

## THE ROLE OF EDUCATION IN THE MAINTENANCE OF ARABIC LANGUAGE AMONG THE ARABIC-SPEAKING COMMUNITY IN THE REGIONAL CITY OF TOOWOOMBA, AUSTRALIA

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### Abstract

This paper seeks to investigate the role of the education as an important factor that may contribute to the maintenance of Arabic language within the Arabic-speaking community in the regional Queensland city of Toowoomba, Australia. A qualitative approach was utilized in order to explore the language maintenance phenomenon through engaging in the everyday life of the Arabic speakers. Data was collected through participant observations and in-depth semi-structured interviews with 20 adults who were selected using a mixed purposeful sampling strategy. The findings of this study show that the Arabic language is well maintained among the Arabic speakers because of the role of Arabic in religion and Islamic schools. The conclusions of this study are envisaged to enrich the knowledge and theories of language maintenance, as well as redesigning the multilingualism and multiculturalism structure of the Australian society.

**Keywords:** Language Maintenance, Community Language, Education, Arabic language.

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### 1. Background

Australia has always been recognized by its linguistic and cultural diversity practised by the Indigenous inhabitants. It is reported that there were more than 600 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages during the British settlement in Australia (Hatoss, 2013). Unfortunately, most of these languages have disappeared and the number has diminished to only 150 languages, due to the settlers' conflict with the Indigenous people and the early death of Indigenous people from epidemic diseases (Holmes, 2013) as well as assimilation pressures (Clyne, 1991). More recently, the linguistic situation in Australia has been entirely amended and reshaped with another 150 immigrant languages, other than English, which were brought by immigrants from all over the globe. In spite of such huge linguistic and cultural diversity, with over 300 languages spoken by Indigenous Australians and immigrants, Australia remains a mostly monolingual society where most of the population speaks English as the majority and *de facto* official language (Beykont, 2010; Holmes, 2013; Rubino, 2010).

On the basis of the 2011 Census of the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), 81% of the Australian population speak English at home, and this number has decreased slightly from 86% in 1986 (ABS, 2011). That implies that less than 20% of people speak their native language at home, and this little number may alert us to the fact that some languages are on the edge of language shift in Australia. Statistics from the same census indicate that: (1) The majority of immigrants are gradually losing their original languages (ABS, 2011); (2) Australia policies are unsuccessful in encouraging the maintenance and transmission of the original language across generations (Hatoss, 2013); and (3) Multiculturalism policies have failed to protect and promote minority languages (Cavallaro, 2005).

The purpose of this study is to explore language maintenance efforts, experiences and challenges confronting the Arabic-speaking community in the regional city of Toowoomba, Australia and to identify the major role of education as a crucial factor that may contribute to the maintenance of Arabic language within this community.

## **2.Literature review**

A number of studies have investigated the maintenance of the minority languages all over the globe, notably in multilingual and multicultural societies (Clyne, 2005; Rubino, 2010). The aim behind these studies is linked to the advocacy and preservation of ethnic minority and immigrant languages from an unexpected shift or loss (Garcia, 2003). However, little research was undertaken on the maintenance of Arabic language among Arabic-speaking immigrants (Abdalla, 2006; Martin, 2009; Sehlaoui, 2008). These studies are reviewed in this literature to get comprehensive perspectives on the role of the education as an important factor that may contribute to the Arabic language maintenance.

### **2.1 The role of education in Arabic language maintenance**

Many studies on language maintenance have found that the use of a community language in education contributed to the maintenance and development of a language (Rouchdy, 2013; Rubino, 2010). Rouchdy (2013) studied the Arabic language among the Arab Americans, and she referred to the importance of teaching Arabic as a foreign language in some public schools as well as the increase in enrolments in Arabic classes at universities. Conklin & Lourie (1983) claimed that a low education level restricted social and economic mobility, but they agreed that educated community leaders were loyal to the community language.

In the same context, Gomaa (2011) carried out research on the maintenance and transmission of Egyptian Arabic. He found that a higher educational level of the participants was among the essential factors for maintaining the Arabic language. He claimed that well-educated parents were more likely to be aware of the importance of Arabic for Egyptian and Islamic identity. Usually, well-educated parents had a positive attitude towards the maintenance of their community language.

