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**The American University in Cairo**

**School of Humanities and Social Sciences**

**Heritage Language Learners in L2 Arabic Classes: Challenges and  
Instructional Strategies**

**A Thesis**

**Submitted to**

**The Department of Applied Linguistics**

**In partial fulfillment of the**

**Requirements for the Degree of Master  
of Arts in Teaching Arabic as a Foreign Language**

**By**

**Almutazbellah Alabd**

**May 2016**

The American University in Cairo

School of Humanities and Social Sciences

**Heritage Language Learners in L2 Arabic Mixed Classes:**

**Challenges and Instructional Strategies**

A Thesis Submitted by

**Almutazbellah Alabd**

to Department of Applied Linguistics

May 2016

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for  
The degree of Master of Arts in Teaching Arabic as a Foreign Language

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### *Abstract*

This study explored the teaching challenges and instructional practices that teachers of Arabic as a second/foreign language (ASL/AFL) use in their university-level Arabic mixed classes. Data collection procedures included an online questionnaire, class observations and teachers' interviews. 58 respondents were surveyed, 3 teachers were interviewed, and 4 mixed classes were observed. Data analysis was carried out using descriptive and inferential statistics. Results revealed that the presence of Heritage Language Learners' (HLLs) in an ASL/AFL classroom poses challenges for ASL/AFL Arabic teachers and entails developing certain types of instructional practices to overcome such challenges. They also revealed that strategies like including discussion of cultural topics, using collaborative learning, and individualized tasks are commonly used by ASL/AFL Arabic teachers to help cater to the needs of Heritage Language Learners in an ASL/AFL Arabic environment. Moreover, the study revealed that ASL/AFL Arabic teachers use certain types of instructional practices that are designed to reduce student anxiety and provide contextualized instruction. Teachers also prefer to design curricula tailored to suit mixed classes that differ from regular ASL/AFL curricula, and to explore HLLs' motivations and expectations to better fulfill their needs or ensure that they are enrolled in level-appropriate classes. Furthermore, ASL/AFL Arabic teachers do not support the idea of placing heritage students and ASL/AFL learners in separate groups nor separate them in class activities. Such results, therefore, support the notion that Arabic heritage speakers in ASL/AFL Arabic classes present challenges to Arabic teachers; hence, they need certain teaching strategies in order to fulfill their needs.

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*Dedication*

To Asmaa Albeltagy

*R.I.P*

*Rabia Massacre*

*Aug. 14<sup>th</sup> 2013*

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## **CHAPTER I**

### ***Introduction***

#### ***Overview***

One of the relatively recent fields of research in linguistics is the study of Heritage Languages (HLs) and their learners/speakers. In fact, the growing body of research in this area has focused on “an array of geographic, linguistic and policy contexts.” (Leeman, 2015, p. 100) The thrust of HL research lies in providing insights about the heritage language learner’s (HLL) needs, learning challenges and priorities, and appropriate instruction designs (Valdés, 2005). There have been also some efforts to define and identify the HLL in the second language (L2) instructional contexts. However, there has been no consensus on the definition of the heritage learner/speaker. In this respect, Benmamoun, Montrul, and Polinsky (2013) reported that “all of the definitions advanced have been appropriate for the specific context and communities they describe, yet hard to apply beyond that” (p. 259).

However, the past decade in particular has witnessed a remarkable progress in terms of research and study of HL speakers/learners cross-linguistically (Leeman, 2015). Two tracks of the research undertaken so far in the field of HLL could be identified as either student or teacher-based. The significance of conducting student-based research is manifest in highlighting the HLLs’ linguistic competence, attitude and motivation, and learning challenges and priorities. The literature, for instance, demonstrates some research interests addressing the diverse needs of HLLs in different contexts (Beaudrie & Fairclough, 2012). Such interest covers studying the grammatical features of the HLLs’ oral production (Albirini, Benmamoun, & Saadah, 2011). It also elaborates on

discovering the role of identity and its strong connection to the HL acquisition in ASL/AFL classrooms (Carreira, 2004).

