



دور الدافعية في تعلم اللغة العربية لتعزيز الكفاءة التواصلية لدى  
الطلاب الأمريكيين العرب

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***The Role of Motivation in Learning Arabic Language to  
Enhance Communicative Competence by Arab American  
Students***

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## المستخلص

تلعب اللغة ، باعتبارها الوسيلة الرئيسية للتواصل بين البشر ، دوراً حاسماً في فهم العالم من حولنا والتعبير عنه. بسبب هذه الأهمية الأساسية للغة في حياة البشر ، فقد تم التحقيق فيها من أبعاد مختلفة مثل التركيب والعمليات السليمة والجوانب الثقافية. الجانب المركزي للغة التي تم فحصها في الورقة الحالية هو جانب متعدد اللغات لدوافع العرب الأمريكيين ويتم استخدام الاستراتيجيات لتعلم لغة ثانية ، والتي يمكن الإشارة إليها باسم الكفاءة التواصلية. شارك اثنان من المشاركين في هذه الدراسة. المشارك الأول طالبة من فلسطين والثاني طالب عراقي. جاء كلا المشاركين إلى الولايات المتحدة عندما كانا طفلين. هذه دراسة حالة نوعية ، استقصاء ظواهر عن دوافع الطلاب الأمريكيين العرب لتعلم اللغة العربية كلغة أجنبية أو لغة ثانية على المستوى الجامعي في جنوب شرق الولايات المتحدة. تم استخدام ثلاث طرق رئيسية لجمع البيانات. أولاً ، إجراء مقابلة مع كل واحد من المشاركين الاثنان لمدة ٣٠-٤٥ دقيقة. ثانياً ، مراقبة المشاركين في قسم اللغة واللغويات الحديثة بجامعة ولاية فلوريدا ، الذين كانوا يشاركون في الفصل الذي احتفظ الباحث به بالأفكار الميدانية. تم تنظيم كل ملاحظة باتباع تنسيق اميرسون وفرتز ووشون ١٩٩٥ . ثالثاً ، أخذ الباحثون في الاعتبار منهج مقرر اللغة العربية كوثيقة لتحليلها. تم نسخ كل مقابلة ، ثم تم تحليل جميع المقابلات والملاحظات والمناهج الدراسية وترميزها في موضوعات لمعرفة أي اتجاهات أو علاقات بين الطلاب الأمريكيين العرب ودوافعهم لتعلم اللغة العربية. في ضوء نتائج الدراسة ، تم تقديم العديد من التوصيات المفيدة المتعلقة بمتعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية ، والمدرسين ، ومصممي المناهج الدراسية ، كما تم تقديم العديد من الاقتراحات التربوية لمزيد من البحث. الكلمات المفتاحية: الدافعية ، اللغة العربية ، لغة ثانية ، تعلم ، كفاءة تواصلية ، الأمريكيين العرب

## Abstract

Language as the main way of communication among humans holds a crucial role in understanding and expressing the world around us. Because of this fundamental importance of language in the life of humans, it has been investigated from different dimensions such as structure, sound processes, and cultural aspects. The central aspect of language examined by the current paper is a cross-language aspect of Arab Americans' motivation and strategies are used to learn a second language, which can be referred to as communicative competence. Two participants were involved in this study. The first participant is a female student from Palestine and the second one an Iraqi male student. Both participants came to the U.S. when they were children. This is a qualitative case study, phenomenology inquiry of Arab American students' motivation to learn the Arabic language as a foreign or second language at the university level in the southeast of the United States. Three main methods of data collection have been used. First, interviewing each one of the two participants for 30-45 minutes. Second, observing the participants in the department of modern language and linguistics at Florida State University which they were taking a part in the class for which the researcher kept fieldnotes. Each observation was organized by following Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw (1995) format. Third, the researchers took into account the syllabus of the Arabic course, as a document to analyze it. Each interview was transcribed, and then all the interviews, observations, and syllabus were analyzed and coded into themes to see any trends or relationships between Arab-American students and their motivation to learn the Arabic language. In the light of the study results, several useful recommendations concerning EFL learners, instructors, and syllabus designers were presented and several pedagogical suggestions for further research were stated.