### **2.2 Literacy in Arabic language**

Literacy in the community language helps children to develop their language proficiency and make them feel confident in using the language. However, literacy by itself does not guarantee the maintenance of the language, which implies the need for other language maintenance factors such as the role of the family and the community. As pointed out by Conklin and Lourie (1983), literacy can only be successful in maintaining and reinforcing the community language if the family continues to play its vital role in the home.

In the Australian context, it is pointed out by Rubino (2010), that there has been an emergence of Islamic schools for Arab and Muslim students to promote their Arabic usage and maintain its stability in the host country. The Arabic language is one of the top ten community languages other than English to be taught in the Australian schools (Clyne, 2005).

## **3.Methodology**

### **Participants**

In this qualitative study, the sample size was determined by the concept of saturation. The researcher was looking for the factors that may contribute to the maintenance of the Arabic language within the Arabic speaking community in the regional city of Toowoomba. The sample included 20 participants who were drawn purposefully from the community membership list at the Mosque.

A mixed purposeful sampling technique was used for recruiting 20 Arabic speakers from the mosque in the regional city of Toowoomba, Australia to participate in this study. First, the researcher conducted a purposive sampling technique at first in order to select 12 adult male participants from the membership list at the mosque. This list includes the population of about 1000 male adult individuals who are members of the mosque by paying annual membership fees. The Arabic speakers represent the majority at the Mosque.

The selection criteria for participation were: (1) adult first generation Arabic native speaker, (2) Arab in ethnicity, (3) married with at least one child. Second, eight female participants were recruited by a female research assistant using a snowballing technique. In this technique, each participant who agreed voluntarily to participate in this study was asked to identify other participants who met the selection criteria mentioned above and were willing to participate (Johnson & Christensen, 2012). The snowballing technique was utilized due to the difficulty in finding female participants since they do not regularly come to the mosque. Additionally, there were other constraints such as the religious and cultural concerns among Arabic speakers. In view of that, the researcher was obliged to appoint a female research assistant to recruit, interview and observe female participants.

With respect to their age, the majority are in their 30s; there are only four in their 40s and two in their late 20s. All the participants came to Australia in the last decade between 2006 and 2013. With regards to education, 90% of the participants were still students during the time the research was conducted. Among them, 35% were undertaking Ph.D. studies, 35% a Master's Degree, 25% a Bachelor of Arts Degree and 5% had a High School Certificate. A larger proportion came to study and subsequently preferred to settle down and live in Australia. However, there were only two male participants who were married to non-Arabic-speaking spouses. Their wives came from English-speaking countries: Australia and New Zealand.

#### **4. Data collection strategies**

Firstly, in order to answer the research questions, data were first gathered using in-depth, semi-structured interviews with the 20 Arabic speakers who met the sample selection criteria discussed in the "Participants" section.

Secondly, in order to learn more about the participants' perspectives and experience, data were collected through observation in which the researcher observes and take field notes from the participants' interaction in order to form a better understanding of the central phenomenon.

##### **4.1 Ethical considerations**

Approval for this research was gained from the Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) at the University of Southern Queensland, Australia. All ethical concerns about all aspects of this research were clearly explained to the participants verbally and it was also included in the participant information sheet, as well as in the consent form. Participants in this study were informed that their contribution was entirely voluntary and they had the full right to withdraw at any stage during the study without any consequences. Participants were informed that their identity would be protected by providing a pseudonym, rather than their actual names.

##### **4.2 Data analysis procedures**

In the current study, the researcher adopted the same steps for analysing the data that are outlined in Creswell's (2014) plan of analysis. This plan involves going through several steps: (1) organizing and preparing data for analysis, (2) reading through all the gathered information in order to acquire a general sense of it, (3) coding the data by detecting text segments and giving a code label to them, (4) representing the data in tables or charts to convey information about each participant, and (5) making an interpretation of the data and comparing the findings with information found in literature (Creswell, 2014). The researcher found this plan to be very comprehensive and an easy way of dealing with the big amount of raw data gathered. A thematic analysis was utilized in this study, which involved going through all of the following steps: organising, transcribing and coding the data, to extract themes and sub-themes which would represent the findings of this study. Figure 1 is a summary of qualitative data analysis plan which refers to these steps starting at the bottom:

