich Arabic language learning resources that I create for students. Hence, your child will not be able to practice his/her Arabic online or complete any Arabic assignments or activities created using VoiceThread inside or outside of school. Moreover, your child will not be able to participate in projects with his or her classmates involving VoiceThread in-class or at home.

Please visit this link to see examples of how VoiceThread is used by teachers and students in education: <https://voicethread.com/about/library/>

Should you need more clarification about VoiceThread, you can reach me at the school by phone at [redacted] or by email at [redacted]. Thank you for supporting your child's learning at home.

Sincerely,

Mr. Sweileh, B.Ed.
Arabic Teacher / Grade 5 Homeroom Teacher

**Consent Form for Allowing Use of Your Child's Personal Information
for Creating a VoiceThread Student Account
and the Use of VoiceThread as a Teaching and Learning Tool**

[redacted] are facilitating Mr. Sweileh in requesting your permission to use your child's personal information to create a VoiceThread student account for your child and to use VoiceThread as a teaching and learning tool inside and outside the classroom. The collection of personal information will be done in accordance with school policy.

Your child's personal information (full name, school email address) and any text, audio, or video comments created as a result of using VoiceThread will only be visible and accessible to members of your child's classroom community (i.e. Mr. Sweileh, your child, and his/her fellow classmates).

Your child's VoiceThread account will remain active for the duration of the school year. Should you wish to have your child's VoiceThread account deleted after the year ends, you may contact Mr. Sweileh by email at [redacted].

You may also revoke permission, at any time by contacting Mr. Sweileh by email at [redacted]. Please note again that your child's personal information and any of his/her text, audio, or video comments associated with VoiceThreads will not be made public and will remain private in password-protected virtual classroom area only accessible to members of your child's classroom (i.e. Mr. Sweileh, your child, and his/her fellow classmates). **The school will return the form to Mr. Sweileh.**

Under the *Personal Information and Protection Act*, your permission is required for the above to take place. I understand that by completing this section I consent to sharing my child's personal information with Mr. Sweileh and VoiceThread for the purposes described above and in the attached letter from Mr. Sweileh.

To be completed only if consent is given.

Student's Name: _____ Grade: _____ School: _____
(Print first and last name)

Parent/Legal Guardian(s)' Signature(s): _____ Date: _____

Letter to Parents Inviting them to Informational Session about Online Arabic Learning

[Empty box for address or header information]

October 31, 2014

Dear Parents/Guardians,

[Empty box for name]

At next month's [] parent meeting, **on Wednesday November 12 at 6PM**, there will be a special orientation for **all** parents about **online Arabic learning** [] this year.

At this meeting, I hope to:

- Introduce the concept of online Arabic learning and explain the rationale behind it
- Showcase how Arabic learning is done on the learning management system (LMS) on [] and highlight a few key sections and features
- Explain how you can support your child with Arabic learning at home
- Speak about future initiatives to support Arabic learning []
- Answer any questions you may have

I would be honored if you could attend this important meeting and encourage other parents to attend as well. I am sure it will be very practical and helpful for everyone.

Thank you so much for supporting your child's Arabic learning. Should you need to contact me for any reason, you can always reach me at the school by phone at [] or by email at []

[Empty box for signature line]

Sincerely,

Mr. Sweileh, B.Ed.
Arabic Teacher / Grade 5 Homeroom Teacher

[Empty box for contact information]

[Empty box for footer or additional information]

Letter Inviting Parents to Participate in Interactive Arabic Homework with Their Children

November 19, 2014

Dear Parents/Guardians,

I would like to give my sincere thanks to everyone who attended the Parent Meeting last Wednesday. It was a great turnout! It was truly humbling to see so many families showing support for their children's Arabic learning.

At last week's meeting, I invited parents to support their children's online Arabic learning by completing online **Interactive Arabic Homework** at home with their children. Below you will find some steps to find your child's interactive homework on (see the images on the back of this letter). I have also attached your child's login credentials (email and password) to the bottom of this letter. These credentials are needed for logging into and voicethread.com

- 1) Go to
- 2) Click on "Interactive Arabic Homework"
- 3) Choose your child's grade level.
- 4) Have your child login with their email and password
- 5) Please complete the **Interactive Homework Assignment** with your child

Sincerely,

Mr. Sweileh, B.Ed.
Arabic Teacher / Grade 5 Homeroom Teacher

Step 1

Mr. Sweileh Home Arabic Interactive Homework Contact Mr. Sweileh Need Help?

Interactive Arabic Homework

Click on your grade level

K Kindergarten
1 Grade 1
2 Grade 2
3 Grade 3
4 Grade 4
5 Grade 5
6 Grade 6

Step 2

Mr. Sweileh Home Arabic Interactive Homework Contact Mr. Sweileh Need Help? Login

Welcome!