The student-based literature, moreover, manifests an examination of the argument for a community-based curriculum that responds to the needs of HLLs and its effectiveness in achieving the HL learning goals (Carreira & Kagan, 2011). Finally, it handles studying the variability in the linguistic proficiency among HL speakers (Polinsky & Kagan, 2007), and investigates the pedagogical and sociopolitical factors surrounding HL learning from a cross-cultural and historical perspective (Van Deusen-Scholl, 2003).

As for teacher-based studies, interest has been focused on the teacher's perceptions of foreign languages and their learners, the teaching challenges, and the strategies used in HLL classes (Byrnes, Kiger, & Manning 1997; Lawson, 2010; Elmahjoubi, 2011). Conducting such teacher-based research, in fact, is expected to help in drawing inferences about the nature of the teacher-student relationship and the factors governing it. In addition, it offers an opportunity to explore the classroom challenges and strategies from a different angle and consider the teacher's needs and preferences in the classroom (Moon, 2013; Seraj, 2010; Campanaro, 2013).

Such expansion in the scope of research to include teacher perspectives has opened the door for further studies. Further advances in this field could be reflected in a more thorough understanding of the issues that underlie the HL learning and teaching in areas such as HLLs' linguistic proficiency, curriculum, assessment and educational policies.

### *Statement of the Problem*

With the increasing numbers of HL students in Arabic as a second language (ASL) and Arabic as a foreign language (AFL) classes, questions about how to create an optimal classroom environment, fulfill the learning goals of both ASL and HL learners and promote the best outcomes of the learning process have become more pressing. In this respect, for example, researchers (Montrul, 2008; Chandrasekaran, 2008) reported that the presence HLLs with ASL learners in one learning setting may cause serious challenges to both ASL/AFL instructors and students. These challenges could arise due to the variability in HLLs' linguistic competence or the teacher's inability to teach HLLs in the ASL/AFL classes (Chandrasekaran, 2008). The above conclusion is further verified by Valdés (1995) who reported that HLLs "have language development needs that pose important challenges to teachers" (p. 307). In addition, researchers Kagan and Dillon (2008) reported that the presence of HLLs in the language classroom represents a "challenge to language educators who are trained to teach foreign language learners" (p. 144).

In case of Arabic as a heritage language (AHL), researchers (Aburumuh, 2012; Elmahjoubi 2010; and Husen, 2011) have referred to a dearth of Arabic HLL research and scholarship. Such research, if conducted, would need to investigate the nature of AHL learning as well as the environmental and circumstantial factors affecting its acquisition. It could also study the HLLs and their attitudes and linguistic competencies, the parental attitudes and motivations, the teaching and instructional priorities as well as the community-based curriculums. Some student-based research, in fact, investigated and provided some possibilities to overcome the challenges that L2 learners encounter in the

language classes (*e.g.* Zouhir, 2010). Other studies, also, examined the factors affecting the learning and teaching of Arabic and recommended a ‘holistic approach’ to studying the phenomenon of HLLs’ presence in the ASL/AFL classes. Elmahjoubi (2011), for instance, investigated the effects of mixing heritage and non-heritage students on the ASL learner’s attitude, motivation, and anxiety. He concluded that ASL learners in classes that separate HLLs from Non-HLLs were less anxious and more motivated to learn than those who were mixed. While this student-based research examined the influence of HLLs on ASL learner’s attitude, motivation, and anxiety, it partially underlined the challenges of mixing on ASL/AFL teachers. Hence, it recommended a teacher-based research that explores the teaching approaches used to overcome the challenge(s) of having mixed classes.