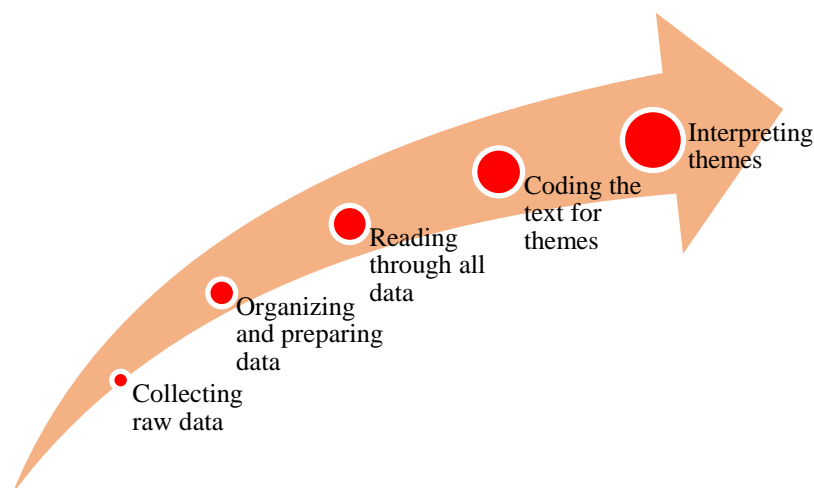


Figure 1: Qualitative Data Analysis Plan, Adapted from Creswell (2014)

## 5. Findings

This section describes the qualitative results that were uncovered through the use of in-depth semi-structured interviews and participant observations. The findings of this study are presented in two main sections: 1) general description of the sample, 2) description of the themes and sub-themes.

### 5.1 General description of the sample

The sample includes a total of 20 participants, 12 males and 8 females. This study did not intend to make a distinction or a comparison between male and female participants since there was no balanced sample, but rather to get a holistic understanding of the Arabic language maintenance from both genders' views.

Participants in this study came from different Arab countries, including the Middle East and North Africa. Seven were Libyan, six were Iraqi, two were Moroccan, two were Omani, one was Saudi, one was Kuwaiti, and one participant was Emirati. All participants were bilingual speakers of Arabic and English except for two participants who were multilingual. All the participants in this study were native speakers of Arabic, and Arab in ethnicity.

### 5.2 Description of the themes and sub-themes

The analysis of transcripts of both interviews and observations led to the emergence of several themes and sub-themes which contribute to the maintenance of Arabic among the Arabic-speaking community in the regional city of Toowoomba. In this section, the focus is on one theme which refers to the role of the education using the Arabic language as a medium of instruction.

#### 5.3 The role of education in the maintenance of the Arabic language

This theme is found to be one of the core factors that support the maintenance of Arabic language within the Arabic speaking community in the regional city of Toowoomba. The role of education as a major theme includes several sub-themes: 1) lack of Arabic schools, 2) importance of Arabic schools, 3) teaching Arabic at home by parents 4) teaching strategies, and 5) teaching Arabic by volunteers. Figure 2 is a summary of this theme and its related sub-themes emerging from data analysis:

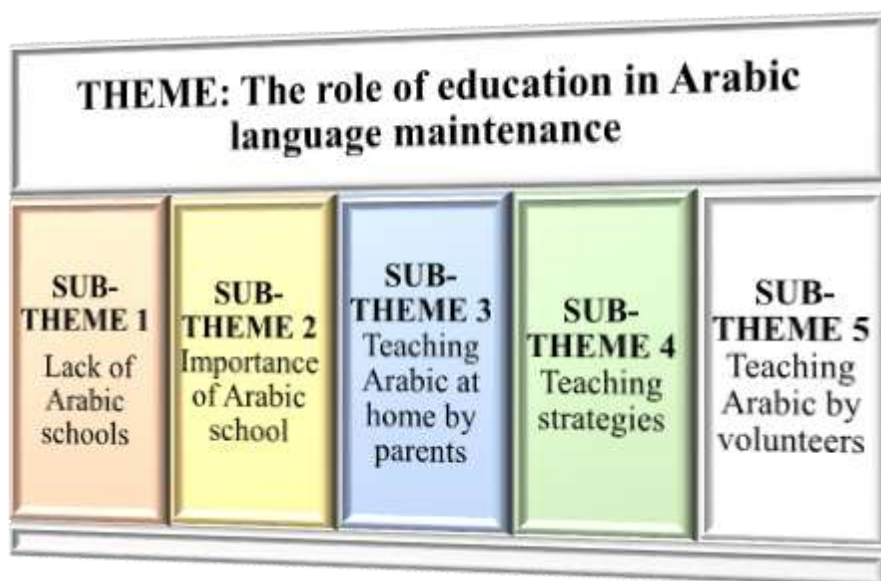


Figure 2: The role of education in the maintenance of Arabic language

#### 5.4 The lack of Arabic schools– Theme 1, sub-theme 1

This sub-theme emerged in all participants' transcripts during the interview analysis in response to the question: Do your children learn Arabic at school?, All the participants in this study reported the lack of Arabic schools in the regional city of Toowoomba and their children went to English state schools. The following statements are examples reflecting the participants' thoughts about the unavailability of Arabic schools:

*There is no Arabic school; they go to state schools, the majority of them going to state schools. (S2M)*

*No, there is nothing in Toowoomba; there is no facility in Toowoomba that helps children to learn Arabic as a language, unfortunately. (S5M)*

*No, because they go to childcare, so all in English. (S13F)*

According to these statements, it seems that English was the only medium of instruction in Toowoomba state schools since there were no Arabic schools or even an Arabic subject to integrate into the English curriculum. Conversely, some other participants said that there were other community languages taught along with the English language, such as Indonesian, Chinese and Japanese language.

*No school, that is the problem in Toowoomba, because Toowoomba is a small town, the government of Australia can look about that because at school here, kids, some teachers teach Chinese, Japanese. But if some people, we have Somali people, a big community in Toowoomba, an Arabic community in Toowoomba, come from Sudanese, Arabic people, from Libyan, from Algeria, from everywhere. (S4M)*

*I would really prefer my children to study Arabic at the school. Like there is lesson in Indonesian class and there is ah, I forgot what other language, but they do not teach Arabic at the school and I thought that was a little bit ah worry me, make me worry me. (S14F)*

The participants raised a significant concern in which some community languages were taught in Toowoomba while the rest were deprived of a bilingual education. This type of education was not accessible for all the immigrant languages in this multilingual and multicultural society. The few languages mentioned by the participants were all Asian languages with great economic influence and benefits in Australia. This concern was part of the research problem of this study.

In the same context, participants indicated another issue: the availability of Arabic and Islamic schools in big cities such as Brisbane, Melbourne and Sydney, but not in small regional centres such as Toowoomba. The following excerpts expressed their thoughts:

*Not in Toowoomba, maybe in Brisbane or the big cities Sydney or Melbourne. (S2M)*  
*No. No, they do not have. Not in Toowoomba. I hear some friends have it in Brisbane or down in Sydney. They have their own Arabic curriculum and Arabic lessons and religion and Muslim lessons but not in Toowoomba. (S15F)*

These comments highlighted the difference between the regional areas and the big cities in terms of bilingual education. Arabic schools exist in big urban cities, but not in regional and remote areas. This implies that Arabic-speaking children who live in urban cities have more opportunities to learn the Arabic language than those who reside in rural areas. This sort of problem puts some parents under the pressure to find a solution to how to get access to Arabic education. Some Arab families refused to join their friends in rural areas while others wanted to leave their community to go to the big cities. The following participants' statements explained this concern:

*I know that some Arabic families, they do not prepare to come to Toowoomba or USQ [university name] because there is no Arabic school here. That is also another community concern. That is a big concern when we always meet other parents; we talk about this concern because that is a really big problem. (S14F)*

*I am thinking of going to another city where there are Arabic schools, and my son will be five years old soon, and I want him to learn Arabic. We are here to be developed, not to lose our religion; I need him to read the Qur'an and perform the prayers. (S17F)*  
*I have to depend on myself [in teaching his children]. Otherwise, I have to live in big cities; they have Arabic schools. (S10M)*

From this potential concern about the education in Arabic, it was apparent that the Arabic-speaking families were conscious of the importance of the education in their native language. The last comment was made by a male participant (S10M) who demonstrated his sense of responsibility by relying on himself to teach the Arabic language to his children because he had no choice in the absence of Arabic schools.