Click here

or click here

Interactive Arabic Homework
Here you will find interactive Arabic homework assignments to do with your child

Contact Mr. Sweileh
Send me a quick message

Need Help?
If you are having trouble with using the website, you may find answers here

Login Here

Username

Password

Login

Lost your password?

Step 3

Interactive Arabic Homework – Grade 1

You will find links to your homework here

Lessons	Status
1 Homework 1	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
2 Homework 2 - Available Nov 21	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
3 Homework 3 - Available Dec 5	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

Letter Inviting Parents to Complete “Beginning of Year Survey”

December 3, 2014

Dear Parents/Guardians,

At last month’s [] parent meeting, I had spoken about future plans for Arabic language learning at [] I had mentioned that I intend to create a freely available online Arabic language course just for parents.

Are you interested in learning Arabic online? If so, please tell me about your background so that I can design the online course to suit your particular needs.

I have attached a short survey to this letter. In this survey, there are a few questions about your linguistic background, your Arabic language abilities, your familiarity with the Arabic language curriculum [] and your past experiences using technology and taking online courses.

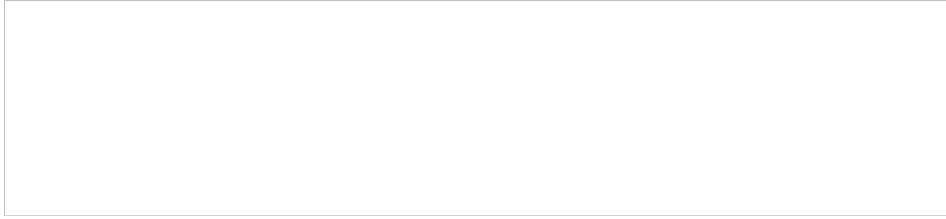
There are two copies of the survey attached to this letter. So if there are two parents in the household, you can each fill out a survey.

Please note that completing the attached survey is voluntary. If you choose to complete it, please write your full name on the front page of the survey and include some means of contacting you on the last page of the survey – in case I need to follow up with you face-to-face at a later time. If you have already completed the survey at last month’s parent meeting, please disregard this letter.

After completing the survey, please return it to me directly (or to your child’s teacher to pass on to me). Thank you for supporting your child’s Arabic learning.

Sincerely,

Mr. Sweileh, B.Ed.
Arabic Teacher / Grade 5 Homeroom Teacher



January 20, 2015

Dear Parents/Guardians,

Before the winter break, I had mentioned that I intend to create a freely available online Arabic language course just for parents. [redacted] it is currently under development and I hope to launch it mid-March 2015 [redacted]

Since then, I have received a lot of helpful feedback from parents about their Arabic learning needs and experiences. Thanks to all who filled out the survey.

If you did not get a chance to fill out the survey, they is still time. In an effort to save some trees, I have placed the survey online. You can find it here:

[redacted] [/survey](#)

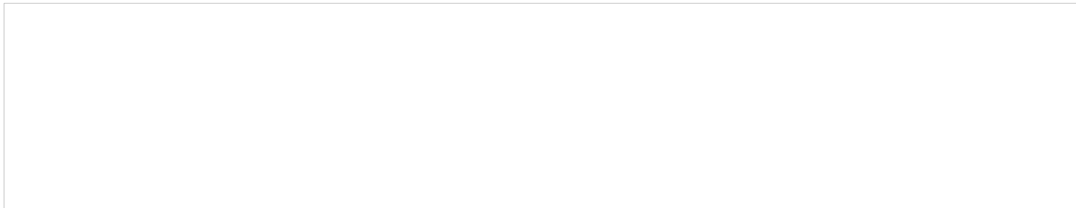
Please note that completing the online survey is voluntary.

Thank you for supporting your child's Arabic learning. [redacted]

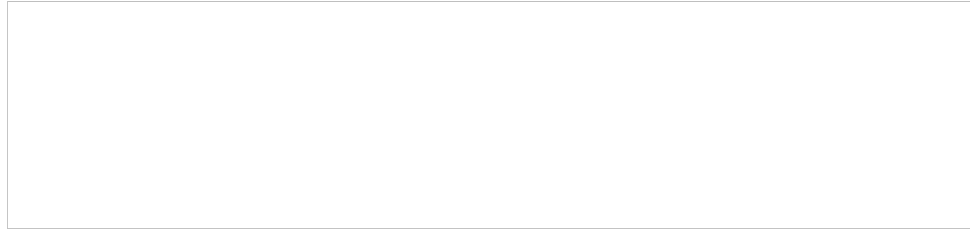
Sincerely,

Mr. Sweileh, B.Ed.
Arabic Teacher / Grade 5 Homeroom Teacher

[redacted]



**Sample Letter Informing Parents of the Release a New Interactive Arabic
Assignment**



January 15, 2015

Dear Parents/Guardians,

I have uploaded the **3rd interactive Arabic homework assignment** to Please allow your child to showcase his/her Arabic learning to you.