Despite such recommendations, literature in such area is mostly student-based and focused principally on HLLs’ linguistic competence and attitudinal aspects (*e.g.* El Aissati, 1997; Bos, 1997; Boumans, 2006; Bale, 2010; Albirini, Benmamoun, & Saadah, 2011; Saddah, 2011; Albirini, & Benmamoun, 2012; and Albirini, Benmamoun, & Chakrani, 2013). However, little is known about teacher-focused studies that explore the teaching challenges as well as the strategies teachers may employ to involve HLLs in the ASL/AFL classroom.

Such lack of research hinders our understanding of how to deal with the challenges about teaching HLLs, especially in mixed classes. Hence, the importance of conducting teacher-focused research may manifest in the creation of an optimal teaching environment that fulfills the needs of ASL and HL learners (Benmamoun, Montrul, & Polinsky, 2013; Chandrasekaran, 2008; and Elmahjoubi, 2011). Among other things - as

Seraj (2010) pointed out in his study- “knowing teachers preferences in teaching methods can help curriculum designers when compiling training packages for teachers of Arabic as a foreign language” (p. 3-4). Furthermore, it could inspect challenges already studied by research done on languages like Spanish and Russian, for instance. Among these studies is Chandrasekaran’s (2008) that investigated some challenges such as variability, teacher orientation and teaching preferences, and strategies that could/could not be used when teaching HLLs. Such research has paved the way to presenting suggestions on the need for developing sections specific for HLLs in curriculum designs. In addition, it provided resources that assist teachers in dealing with HL students as it surveyed many learners and teachers to better know the needs and preferences of the two parties. Similarly, Campanaro (2013) studied the perceptions of both students and teachers in Spanish classrooms in an attempt to address the needs of learners (heritage and non-heritage) in the mixed classes. In Russian, Geisherik (2005) investigated the involvement of HLLs in the Russian language classes. It also studied the availability of any specially designed sections for HLLs in the Russian programs and examined the instructional materials and placement strategies employed.

Such studies, among others, have advanced valuable arguments regarding the optimal classroom environment. They discussed whether HLLs could be a significant asset in the learning process, the positive and negative aspects of mixing and its influence on the classroom environment, and the instructional priorities and teaching strategies being employed. They also reflected how the teacher-based research not only explored the challenges and teaching strategies but also suggested and opened the door for more future research. Therefore, conducting deeper study of these challenges and strategies in Arabic

mixed classes may ultimately suggest approaches and instructional practices on how to cater to the needs of both types of learners in ASL language classes.

### ***Purpose of the Study***

The research studies quoted above highlighted the challenge of having HLLs and ASL learners in language mixed classes. They also referred to some teachers' inability to accommodate the needs of those learners as well as the lack of teacher training packages or guidance references to deal with such situations. Such gaps could be a result of the absence teacher-based research in the area of AHL. Therefore, there is a need for teacher-based studies that explore the mentioned challenges as well as the instructional practices employed to address them.

Hence, the purpose of this study is to fill this gap in research by conducting a teacher-based study that explores the challenges of teaching mixed classes (classes involving HL and ASL learners) as well as the instructional practices used by ASL/AFL teachers to cater to the needs of HLLs and ASL learners.

### ***Significance of the Study***

Besides filling the mentioned gap in the existing literature and highlighting the challenges and instructional practices used by ASL/AFL teachers in Arabic mixed classes, this research is expected to reveal new insights about the current situation in ASL/AFL teaching and learning. For instance, it could tell how teachers attempt to create an optimal ASL/AFL classroom environment. In addition, it may reveal what types of instruction are used to cater to the learners' needs. Such findings may provide resources and curricular suggestions that respond to the increase of "heterogeneous



classes of Arabic and the dominance of heritage students compared to non-heritage ones” (Elmahjoubi, 2011, p. 4).