**Key words:** Motivation, Arab Americans, Arabic Language, Learning, Communicative Competence, Arab Americans

## Statement of the Problem

The cultural differences in language use have caused researchers and teachers to question the learners' motivation, teaching methodology and language competency because grammatical, syntactic, and semantic competence alone are not enough to communicate efficiently. Communicative competence that refers to the ability to communicate effectively in the context of the language use came to the attention of scholars and teachers during context with other people who are from different cultures. Hymes (1972) defined communicative competence "includes both tacit knowledge and the ability to use language" (p. 277). Romains (2000) explains the term of communicative competence it as a field of linguistics which examines the language and language variations according to the contexts in which they are used. One of the most popular contexts of the language is the cultural environment in which the language is used. The way people learn the language changes from one culture to another, and not knowing their motivations might affect the effectiveness of communication. The importance of communicative competence can be explained by a language situation. Therefore, reaching the competence in the structure of a language does not necessarily result in the communication being utilized effectively and efficiently.

Although second language learning research has considerably flourished during the last four decades; there are still many "unanswered questions" (Johns, 2004) and any underexamined areas. Besides, second language learning research is still dominated by ESL studies and these studies attempting to describe learners' communicative competence at different stages of language learning are needed to identify if there is a systematic pattern of development in a learner's

competence system and if so, what conditions affect this development.

### The Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to analyze and understand the ways in which Arab-American English speakers develop their communicative competence in learning Arabic as well as analyze the students' motivation. Within the domain of second language learning (SLL), this study will contribute to the understanding of cross-cultural communication, provide a better understanding of how communicative competence is developed, and help language teachers better understand and find more efficient ways of promoting communicative competence among second language learners (SLLs). Also, having citizens who are proficient in multiple languages and who can function in different cultural environments is vital to the country's defense and economic development (Benson, 2013).

### The Overarching Question

The overarching question of this study is "What are the interest of Arab Americans English speakers in learning Arabic as a second language?" as a research question for this research, as the researcher believes foreign teachers should make themselves aware of the benefits and issues to keep their heritage language. The researcher found the selected research question important and compelling, as by learning other languages not only the new Arab Americans but also Americans themselves, both of them will be able to think and understand the materialistic approach and propaganda other nations are making the America, which will further strengthen the integrity and prosperity of the nation.

### Significance of the Study

In viewing language as an important communication way and communication as an essential mean in any human action, one could say that the main aim of learning a second language is to attain the primary goal that is the ability to communicate in the target language. That is, to develop both receptive and productive skills in learning a second language.

Within the domain of second language learning (SLL), this study contributes to the understanding of cross-languages communication, provides the better understanding of how communicative competence is developed, and help language teachers better understand and find more efficient ways of promoting communicative competence among L2 learners. Also, having citizens who are proficient in multiple languages and who can function in different cultural environments is vital to the country's defense and economic development (Baucom, 2005; Grubbs, 2003).

## Theoretical Framework

The underlying theory of this paper is Motivation Theory. The researcher used motivation theory to achieve two major purposes. First, to offer a synopsis of recent research development on recognizing the factor of motivation that motivates students to learn the second or foreign language. Secondly, to analyze the Arab American student/ motivation to learn Arabic in America. The term of motivation was demonstrated from the 1970s by the work of the Canadian social psychologist Robert, C. Gardner. Over the years, consistent relationship has been demonstrated between language attitudes, motivation, and learn the second language. He proposed well-distinction between instrumental motivation and integrative motivation. "Integrativeness has been defined as 'an open and accepting orientation to the other language community'; in combination with motivation it has

consistently shown itself to be a powerful predictor of a second language success. Instrumental motivation reflects the belief that language learning will bring concrete benefits” (Gardner, 1994: p. 360). This study based on Gardner’ motivation theory, specifically on the two types of motivation in second language learning that he stated. According to the first type of motivation, learners with integrative motivation are interested in learning a second language because they have a strong desire to become like the member of the target community. The second type of motivation, learners with instrumental motivation are interested in learning a second language in order to be able to benefit from it on the personal level. Making a connection between these two types of motivation, Gardner (1994) defines these two terms (integrative motivation and instrumental motivation) as the reason for studying a second language. Motivation as “a combination of effort plus desire to achieve the goal of learning a language plus favorable attitudes towards learning the language” (p. 361). Hence, it is very important to think about the integrative and instrumental’s role in order to analyze the learners’ motivation in learning a second language. It goes without saying that nurturing the initial motivation of learners throughout the learning process to make them more responsible and invested for their language learning should be our priority as a second language teacher.