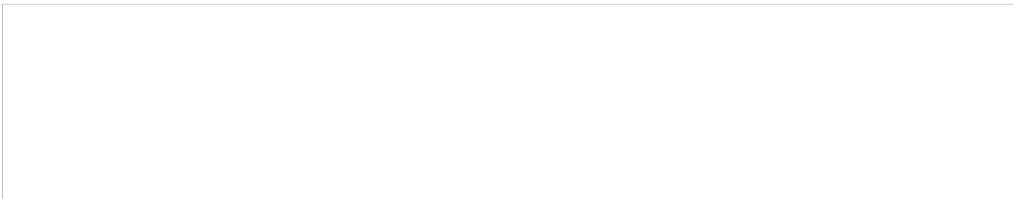
Below you will find some steps to access your child's interactive Arabic homework on (see the images on the back of this letter).

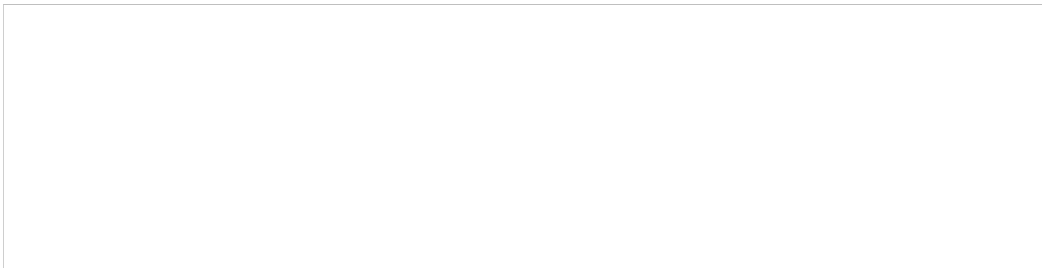
- 1) Go to
- 2) Click on "Interactive Arabic Homework"
- 3) Choose your child's grade level.
- 4) Have your child login with their email and password
- 5) Complete the **Interactive Homework Assignment** with your child

If you have any difficulty accessing the interactive Arabic homework assignments or if you need me to resend your child's login credentials (i.e. username/email and password), please let me know. You can always send me a quick email through or visit me at the school.

Sincerely,

Mr. Sweileh, B.Ed.
Arabic Teacher / Grade 5 Homeroom Teacher





June 3, 2015

Dear Parents/Guardians,

I have uploaded the 9th **Interactive Arabic Homework Assignment** to Please have your child to demonstrate his/her Arabic learning to you by completing this assignment.

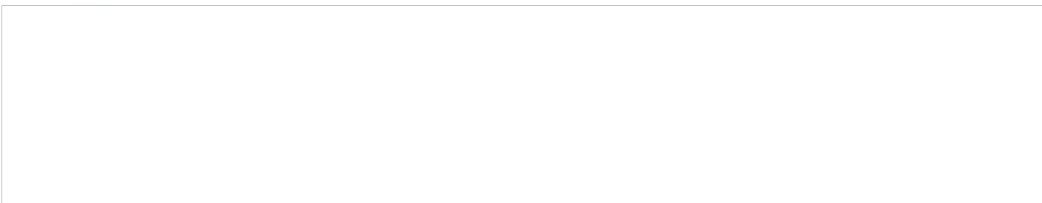
Below you will find some steps to access your child's interactive Arabic homework on (see the images on the back of this letter).

- 1) Go to
- 2) Click on "Interactive Arabic Homework"
- 3) Choose your child's grade level.
- 4) Have your child login with their email and password
- 5) Complete the **Interactive Homework Assignment** with your child

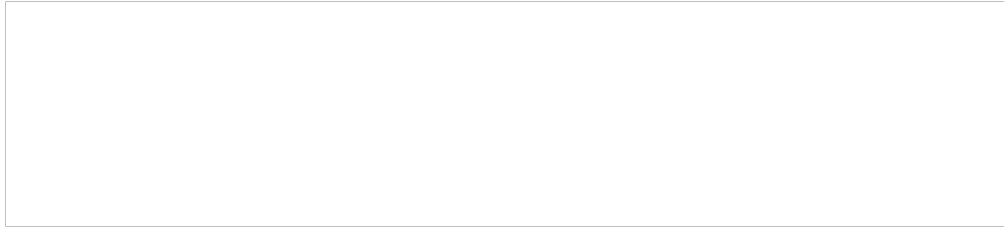
If you have any difficulty accessing the interactive Arabic homework assignments or if you need me to resend your child's login credentials (i.e. username/email and password), please let me know. You can always send me a quick email through or visit me at the school.