Such expansion in research may also offer suggestions on the ASL curriculum development based on teacher-reported challenges when teaching mixed classes. It, moreover, may recommend pedagogical ideas regarding the development of special programs for HLLs. In this regard, Lee (2005) and Husen (2011) reported on the need for “curricula specific to HLL that take advantage of their cultural capital and learning potential to help them excel and hone in on the language skills with which they typically struggle.” (p. 4)

By developing such research study, ASL/AFL teachers are offered an opportunity to know about these challenges and instructional practices. Hence, results may lead to an “accurate and efficient measurement of strengths and weaknesses of HL speakers that could inform [the] development of a curriculum tailored to their needs” (Sekerina, 2013; p. 203).

### ***The Research Question(s)***

In case of Arabic, researcher (Elmahjoubi, 2011) has partially examined the effect of mixing heritage and non-heritage students on teaching approaches used by the ASL/AFL teachers. As he interviewed and observed only one teacher, he recommended further research on a wider scale about the teaching methods in mixed classes. From that point, the current study attempted, on the one hand, to investigate the teaching challenges of having mixed classes. On the other hand, it explored the instructional practices and strategies ASL/AFL teachers use with Arabic mixed classes to create an optimal

classroom environment that caters to the needs of both heritage and non-heritage students.

The research question(s) guiding this study is/are:

1. What are the perceptions of teachers of Arabic as a foreign/second language about challenges encountered when teaching mixed classes? How do they respond to such challenges?
2. What are the instructional practices that teachers use in Arabic as a foreign/second language mixed classes?

### ***Hypotheses***

This study concentrated basically on teachers' performance in ASL/AFL classroom regardless of the HLLs or ASL learners' performance. It hypothesized that (1) HLLs' presence in an ASL/AFL classroom entails challenges and instructional practices that might be different from regular non-mixed Arabic language classes. It also added that (2) ASL/AFL teachers may be negatively challenged by the presence of both heritage and non-heritage learners in language classes. Moreover, (3) teachers may prefer the complete separation of the two groups of learners in class activities or put them in completely separate classes.

## ***Definition of Constructs***

### ***1. Arabic Heritage Language Learners***

Due to the numerous definitions of heritage speakers/learners, this study drew upon the operational definition developed by Ibrahim and Allam (2006) that identified the major traits of Arabic HLLs. They indicated four types of HLLs:

- a. Students whose parents were both of Arab origin and who heard or spoke one of the Arabic dialects at home.
- b. Students who had only one parent of Arab origin and did not speak Arabic language at home.
- c. Muslims who came from non-Arab countries and were exposed to only one variety of Arabic through their learning of the Qur'an or aspects of religion.
- d. Arabs who lived in Arab countries, attended international schools, and had never had any formal education in Modern Standard Arabic (Ibrahim & Allam, 2006, p. 443).

For the purposes of the current study, only the first three categories are considered.

### ***2. Non-Heritage Learners***

This study drew upon the definition used by Elmahjoubi (2011) who defined Non-Heritage students as those “who have no authentic exposure to Arabic language and culture. They were raised in a non-Arabic environment.” (p. 5)

### ***3. Teaching Challenges***

The term refers to the difficulties, if any, a teacher may face when teaching mixed language classes. As there is no particular definition recommended by the literature, the

concept here could refer to the linguistic, psychological, learning and/ or curricular challenges.

#### **4. *Instructional Practicest***

Within the context of this study, instructional practices refer to the teaching methods, plans, activities, strategies, and curricular and instructional priorities that ASL/AFL teachers employ to accommodate HLLs in their classrooms (Kameenui, & Carnine, 1998).

#### **5. *Mixed Class***

It refers to a language class that encompasses heritage and non-heritage learners in one learning setting.

### ***Design of the Study***

As stated above, the research question was divided into two parts; one investigated the teaching challenges encountered with mixed groups (HL and ASL Learners) while the other elaborated on the instructional practices employed in such learning setting.