#### Role of the Researcher

Exploring the learner experiences in learning a second language for students who take academic classes led the researcher to go to the place where the students learn Arabic to find out the participants. Also, the researcher spoke with the instructor herself, who is teaching them. The researcher told the participants and the instructor the research's focus of the study

that is to explore learners' motivation and strategies are used to develop their communicative competence. The researcher's role was doing two interview audio recordings with different participants, three observations in the classroom, as well as analyze the syllabus of the Arabic course material. Identifying the research's focus to the stakeholders of this study establish excellent relationships between the researcher and the participants as well as between the researcher and the Arabic instructor since this study will make the Arab American students realize the importance of learning the Arabic language for enhancing the cultural diversity initiatives taken by the society. Also, this study will give a chance to the instructor to explore the benefits and issues (motivation and strategies) that are faced by the Arab American students due to developing their communicative competence. Also, one of the significant roles of the researcher is how to analyze the data to answer the research question and identify the students' motivation. This study made the researcher think about her role not as a researcher only, but also as a mother for 11 years old daughter. Since her daughter came to the U.S. when she was six years old and by the time she is losing her Arabic language and developing her English only. This study helped the researcher to take into her account the benefits of the results that she found and how to make them work for her daughter to keep her first language.

### Methods/ Qualitative Research Approach

This is a case study, a phenomenology inquiry of Arab American English speakers learn Arabic as a second language to develop their communicative competence. Due to the in-depth nature of qualitative studies, many seek to examine a small number of cases with single cases being a valid number

(Merriam, 1998: p.27). Examining a small number of cases enables the researcher to be able to gather in-depth information about the issue at hand (Rossman & Rallis, 2003). A case study is “an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the bond arises between phenomena and context are not clearly evident” (Yin, 1994: p.13). In case studies, researchers choose to gain deep insight into a single case, sacrificing the breadth of knowledge that can be acquired by studying a larger number of cases (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). Since the purpose of this qualitative study is to describe what are the learners’ experiences in learning Arabic, so the researcher used phenomenology inquiry to explore and analyze Arab American English speakers who are taking Arabic classes at the department of modern languages and linguistics at Florida State University.

Despite numerous studies in second language learning among learners, it remains unclear as to what types of language-based difficulties as well as conceptual and strategic difficulties related to differences in culture-specific practical knowledge cause problems for L2 learners in developing communicative competence. So, it is important to explore and analyze second language learners’ motivation by discovering the learners’ experiences. Phenomenology defines the public meaning of people or their lived experiences of a concept or a phenomenon. Creswell (2012) states that “phenomenology and its qualitative design describes the common meaning for several individuals of their lived experience of a concept or a phenomenon” (p. 76). It focuses on what all participants have in common as they experience a phenomenon (Creswell, 2012: p.76). So that the researcher used phenomenology inquiry rather than other types of a qualitative study.

### Data Collection/ Participants

The purposeful sampling strategy that the researcher used is a criteria sampling strategy because the researcher was looking for specific criteria that the participants have, for instance; Arab American who born in the U.S. or live in it when they were children, fluent in English as their first language, attending Arabic classes in U.S. institutions to learn Arabic as a second language, as well as they, are in intermediate level of language proficiency. Two participants were involved in this study. The first participant is a female student from Palestine and the second one an Iraqi male student. Both participants came to the U.S. when they were children. Attending American schools and communication with others in English made them lose their Arabic. The procedures of the researcher for gaining access to participants to involve in this study was the researcher know the first participant's father, and she agreed to involve and then the researcher went to the Arabic classes to look at the second participant who has the primary criteria that the researcher is looking for in her study. The researcher told the participants the records of this study would be kept private and confidential. In any report the researcher might publish, she will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Also, they need to know their participation is voluntary, and they can withdraw at any time. Furthermore, the researcher shared her contact information just in case if they have any question. It is imperative to clarify that to them, participating in this study and the right information that they provide her will assist other researchers who want to build their research based on this study.

### Procedures

This is a qualitative case study, phenomenology inquiry of Arab American students' motivation to learn the Arabic language

as a foreign or second language at the university level in the southeast of the United States. A case study involves the study of a case within a real-life; it is a collective case study type (one issue or concern is selected Arab American students' experiences in learning Arabic, but select several individuals two participants to show different perspectives on the issue (Creswell, 2012). Three main methods of data collection have been used. First, interviewing each one of the two participants for 30-45 minutes. Second, observing the participants in the department of modern language and linguistics at Florida State University which they were taking a part in the class for which the researcher kept fieldnotes. Each observation was organized by following Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw (1995) format. Third, the researchers took into account the syllabus of the Arabic course, as a document to analyze it. Each interview was transcribed, and then all the interviews, observations, and syllabus were analyzed and coded into themes to see any trends or relationships between Arab-American students and their motivation to learn the Arabic language.