Sincerely,

Mr. Sweileh, B.Ed.
Arabic Teacher / Grade 5 Homeroom Teacher



Letter Informing Parents of the Release of Interactive Arabic Letters Course for Students



March 4, 2014

Dear Parents/Guardians,



I have released a new online Arabic course for students on This course will help students learn their Arabic alphabet.

Students will:

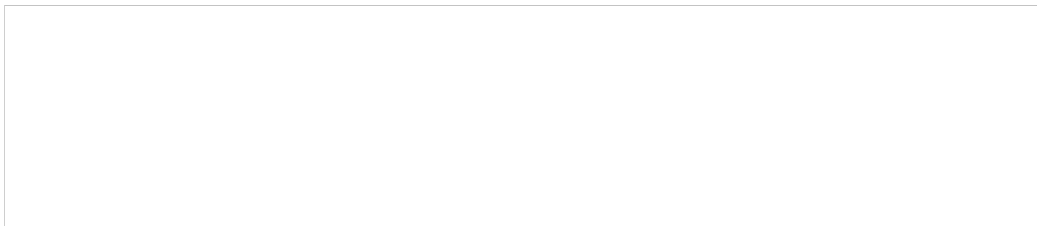
- Learn to name Arabic letters
- Learn to identify different Arabic letter forms
- Learn to read each Arabic letter combined with short and long vowels
- Learn to trace and write Arabic letters
- Learn new vocabulary that contain each letter
- Listen to and read interactive storybooks containing the learned vocabulary

To access the new course on please follow the steps outlined on the back of this letter.

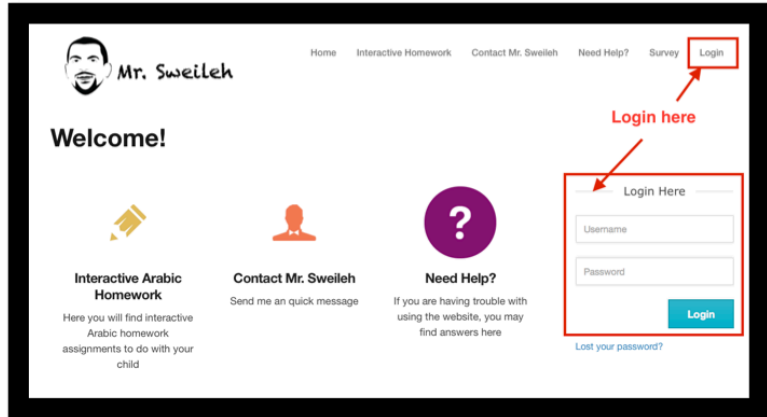


Sincerely,

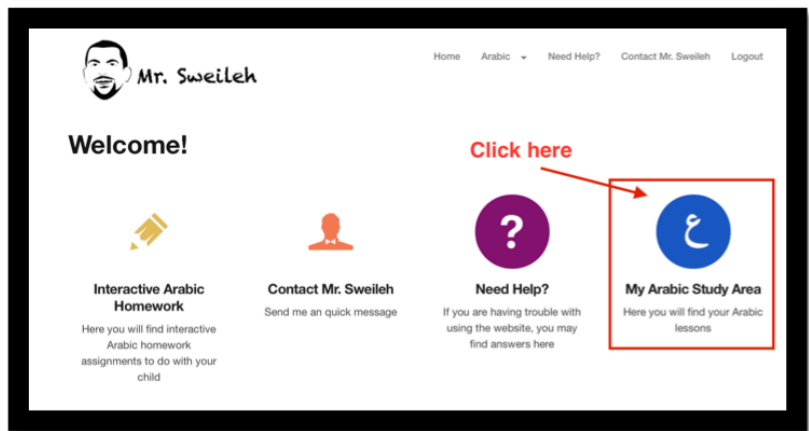
Mr. Sweileh, B.Ed.
Arabic Teacher / Grade 5 Homeroom Teacher