### **5.5 The importance of Arabic schools– Theme 1, sub-theme 2**

Despite the lack of Arabic schools in the regional city of Toowoomba, all the participants admitted to the importance of teaching Arabic, as well as the importance of having Arabic schools. The latter could provide great help to the parents seeking to transmit the Arabic language to their children. The following excerpts reflected the participants' desires and views about the importance of having Arabic schools in Toowoomba:

*If there are Arabic schools, it is going to help the parents, is gonna to help the children, is gonna to help even non-Arabic speakers who are interested to learn Arabic, which is a good opportunity for them to learn Arabic, this is many advantages at this point actually. (S1M)*

*It is very important to have Arabic school. At least I want my children to maintain their Arabic. Look, they will be affected by TV, radio, school, street, shopping, transport, so how they learn Arabic? If it is the only home environment, it won't be enough; however, it will be great and helpful if we have Arabic schools, to help at least shared the job with us. (S10M)*

In the same sense, some of the statements made by the participants focused on the importance of bilingual education, to teach English alongside with the Arabic language. The following two participants identified the importance of both languages:

*Yes, actually, if there is a school that has Arabic class, it will be very helpful because the boys or girls, they will get both the language and both languages are important, the English language is important to communicate with English speakers, and the Arabic*

language is good to communicate with the Arab people speakers. Yeah, it is important. (S9M)

Yes, I think so. Very important. Yeah, because it is their mother tongue, what's it called? Their first language I like them to be fluent I like them to be fluent in English as well, but like I told you Arabic is the most important things here in Australia and like I told you English is here so it is very important to keep them speak Arabic. (S13F)

In short, the interview analysis revealed that all the participants desired to have Arabic schools, or even an Arabic class included in the Australian educational curriculum as a form of bilingual education in their city. This sub-theme appeared to be paramount for all the participants since education was one of the challenges they still faced in Toowoomba.

### **5.6 Teaching Arabic at home by parents – Theme 1, sub-theme 3**

In response to the question: Since there are no schools, what do you do to teach your children?, several participants asserted that teaching Arabic to their children is the responsibility of the parents at home. Parents have to become teachers and they have no choice but to teach Arabic to their children to fill the gap in Arabic teachers as well as Arabic schools. Excerpts from interviews are presented below:

*It is just what you do; you are pretty much the only teacher they have when it comes to learning the language. You are the parents; you are the only teacher. (S5M)*

*At the weekend, especially at the weekend, after lunch, my wife is doing some schedules for them to teach them the Arabic language for different subjects, I mean science, Qur'an, Math. (S9M)*

Some participants reported that teaching Arabic at home was very important, but that they found it a very hard task. Home does not provide classroom interaction where the children can meet and engage in conversation. The following statements from the interviews reflect participants' thoughts:

*... Ah, I have got friends that have children at school age, and they try and teach them at home Arabic, but they do not apply themselves like they do at school. I feel it is very helpful if they find Arabic like at school with other kids, and they will like experience a real class with a teacher, and they will acquire so quickly. At home, it will be hard (laughter). (S13F)*

*Yeah, that's good you know because I have some Libyan friends, and they are trying to teach their children Arabic and you know life is busy, so it is difficult to keep that up so if it was at school that would be an advantage. (S16F)*

*Actually, I decided on the weekend; ah give them some activity to write letters, some words, now this one is very good in writing Arabic letters, it still took time, because they will continue their learning in Libya when we are returning. (S18F)*

Participants identified in their statements above that teaching children at home was not an easy task. According to them, the home education could never replace the interactive role of the classroom environment, but it could narrow the gap of its absence by providing their children with some Arabic classes at least on the weekend. This was a daily challenge for the Arabic-speaking parents in Toowoomba, trying to teach Arabic to their second generation children at home.

### **5.7 Teaching strategies implemented by parents– Theme 1, sub-theme 4**

Participants in this research were responsible parents who implemented different teaching strategies to maintain the Arabic language and transmit it to their children. Translation is one of the teaching strategies used by the Arabic-speaking parents as illustrated in the participants' statements below:

*You can show these things, its name, that named by Arabic and these things, when you say "sit down" by Arabic or "coming" by the Arabic language, she can understand that we use the Arabic words to learn these basic words. (S2M)*

*Yeah, mostly I have made some simple classes for them at home, yes to teach them the alphabet, the Arabic alphabet, and how they can learn the numbers; they can say them in English (Telephone rings). And, uh uh I like that even I have started them the Qur'an and teaching them some of the short Surahs (verses) ah to memorise them. (S3M)*