#### Data Analysis/ Coding Procedures

Based on the purpose of the study is to analyze learners' motivation to learn a second language and identify methods and strategies that are used to develop communicative competence, the researcher first; formatting the interview questions based on the research question. Second; data was analyzed by identifying students' motivation and strategies that are used. Interview data was analyzed into eight main themes to define the students' motivation. The interview themes are "cultural Identity CI", "Engagement EG", "Struggles to Learn Arabic SLA", "Getting a Job GJ", "Travel TR", "Parents Wanting to Learn Arabic PWLA", "Experience at early Age EEA", and "Developing

Reading & Writing DRW”. Observation data was analyzed into six themes to identify methods that are used to develop communicative competence. The observation themes are “Students-Students Interaction SSI”, “Students-Instructor Interaction SII”, “Resources-Materials RM”, “Assessment AS”, “Challenges to Learn & Teach Arabic CLTA”, “Teaching Arabic Strategy TAS”, and “Arabic Topics AT”. The syllabus documents were analyzed into five themes. The syllabus themes are “Arabic Curriculum AC”, “Arabic Class Objectives ACO”, “Assessment Methods AM”, “Study Management Advice SMA”, and “Arabic Developing Strategies ADS”. It is important to know if students achieve their goals based on their motivation to attend educational programs in foreign languages to learn a second language, and what methods and strategies are used in teaching develop their communicative competence.

#### Strategies for validating findings

To establish accuracy and credibility of the research findings, qualitative studies employ rigorous data collection procedures (Creswell, 2012: p.53). The researcher collected multiple forms of data in her research design. Multiple forms of data that were employed in qualitative research include “interviewing, observing, gathering documents and observing material culture” (Creswell, 2012: p.53). Other material includes items such as photographs, videos, objects, documents, music, written & visual materials, digital text messages and records also consider as primary data sources in qualitative studies (Creswell, 2012:p.53). The researcher used Arabic syllabus as a document to analyze assessment methods, and Arabic topics, as well as some classroom photographs that are taken to identify resources and materials that were used in Arabic classes.

The researcher collected more than one data sources; she depended on the interview, observation, and syllabus document as data collection sources in her research. Also, the interview questions format were organized around the purpose of this study; there was a list of 12 questions that were used in interviewing the participants. The interview questions based on four main criteria: the participants' motivation, the participants' experiences, their family background, and their major and education. For each criterion, there are three questions. The researcher did member checks to ensure the accuracy and credibility of data that were collected.

### Results

The results show that Arab American students enroll in Arabic classes for different reasons. First; the identical reason. For example, the first participant identified her high motivation to learn the Arab culture as a part of her self-identity. Learners with a high identity have a strong motivation to learn Arabic. Second; the instrumental reason that is the academic purpose and getting a job. The second participant explained his motivation to learn Arabic is an academic purpose as well as to get a job that requires people who know Arabic and English languages.

One of the striking contrasts among two participants' responses about their motivation to learn Arabic is "cultural identity" and "getting a job." Also, "educational purpose", "travel to Arab countries", and "communicate with Arab people fluently" are their interests to learn Arabic for both of them. It is interesting to explore Arab American English speakers' experiences to attend Arabic classes in the U.S. universities to learn Arabic, and how academic disciplines have lenses to offer the students' needs. Some studies claimed that percentage of students have been more increased to learn Arabic after 9/11 in

America to know more about different Arab cultures. 9/11 event plays a vital role to increase students' motivation to learn Arabic. This fact leads to expand American institutions that teach Arabic (Youns; 1999, Abuhakema; 2004; Al-Batal; 2007).

After reviewing the participants' interview responses to analyze the relationship between Arab American students' interests and learn Arabic such as the researcher found "develop reading and writing," "be fluent in Arabic", and "engage with Arabs" are the most interests for them. Even though their responses explain their level in Arabic "know the basic of Arabic", "I do not know how to form sentences" and "cannot read or write", but they still have a strong incentive to learn Arabic, for example; the first participant's motivation is "cultural identity" through analyzing her responses "be able to read my ID Palestinian" and "go back and try learn my roots", and for the second participant's motivation is "getting a job" when he said "it helps a lot to know Arabic as a second language to get a job", "what makes me interesting because helps a lot to find a job after graduation". - As evidence, they have to achieve their goals to learn Arabic. Both participants have some struggles to learn Arabic. They explained that through their responses by the never know how to read or write and to work right now to develop that. They also talked about attending American schools from elementary school until now the college level made them not focus on Arabic and use English only. Even though their parents speak Arabic, but the language that people use more frequent to communicate with others plays a significant role to develop that language.