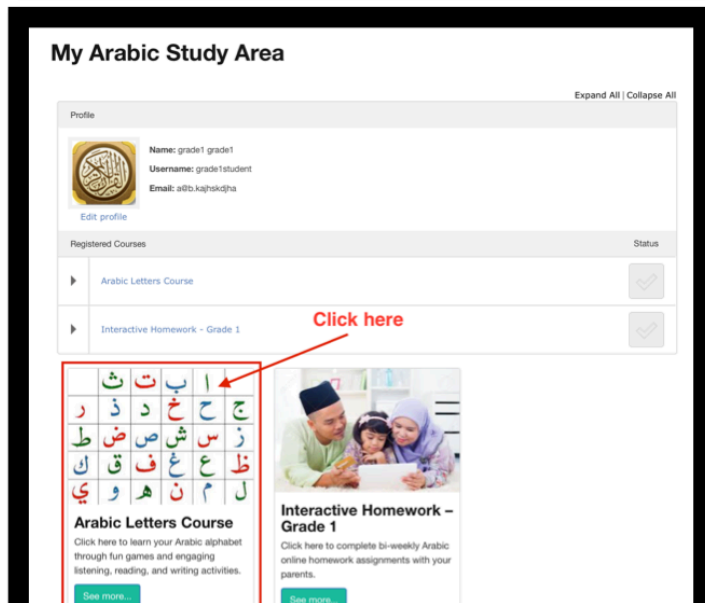
Step 1



Step 2



Step 3



Letter Inviting Parents to a Second Information Session on Online Arabic Learning

March 4, 2014

Dear Parents/Guardians,

At this month's parent meeting, **on Wednesday March 11 at 6PM**, there will be a **special update** for **all** parents about **online Arabic learning** at

At this meeting, I hope to:

- Update you on the status of online Arabic learning
- Show you the latest Arabic learning modules that students are working on
- Give you a sneak peak of the upcoming online Arabic course for parents
- Answer any questions you may have

Moreover, students from various grade levels will be showcasing their Arabic learning via songs, poems, and presentations.

I would be honored if you could attend this important meeting and encourage other parents to attend as well. I am sure it will be very entertaining, practical, and helpful for everyone.

Thank you so much for supporting your child's Arabic learning. Should you need to contact me for any reason, you can always reach me at the school by phone at or by email at

Sincerely,

Mr. Sweileh, B.Ed.
Arabic Teacher / Grade 5 Homeroom Teacher

Sample Slides from Presentation to Parents during the Second Information Session on Online Arabic Learning






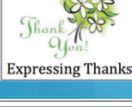
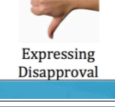

Online Arabic Learning: Update

- Added new "Arabic Letters Course" for all students. Can be accessed on
- It aims at teaching students to master their letters and build basic vocabulary and literacy in Arabic.
- It includes many interactive games and engaging learning activities


Online Parent Arabic Course

- The focus of this course is functional and communicational.
- It will contain similar interactive activities
- **To be released before spring break inshallah.**
- If you are interested, please fill out the sign up forms and I will contact you via email when the course opens

Figure 35: Slides showing the updating parents about the new online Arabic letters course for students and the new online Arabic learning module for parents

 Greetings	 Farewells	 Making a Request
 Expressing Love and Affection	Communicative Functions	 Giving Directions
 Expressing Thanks	 Expressing Disapproval	 Apologizing

Making Requests in English


More Polite

Excuse me, if it is no trouble at all, could you kindly get me some water, please?

Could you kindly get me some water, please?

Could I have some water, please?

Can I have some water, please?

I would like water, please.


I would like water.







I want water, please.

I want water.

Give me water.

Water!


Less Polite

	← Less Polite	More Polite	
	← Day	Night	
	← Younger	Older	







	← Less Emotion	More Emotion	
	← Less Formal	More Formal	
	← Complete Stranger	Family Members	

Figure 36: Slides showing the communicative approach followed in the online Arabic learning module for parents as well as language ladders

Letter Inviting Parents to Enroll in the Online Arabic Learning Module

April 7, 2015

Dear Parents/Guardians,

I have just released the new online Arabic course for **parents** on This course will help you learn everyday conversational Arabic.

In this course, we will:

- Learn basic communicative functional Arabic used in everyday conversations
- Learn common Arabic vocabulary used in everyday speech
- Get exposed to some common Arabic grammatical rules
- Become familiar with Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) and colloquial spoken Arabic
- Identify some cultural elements that characterize Arabic language and speech

To access the new course on please follow the steps outlined on the back of this letter.

Sincerely,

Mr. Sweileh, B.Ed.
Arabic Teacher / Grade 5 Homeroom Teacher

Step 1

Go to

Step 2

Mr. Sweileh

Home Arabic Homework Contact Mr. Sweileh Need Help? **Parent Course** Login

Welcome!

Click here →

Interactive Arabic Homework
Here you will find interactive Arabic homework assignments to do with your child

Contact Mr. Sweileh
Send me an quick message

Need Help?
If you are having trouble with using the website, you may find answers here

Login Here

Username

Password

Login

[Lost your password?](#)

Step 3

Parent Online Arabic Course

If you are a parent of a child in [] and are interested in learning Arabic online, then you have come to the right place. I have designed this course specifically for you.