Principally, this study followed a mixed-method approach (Creswell, 2002; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998, 2003). It is a quantitative/qualitative research aiming at an in-depth investigation and generalization of the common challenges and teaching practices ASL teachers use with mixed classes. The study consisted mainly of verbal and numerical data collected through surveys, class observations and teachers' interviews. Since it investigated a teaching/learning situation and directly tapped into classroom challenges and practical implications, this is considered to be applied research.

### *Abbreviations*

The following terms are used throughout this study:

*AFL*            Arabic as a Foreign Language

*ASL*            Arabic as a second Language

*AHL*            Arabic Heritage Language

*ANOVA*        Analysis of Variance

*DV*            Dependent Variable

*FL*            Foreign Language

*HL(s)*          Heritage Language(s)

*HLL(s)*        Heritage Language Learner(s)

*HLS*            Heritage Language Speakers

*HS*            Heritage Speakers

*IV*            Independent Variable

*L1*            First Language

*L2*            Second Language

## **CHAPTER II**

### ***Literature Review***

This chapter provides an overview of the literature about the study of Arabic as a heritage language. It primarily explores the challenges ASL/AFL instructors encounter while teaching mixed classes that have HLLs therein. It also elaborates on the teaching strategies instructors use in ASL/AFL mixed classes. Following a thematic approach, this review is mainly divided into two sections: first, the student-based research in ASL/AFL Arabic language that covers topics about (a) linguistic proficiency, (b) attitude, and motivation discovery, and (c) learning challenges and strategies. Second, the teacher-based research that highlights (a) the teacher's attitude and motivation, (b) the teaching challenges encountered when teaching HLLs and diverse classrooms, and (c) the teaching strategies, models, practices, activities, and curricular and instructional priorities that ASL/AFL teachers use in their mixed classrooms.

The division of the two sections is meant to set a background by giving an overview of the growing body of literature in the student and teacher-focused research in AHL studies. Then, each division is subdivided to address directly the points related to the research questions, and to present a scholarly work on the teaching challenges and strategies being investigated in the mixed classes. Such subdivision is also meant to draw a clear and more detailed picture of the phenomenon of HLLs' presence in the ASL/AFL classes and how research addressed it. Due to the dearth of research in the field of Arabic as a Heritage Language (AHL), reference is made to relevant and similar research studies in the L2/FL and HL literature other than Arabic such as Spanish and Russian.

### ***Studies on HLLs research (student-based research)***

Initially, the growing body of literature in the area of AHL covered specific themes like AHL learning, AHL learners, and AHL learners' parents and families (Aburumuh, 2012). Despite the fact that student-based research is not the focus of this study, it is essential to address such studies as they may highlight some teaching challenges that need to be addressed in the Arabic language mixed classes. This section is subcategorized into three basic themes; namely, studies addressing linguistic competence, studies dealing with the student's attitude and motivation, and studies relating to learning challenges and strategies. Before proceeding to discuss these points in detail, it would be more plausible here if the review sheds light on the history of AHL research and how it emerged.

In this respect, Bale (2010) is one of the studies that focused mainly on Arab immigrants, sketching their history of immigration and language maintenance efforts. It also presented a demographic analysis and prospects for language practice and education. This study was developed to be a resource for teachers who are interested in teaching Arabic and working on HLLs research and education. Also, the study elaborated on the factors governing the language maintenance efforts at home, religious institutions and community schools as well as the US government efforts to promote Arabic teaching and learning. However, the study highlighted that despite such language maintenance efforts, there is no central institution to provide oversight of these efforts nor is there any mention of the Arabic heritage speakers' role, aspirations and intentions. Though it might not directly relate to the current research focus, this study came to an important conclusion. It stated that the absence of such central institution has its drawback. Such institution may

offer any support or guidance as to how to fulfill the Arabic HLLs' needs. Therefore, the absence of such institution could be a challenge for teachers who do not know how to cater to such learners' needs.