*I teach them because I have books in Arabic at home, sometimes; I go to Arabic books online, like 'Apple' is 'Tofaha' in Arabic, 'Apple' in English always translation. (S4M)*

One of the participants reported a different teaching strategy than the rest of the participants, which was based on reading stories. He also taught his children how to read the Qur'an properly. He stated that children can learn through daily practice. He said:

*Well, with cooperation with my wife, we are giving them some reading stories at home and doing also some reading practice sometimes besides Qurqan [Qur'an] practice, and actually it is not easy for them to read the language since they are practicing it every day. (S11M)*

Another teaching strategy mentioned by half of the female participants in this study was starting with letters (Alphabet). The following are female participants' statements describing their teaching strategy:

*His dad has started to print some Arabic letters to him so he can start to follow and be familiar with that. In childcare, they start to show them the English letters so just we have started to show him the Arabic letters as well. (S13F)*

*Actually, I decided on the weekend; ah give them some activity to write like letters, some words, now this one is very good in writing Arabic letters. (S18F)*

*We start to teach them Arabic at home and start to show them the letters. (S19F)*  
*Face-to-face conversation and Arabic cartoons and showing her letters. (S20F)*

Another participant noted the importance of teaching writing to the children. According to him, writing was far more important than speaking only. He stated that many children of immigrants could speak, but unfortunately, some of them could not read and write. He said:  
*So, I think it is, and if you are going to achieve them, in my experience here, if you try to make them writing by heart, so you give them words and write it... For instance "kafya halluk", that means "How are you", ah, write it. Writing is more important than speaking because I have seen some samples here, they speak Arabic, but they have forgotten to write in Arabic and even if you give them a book they cannot read. That is why I am focusing on writing and reading. That gives them experience in practising the Arabic language rather than verbally. (S1M)*

Three participants reported that they taught their children by using the Arabic books from their home country to follow the same teaching curriculum adopted there. The following excerpts from these participants express their thoughts:

*...because my father, he was the grandfather of the boys, he sent them Arabic subjects, books, which is some of the subjects that are already depending on the Iraqi school. (S9M)*

*Well, I tried my best. I even took some books from my country ah to teach them Arabic I tried my best with them and I didn't do a really good job. (S14F)*

*Well, first of all I have contacted my family in my home country and they have sent me a link of the Minister of Education and they put the Arabic curriculum on the web. So I print it out and take it home and tell them they need to spend an hour every weekend learning Arabic. (S15F)*

The teaching strategies mentioned above by the participants such as translation, teaching writing and reading, the alphabet, books and adopting an Arabic curricula from their Arab countries, reflected their efforts and challenges to maintain their community language and transmit it to their children in an English dominated environment.



### 5.8 Teaching Arabic by Arab volunteers– Theme 1, sub-theme 5

The lack of Arabic schools in Toowoomba created a sense of solidarity and collaboration within the Arabic-speaking community. Some volunteer teachers showed their enthusiasm to help the children of the community and teach them the Arabic language. The following excerpts from the transcripts explain that:

*My wife, she is a volunteer or she is working as a volunteer, she is teaching some kids in Arabic, ah, she picks one day, that is her ability to teach them one hour or half or two hours a week, and for our kids at home, she tries every day to encourage them by reading a story or listening to a story, this is actually our strategy at home. (S1M)*

*... As far as I know there are some you know some families here who just hold Arabic classes. Yeah! So you can take your son to, you know, to these houses and there are some Arabic teachers who can just teach him for one hour yeah. Yes, because they do not find Arabic here so there are some people are looking for opportunities, just not to forget Arabic you know, so they some people trying to make classes for Arabic in order to help others. (S12M)*

*There are some women who are trying to teach the children Arabic and teach the other citizens to speak Arabic and teach them how to read the Qur'an. (S16F)*

The analysis of the interview data revealed that members of the Arabic-speaking community are working together with their available means to teach their children the Arabic language at home. All participants commented on the role of education using Arabic. This theme seemed to be imperative for all the participants. All of them expressed their desire to have Arabic or bilingual schools where their children could learn Arabic.

## 6. Discussion

The first observable limitation in this qualitative ethnographic inquiry is related to the generalization of the findings. The aim of this investigation was to explore the experiences and challenges of the Arabic-speaking community rather than to generalize to a larger population. The role of education using the community language has been found to be crucial in the field of language maintenance, according to several linguists (Rouchdy, 2013; Rubino, 2010).