In this course, we will learn basic everyday communicative Arabic. I hope that after finishing this course, you will be able to use Arabic more often at home to speak with your child.

By visiting this page, you have just taken your first step in learning Arabic online! To get started, please click on the green 'Take this course' button below.

Click here →

Take this Course

Course Content Expand All Collapse All

Lessons	Status
1 03 - Getting Started!	

Step 4

Please complete the registration form to get access to the course. All you need is to enter your full name and your email address in the fields below. I look forward to seeing you online!

Name *

Please enter your full name below:

First

Last

Email *

Please enter your full email address below:

Password *

Please create a password that you will use when logging on to []

Enter Password

Confirm Password

Submit

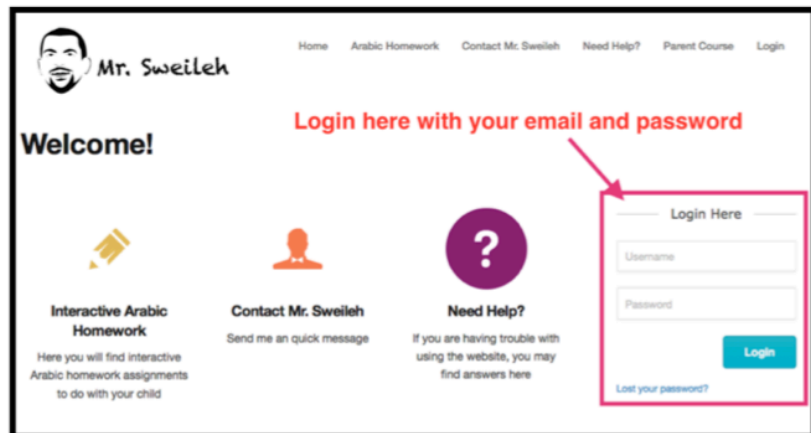
Register for the course by filling out this form with your full name, email, and password. You can create your own password.

Step 5

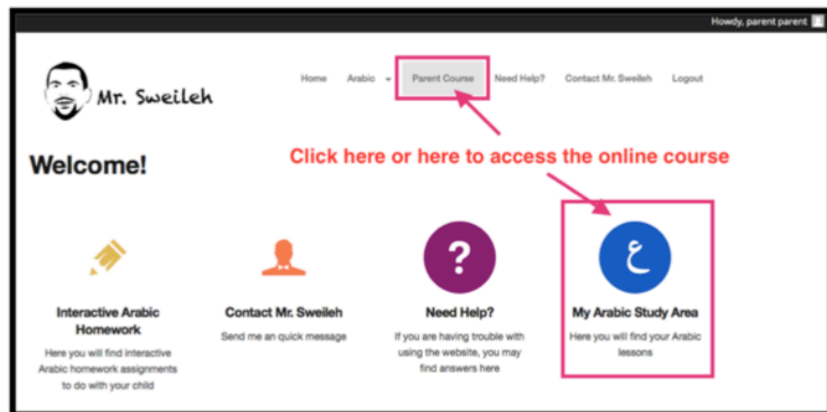
Go to your email account and find the confirmation email that has been sent to you from . Confirm your registration.



Step 6



Step 7



Letter Inviting Parents to Complete the End-of-Year Parent Survey

June 16, 2015

Dear Parents/Guardians,

[] it has been an exciting year of Arabic learning at []
We all experimented with online Arabic learning and interactive homework assignments on []

What did you think of the online Arabic learning experiences that were designed and newly implemented at [] this year? Were they helpful? Were they conducive to student learning? How can they be improved?

Please let me know what you think. I would greatly appreciate your feedback. Please complete the attached surveys and share your experiences and thoughts with me. There are **two** surveys attached: one for each parent/guardian.

Please note that completing the surveys is voluntary. If you decide to complete the surveys, **please return them before June 26.**

Your responses will help us build on this year's efforts and improve online Arabic learning at [] in the future.

Thank you for supporting your child's Arabic learning. []