### ***1.1.HLLs' Linguistic Competence***

The growing body of literature about HLLs demonstrates that some researchers focused on studying HLLs and investigated their linguistic proficiency. This treatment of the HLLs' linguistic competence plays a significant role as it reveals valuable insights about their proficiency, strengths and weaknesses and, most importantly, linguistic gaps. In this respect, Albirini, Benmamoun, and Saadah (2011) advanced a study that investigated the grammatical features of the Arabic HLLs' oral production. It focused mainly on exploring Code-switching and Transfer from the dominant language (English). Data were collected from Egyptian and Palestinian heritage students in a form of elicited oral narratives using their colloquial varieties. The study concluded that HLLs have several gaps in the attested morphological and syntactical features as well as a frequent use of code-switching as a result of the lexical gap. It also concluded that transfer takes place as a consequence of the host language's (English) dominance or even the complexity of the linguistic patterns being tested.

In a follow-up research, Albirini and Benmamoun (2012) investigated some aspects related to transfer in the oral production of Egyptian and Palestinian heritage speakers (HS). Data were collected from oral narratives examining four morphological and syntactical linguistic areas principally. The researchers reported that the significance of this study lays in its investigation of the relationship between L2 transfer and the



incompleteness or attrition of heritage Arabic. Findings restricted transfer to specific areas that are marked or difficult to process. In addition, transfer took place as a result of the incomplete acquisition and language attrition in the linguistic areas being investigated. Therefore, this learner-focused research relates directly to the HLL's performance and shows the impact of the transfer on Arabic HLLs' oral production.

Such study was an attempt to provide a descriptive account of the HLLs' linguistic gaps resulted from language attrition or incomplete acquisition. It also highlighted the effects of transfer as it uncovered areas that have not been empirically attested and implicated a lot of future research within the framework of transfer effects and language attrition/incompleteness. Therefore, the current study attempted to investigate if such linguistic gaps may cause any challenges for ASL/AFL instructors and, if so, how do they respond to such type of challenges.

Another research study on linguistic performance treated the production of Arabic vowels of both HL and ASL learners. Saddah's (2011) study compared the production of certain Arabic vowels between Arabic HLLs and English L2 learners. It investigated whether one or two phonological systems may coexist in the "mental organization of developing bilinguals" (p. ii). Results showed that Arabic HLLs developed two phonological systems for English and Arabic. According to Saddah, heritage speakers have this advantage over their ASL counterparts thanks to the early exposure to heritage Arabic. The challenge that emerges here is that language programs are not designed to tailor to those HLLs' levels and linguistic proficiencies; therefore, they are enrolled in regular ASL/AFL classes that might not fulfill their needs. Such enrollment, in turn, may be another challenge to teachers who should deal with divergent categories of learners.

Hence, Saddah reported that while examining such linguistic abilities of ASL and HL learners, “[t]here is a consensus in considering HSs a unique group with linguistic abilities and needs that differs from other language learners.” (p. 113) Therefore, the study recommended devising new tools to involve, evaluate and better place HLLs in the appropriate-level classes. In terms of pedagogical implications, in addition, the author sketched the pedagogical concerns at the teacher and institution levels. The following quotation highlights some of these concerns:

Every language department/program must have a workable plan with clearly articulated set of objectives for students in various levels. These must respond to students’ needs and have the flexibility to expand or shrink according to political, social, and psychological factors. (p. 123)

As quoted above, the author highlighted the importance of teachers being aware of pedagogical goals that fit every level of learners, heritage and non-heritage. Furthermore, she emphasized the flexibility of the educational institutions to offer resources and training to teachers specifically when it comes to involving HLLs in a learning setting like ASL/AFL classes. Therefore, the current research attempted to explore the teachers’ position on separating HLLs and Non-HLLs in appropriate-level classes or making them work in separate groups within the same class.