Based on what the researcher observed, the most noticeable differences among Arab American students who learn Arabic is that female learners are more active and more participated in the

classroom activities than male learners. Female learners took an efficient path to increase the positive energy inside the classroom atmosphere such as “ask questions”, “group work”, and “interaction with the teacher”, while male learners were less active than females such as “listen to the teacher”, “individual work”, and “inactive in the class”. Group work encourages the students to be more active, and that affects them to participate in the class and then motivate them to learn. As students, they need to know which activities help them to learn better.

The central themes that the researcher did to code her observation to identify the methods and the strategies that were used in teaching Arabic are “students-students interaction”- how students communicate with each others (“students sat as a circle”, students engage and review the words with each other”, “students gave the meaning of some signs with a partner”), “students- instructor interaction”- how students communicate with the instructor as well as how the instructor interacts with the students (“greeted the students in Arabic”, “ask questions”, “the students responded to the instructor’s questions”), “Resources/materials”- the resources and materials are used by the instructor and the students (“overhead”, “slides show & audio recorder”, “textbook”), “Assessment”- how the instructor assesses students (“ask the students in Arabic they respond in English”, “ask the students to say what they heard”, “do excises”), “Challenges to Learn & Teach Arabic”- what are the challenges to learn Arabic by the students and what are the challenges to teach Arabic by the instructor (“ask a question about two words have the same meaning”, “trying to keep the students’ attention”, “students used to ask a question is not correct”), “Teaching Arabic Strategy”- what methods that the instructor was used to teach the students Arabic (“gave the students some examples”, “wrote words on the

board”, “repeat each words twice”), and “Arabic Topic”- what are the Arabic Topics that the instructor teaches for intermediate level of Arabic (“how to form a sentence in Arabic”, “noun sentences & verb sentences”, “differences between feminine and masculine”).

This finding poses the significant challenges for students who learn Arabic because of diglossia in Arabic speaking communities. In Arabic, not only low and high varieties exist with having a different communication function, but also there is no universal low variety spoken in all Arab speakers. Arab people acquire the informal dialect “colloquial” at home and formal format “Al-Fusha” at school.

Acknowledging in the developments of the foreign language education field, Al-Batal (2007) proposed an alternative approach to teaching Arabic in the U.S. institutions. This approach helps learners to reflect diglossia situations in the classroom by using both spoken and written forms for daily purposes (e.g. greeting, buying, complimenting). Younes (1999) proposed another approach that focuses to teach learners home dialect for speaking and formal format to read and write.

Oxford & Shearin (1994) stated that addressing the learners’ needs will assist to keep them more invested in their learning processes; it is imperative that Arabic teachers and classes are aware of to achieve the learners’ needs. Learners will be more motivated and ultimately successful when they perceive the instruction to meet their needs (Donohue & Wong, 1997). Furthermore, motivated learners are more likely to become autonomous learners (Dickinson, 1995), an important trait to achieve higher levels of learning foreign languages.

Learners who have an identification reason for learning Arabic may be better learned if they are offered special courses

with literacy content and cultural aspects. At the same time, learners who have an instructional reason for learning Arabic may be better learned if they are offered courses focus on the contemporary frame of Arabic culture.

Teachers should focus on literacy content and cultural aspects for learners who motivate to learn Arabic for identifiable reasons and focus on contemporary issues and challenging facing American students who learn Arabic for instrumental reasons.

A consensus may never agree as to how approach in teaching Arabic dialects and which dialect should teach. However, it is paramount to acknowledge the colloquial Arabic as an imperative and integral part of the linguistics repertory of Arabic speakers. Arabic teachers cannot ignore the role of colloquial Arabic when 50% felt a colloquial is very essential to their plans (Belnap, 1987).

### Conclusion

The global social environment has now become extremely interconnected with the individuals that have diverse socio-cultural backgrounds and are living in a collective manner. There are several cultural subgroups that are present in the main cultural framework of the present society and have diversified beliefs and traditions. Languages and knowledge about other nations and their capability to communicate across dissimilar cultures are widely recognized as necessary skills for global citizenship. So, to strengthen their relationships and behave like a good global citizen, it is imperative to know the language, religion, and culture.