Sincerely,

Mr. Sweileh, B.Ed.
Arabic Teacher / Grade 5 Homeroom Teacher

Appendix J – Snapshots of New Interactive Arabic Letters Course for Students

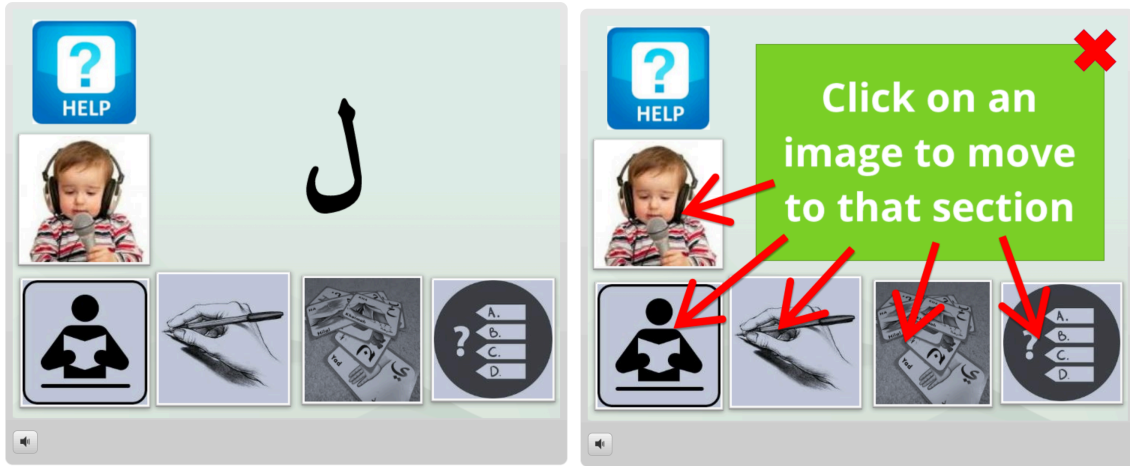


Figure 37: Snapshots showing the main menu of the online Arabic letters course and the help overlay that appear when clicking the help box

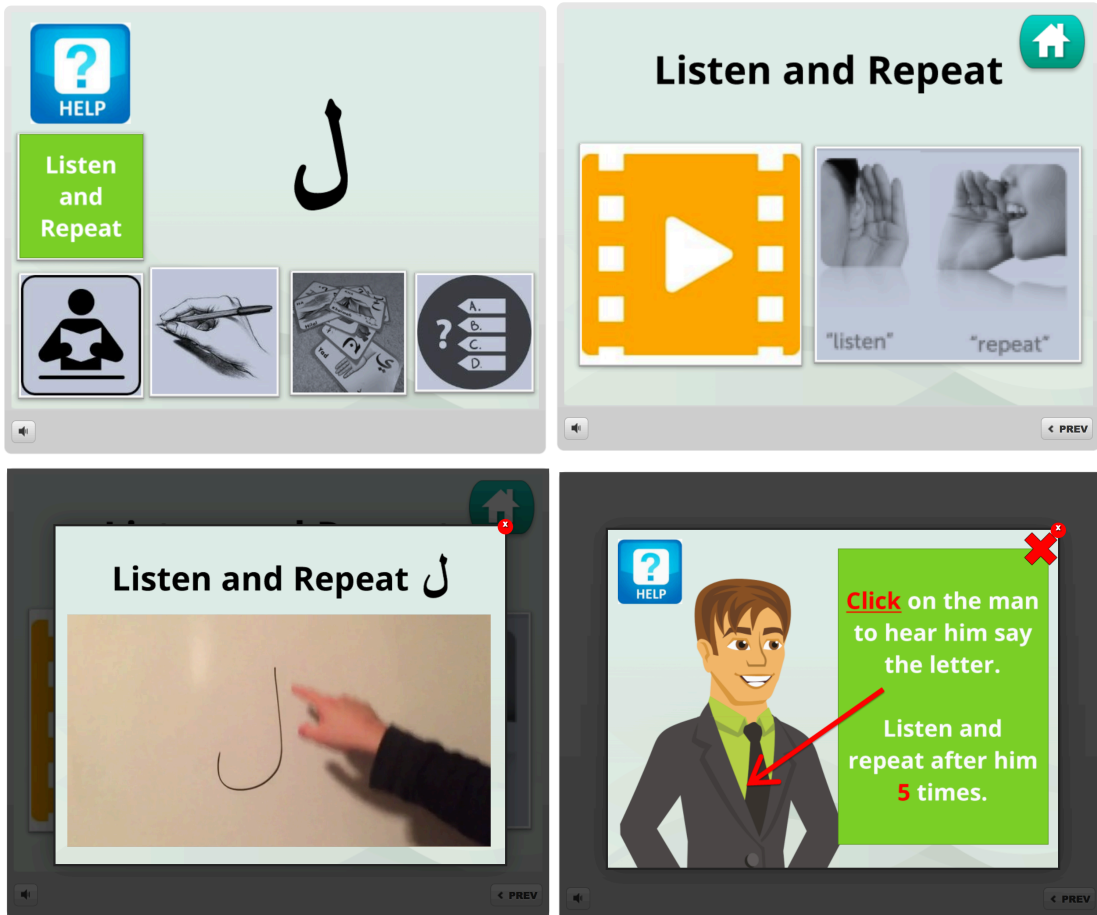


Figure 38: Snapshots of interactive learning activities for pronouncing Arabic letter *Laam*

Appendix K – Study Recruitment Letter and Consent Form

CONSENT FORM END OF SCHOOL-YEAR PARTICIPATION

Instructional Technology, Parental Empowerment, and Arabic Language Learning

You are invited to be in a research study that examines the extent to which instructional technology can empower parents in supporting their children's Arabic language learning at home. You were selected as a possible participant because your "child" was enrolled in an Arabic Language and Culture course at [] this year.