In the same context, similar studies (*e.g.*, Albirini, 2014; Albirini, Benmamoun, & Chakrani, 2013; Bos, 1997; Boumans, 2006; El Aissati, 1997) also examined more grammatical and syntactical features of HLLs’ production. Such features included dual and plural forms, attributive possessives, gender, and number agreement as well as

variability in the language proficiencies of Arabic HLLs. These research studies highlighted the HLLs' linguistic competence to some extent and shed light on their strengths and weaknesses. They also paved the way for more research to better highlight the challenges of having HLLs in an ASL/AFL learning context and to suggest solutions for it.

To conclude, it is worth mentioning that such type of research that investigated the linguistic competence of AHL population played a significant role in highlighting numerous gaps in the linguistic abilities of Arabic HLLs. It also highlighted the reasons for the occurrence of some phenomena like transfer and code-switching in HLLs' production. Highlighting such gaps at a linguistic level should help teachers be aware of their students' linguistic challenges and make teachers think about how to address such challenges pedagogically. These findings, in turn, served the current research objective here to conduct a teacher-based research to find out how teachers address such issues and what teaching strategies, if any, they employ in their classes. In other words, the current study, in part, would explore the teachers' perspectives on the above mentioned linguistic challenges, pedagogical suggestions, and the type of strategies if any, teachers use to respond to such challenges in the classroom.

### ***1.2.HLLs' Attitude, Motivation, and Anxiety Research***

The growing body of research in the area of HLLs has gone beyond just studying the linguistic competence to also investigate motivations, perceptions and anxiety of both HL and ASL learners in mixed classes. This shift in research played a vital role as it focused on the students' psychological challenges as well as their perceptions and

perspectives about language learning. In other words, it highlighted the effect of having these mixed classes in both HL and L2 learners' motivations, attitudes, and anxiety. This branch of research could serve the purpose of the current study as it may highlight a new type of challenge and reflect how teachers deal not only with linguistic but also psychological challenges.

As for the attitudinal and motivational aspects, Lee's (2005) study examined the characteristics of heritage and non-heritage language learners of Arabic through investigating the students' perceptions of who an HLL is. The study focused principally on what the author called "less commonly taught languages." This term refers to less familiar and minor languages being offered in language programs to figure out how both types of learners perceive the concepts of heritage and non-heritage. Regarding the ethnic affiliation and linguistic proficiency variables, results have shown HLLs as diverse learners with different experiences that make it hard to be self-identified as either HS or Non-HS.

Clearly, this study is student-based, and it looked into HLLs' perceptions. It suggested using some tools like initial interviews and needs assessment. Such tools are necessary for teachers and curriculum developers to "gain a better understanding of the instructional techniques and materials that would be most appropriate and effective for the students in the class." (p. 562) Therefore, the study went beyond linguistic needs to other socio-psychological factors that affect HLLs' "relearning" their heritage language. In this respect, the current research would investigate to what extent ASL/AFL teachers agree or disagree with the idea of a prior assessment of the HLLs' needs and how feasible

it is. Another unique finding about this study is that it revealed how some Pakistani students, due to religious affiliation, defined themselves as HLLs.

Such finding would seem to parallel with Husen's (2011) study that expanded the definition of HLL to include even non-Arab "religious heritage" language learners. These variant characteristics of HLLs may propose a new challenge for teachers; therefore, the current study attempted to research address how ASL/AFL teachers assess and classify their students and, hence, respond to their needs.

Another research that focused principally on Arabic HLLs' motivations and attitudes is Ibrahim and Allam's (2006) study. This study highlighted that HLLs came to the classroom motivated to expand their knowledge about their heritage culture and people. They also have a positive attitude toward their heritage language, and they appreciate teaching materials that relate to their heritage and culture. Such findings, in fact, contributed to the current research interest as they focused on the teaching challenge of appropriate material selection. They also highlighted the importance of the teacher's awareness of HLLs' motivations and attitudes toward their heritage language. These findings may ultimately promote the significance of creating an optimal classroom environment that caters to HLLs' needs. In this respect, the current research would explore to what extent do ASL/AFL teachers agree or disagree with the idea of a prior investigation of HLLs' motivations to learn Arabic and whether they recommend the inclusion of cultural contents that appeal to HLLs in the mixed classes.