### 6.1 The role of education in the maintenance of the Arabic language

All participants reported the lack of Arabic schools in Toowoomba and that their children went to English schools. Some parents saw this as a significant issue for the future of their children. Barni & Extra, (2008) mentioned that “community languages such as Arabic in the Australian context are generally not well represented in their school sector” (p. 304). This claim has been confirmed by Hatoss (2013), who argues that the lack of institutional supports, such as schools, to teach the immigrant languages in Australia is a real issue facing the great desire of immigrants to maintain their languages.

In this study, some participants mentioned during the interviews that the Arabic language was being taught in big urban cities like Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane. Most of these schools were private schools established by the Arab community in those areas. Arabic is also taught as a subject in some Australian state schools (ABS, 2011). Generally speaking, however, English is still the dominant language of instruction in Australia, and this can cause a decline in developing children’s home language (Verdon, McLeod & Winsler, 2014). Considering the status of Arabic, as the third most common spoken language in Australia and the first widely spoken minority language at home in Toowoomba (ABS, 2011), it is not well-represented in schools throughout the host country.

However, despite the lack of Arabic schools in Toowoomba, parents were aware of the importance of education in the Arabic language. They brought their children to the mosque to benefit from after school classes and weekend classes. This finding is in line with Fishman’s (1991) model in which the formal education of the group is a key factor in

supporting the vitality of the community language. Also, it is a good opportunity for creating new institutions serving the maintenance of the language.

In the same context of education, it is worth mentioning that there are some volunteer teachers within the Arabic-speaking community who devote their time and efforts to teaching children the Arabic language. Most of these volunteers are educated women and they teach Arabic-speaking children for a few hours a week at their homes. Usually, they design their own programs based on the curriculum brought from their homeland to fit with the level of the children living here. They start with the basics such as the Arabic Alphabet, numbers and memorization of some verses of the Qur'an, before teaching them how to write and read in Arabic. These female Arabic speakers' awareness of the importance of the Arabic language in their everyday life focused their attention to helping the children of the community maintain their Arabic language and culture.

To sum up, education is an important factor for the maintenance of the Arabic language, but it is not sufficient by itself, and it requires the involvement of other language maintenance factors (e.g., family and community) for success. Despite the absence of schooling in the Arabic language to serve the needs of this community in Toowoomba, Arabic language is still actively maintained with the support of the Muslim community at the mosque. This contradicts Baker (2011) to some extent, who stated that the non-existence of schooling in a minority language will negatively affect the survival of the language.

### **7. Limitation of the study**

The observable limitation as noted by the participants in this study regarding the education in the community language is related to the absence of Arabic schools that can teach their children Arabic language. Thus, the lack of schooling in the Arabic language is a significant concern for the Arabic-speaking community. The majority of the Arabic speakers in this study reported that their language maintenance efforts at home could never replace schools as there is no interaction between children. They also reported a lack of Arabic books in Australia and that these books are very expensive to obtain from overseas. It is interesting to note that the Arabic-speaking children learn Arabic language only at the mosque every weekend or during the school holidays. Arabic-speaking parents did wish that their children were taught in a formal way using an official teaching curriculum and strategies, which happens in many countries and in private institutions in the big cities.

### **Conclusion**

The findings of this study suggest that education in the community language is essential for the intergenerational language maintenance and transmission. However, the Arabic-speaking children are disadvantaged in the city of Toowoomba in terms of the availability of bilingual and Arabic schools.

Thus, the findings related to the maintenance of Arabic language in the regional city of Toowoomba are of value in enhancing the linguistic and cultural diversity in the Australian context. It may also contribute to the changing multilingual and multicultural structure of Australian society. Moreover, this study is intended to attract linguists' and educators' attention and to stimulate them to place more value on small isolated ethno-linguistic groups in their future research. At a practical level, this research may contribute to Australian multilingualism and multiculturalism by advocating the rights of small immigrant communities to be recognized. This study has found that there is an absolute need for Arabic schools or at least to include the Arabic language in the Australian educational curriculum for the growing number of Arabic speakers. The author, as a member of the community, suggests that the Arabic language should be introduced into schools, particularly in Toowoomba, in response to the growing number of the Arabic speakers.

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