Please note that for the purposes of this study, "parent" is defined as any individual who plays a parental role in the household, and "child" is synonymous with "student".

By volunteering to participate in the study, you would be asked to:

- 1) Allow us to include into our study results parent and student research data collected from your involvement in your child's Arabic language learning at [] this year. Such research data may include (but is not limited to):
 - **survey data** about your own linguistic history, your sense of empowerment in supporting your child's Arabic language learning at home, and your child's perception of your level of involvement in supporting his/her Arabic language learning at home;
 - **learning management system (LMS) and learning record store (LRS) tracking data** collected in relation to your child's Arabic language learning this year as well as your own (if you took the Arabic "crash-course")
 - **interactive Arabic homework assignment data**, which may include VoiceThread recordings and post-assignment survey data.
 - **communication logs** for any online interaction that took place on the Arabic LMS in relation to this study, which may include (but is not limited to) email conversations, instant messaging, voicemails, text- and voice-chat.
 - and audio recordings, transcriptions, and/or notes from **follow-up interviews and focus groups** conducted during the school year in relation to this study;
- 2) Consider taking part in follow-up interviews or focus group sessions to provide additional comments that may add more depth and richness to the data collected in this study.
- 3) Consider taking (or retaking) some surveys which were administered to parents this year to assess their sense of empowerment in relation to supporting their children's Arabic language learning at home.

This study is conducted by the Arabic Language and Culture teacher at [],
Belal Sweileh.

Background Information

The purpose of this study is to investigate the extent to which instructional technology can effectively empower parents so that they feel more capable of supporting their children's Arabic language learning at home. This study is being carried out in relation to the teaching and learning of Arabic Language and Culture at _____ this year and it will provide valuable insight on the role instructional technology (such as LMSs, LRSs, Web 2.0 tools, etc.) can play in empowering parents and increasing their involvement in their children's Arabic learning. We are asking you to share your experiences with the instructional technology used this year and how it may have affected your sense of empowerment and involvement in your child's Arabic learning so that we may in turn pass this knowledge on to educational stakeholders in Canada and abroad.

Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study

The study does not have any known risks. There are no immediate benefits for you for participating in the study, but you may benefit from the opportunity to further reflect on matters related to the research topic. Broader benefits of the study include the improvement teaching of Arabic Language and Culture at _____ or other second language courses elsewhere. The results from this study may be presented at academic conferences and in academic journals. The results will also be made available to you. If you wish to receive a detailed study report, please e-mail Belal Sweileh at _____

Voluntary Nature of the Study

Your decision about participation in the study will not affect your current or future relationship with us, the University of Alberta, or _____. If you participate, you are free to withdraw by informing us within one month following your provision of consent. Since it is not possible to always identify individual participants' data in a focus group and because of the interactive nature of the discussion, it is not possible to withdraw your focus group data, but you may refrain from responding to any questions that you do not wish to answer.

Confidentiality

Information that you contribute to the study will be kept private. In any articles we might publish, we will not include any information that will make it possible to identify you. Research records will be kept in a file in a locked office, and only the researcher will have access to the records. All digital files or data associated with personal identifiers will be stored in a password-protected and encrypted file on the computer or in a secure password-protected online database owned by the researcher. The interviews and focus group sessions will be audio recorded, with your permission, to assist us in accurately recording your comments and perceptions on your own parental empowerment with relation to your Arabic language learning. If you do not want to be audio recorded, we will take detailed notes instead. Only the researcher will have access to the audio recordings. The master list linking your name to interview recordings and transcripts will be destroyed at the end of the data collection phase. If you choose to participate in the study, we guarantee that we will respect your anonymity and confidentiality. If you take part in a focus group, we ask you to respect all the participants' anonymity and confidentiality as well, but we cannot guarantee it.

Contacts and Questions:

The researcher conducting this study is Belal Sweileh. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you may contact Belal Sweileh at or

Questions about your rights as a research participant may be directed to the University of Alberta Research Ethics Office at telephone number (780) 492-2615.

You will be given a copy of this form to keep for your records.

Statement of Consent:

I consent to participate in this study. I have read the above information and have been given the opportunity to ask questions about the research.

Full Name _____

Signature _____ Date _____

Signature of Investigator _____ Date _____