It is crucial for people to engage with people who speak a language that is learning right now. If people want to learn a second language, they have to know its culture. Knowing a language is not enough to know how to use it, even for Arab

American who their parents Arab originally, but who born in the US or who came when they were a child, they did not know anything even about their country culture. I think, both participants need to their motherland or other Arab countries to develop their levels in Arabic as well as discover an Arab culture. This is an excellent opportunity to develop their skills and performance in Arabic.

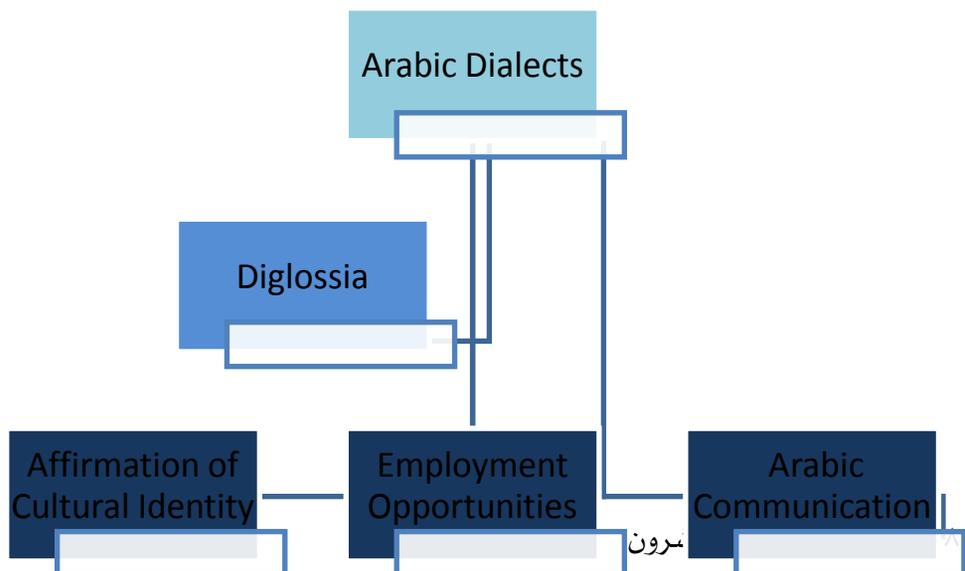
Learning Arabic as a second language is a crushing task for two main different reasons. First, there is an enormous difference between Arabic and English in two significant points: pronunciation (in Arabic there are 11 letters that are no sound of them in English and they are hard to pronounce by American students such as: غ ، ع ، ط، ظ، ص، ض، ق ، ث ، ذ ، خ ، ح ;writing format, Arabic letters entirely different from English ( الحروف الهجائية ), also Arabic writing from right to left. Second, dialect and diglossia factors. The Arabic language has many dialects; each Arab country has its dialect. Diglossia is the case of students, teachers, and institutions with conflicting goals, interest, and priorities.

In American institutions that teach foreign languages, the cultural diversity and initial level of proficiency should be considered and treated as strengthening factors for second language learners. Learners can be more involved and more productive if classes and courses are designed to address their needs. To achieve a high level of proficiency should keep and increase the students' motivation by encouraging them to engage in activities that teach and educate them the culture of Arab society not only the language as well as encourage them to communicate with Arab people inside and outside the classroom. To do that, the researcher suggests curriculum and methods that contain and based on the communicative approach to Arabic

culture and tradition. Students like and need to know the culture of the language they have been learning. Involving and participating in cultural activities rather than teach students who write and read increase the students' motivation to learn that language. However, further research is needed to determine the most appropriate curriculum and methods of teaching that will meet the students' needs to ensure a high level of motivation.

Teachers should be aware of how to address the students' needs and be able to achieve that not to ignore it. Considering that like the relationship between motivation and frustration. Abuhakemah (2004) stated that the lack of exposure to Middle Eastern policies and culture will lead to frustrate students who learn Arabic as a foreign language in the class. Knowing the Middle Eastern culture and the political developmental are not necessary for Arab students' lives, but also, because they are part of this life of the target culture and community. These developments are a vital role in our life: education, media, security, etc.

### **Arab Americans Motivation to Learn Arabic**



# The Role of Motivation in Learning Arabic Language to Enhance Communicative Competence by Arab American Students

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