To examine the influence of HLLs on non-heritage students, Elmahjoubi (2011) investigated the challenges that non-heritage students may face in a mixed language

classroom. He also studied the effects of HLLs on non-heritage students' motivation, attitude and anxiety. The study included mixed and separately taught groups of HLLs and Non-HLLs. Data collection procedures included students' questionnaires, interviews, and class observations. It also included a teacher interview that revealed significant results that relate to the current research topic.

Findings showed that non-heritage learners experienced different linguistic difficulties in speaking tasks compared to their heritage counterparts. They also concluded that non-heritage students, who were taught separately, were less anxious and more motivated than those in mixed classes. Moreover, results stated that non-heritage students' attitude was positively impacted in mixed classes. Therefore, the study revealed significant insights into the nature of teaching HLLs and non-heritage ones and helped to some extent in discovering this heritage population and their influence on their non-heritage counterparts in an ASL/AFL learning setting.

Based on such findings, the current study hypothesized that ASL/AFL teachers would prefer separating HLLs and Non- HLLs into different classes or separate them in class activities. Therefore, the survey would look into teachers' perspectives on either putting the two categories in separate classes or at least separating them in the class activities.

Another important part of Elmahjoubi's (2011)-study is related to results revealed by teacher's interview. It revealed that mixed classes impacted teacher's selection of teaching approach due to the heterogeneous nature of HL and Non-HL learners. This conclusion would also support the argument for an extended teacher-focused study to

explore how teachers think of this learning context and classroom environment and if there is any particular strategy or teaching approach teachers used to fulfill the needs of both HL and ASL learners.

Other research studies focused on the heritage background of HLLs as they studied the Arab parents' attitude toward Arabic, and their feelings about their children's maintenance of Arabic as a heritage language. For instance, Martin (2009) surveyed parental attitudes toward the use of Arabic and their language practices with their children to maintain Arabic. The study concluded that parents held positive attitudes toward Arabic as reflected in their language practices to help their children maintain Arabic.

In this respect, Martin proposed that teachers and language educators need to be aware of the learners' parental backgrounds and language practices inside and outside the family environment. Such awareness might help teachers anticipate how instruction and curricular materials are appropriate for HLLs. Ultimately; this knowledge may enhance the idea of tailoring a type of education that fulfills HLLs' needs. Therefore, the current research built on these findings as it questioned the importance of teachers' awareness of HLLs' backgrounds and objectives. In terms of prior needs assessment, the current study would investigate the teachers' perspectives on whether assessing the HLLs' levels, language practices, and family background before starting their classes may help "create a positive classroom environment in which Arabic and Arab culture are appreciated and promoted." (p. 49)

In the same context, Aburumuh (2012) analyzed the attitudinal and motivational factors affecting the parents' choice of the schooling type they prefer for their heritage children. The study surveyed more than 300 parents who enrolled their children in community-based schools and explicitly stated the socio-cultural factors like ethnicity significantly impacted the parental attitude toward the Arabic language and HLLs' enrollment. The study, also, implicates that future research on HL while associated with ethnic and cultural factors should follow a holistic approach that considers HLL's ancestral, ethnic, cultural and religious backgrounds.

According to the study, this holistic approach entails incorporating other variables such as ethnicity and religion when studying HLLs, which could be reflected in developing Arabic programs as well as supporting AHL learners. Toward a more holistic approach, the current research would incorporate the variable of HLLs' backgrounds and motivations for learning Arabic and whether ASL teachers look into them before teaching mixed classes.

Aburumuh (2012), therefore, added considerable input in the barely new field of HLLs research. It referred to the need for more consideration of HLLs populations in the field and, by doing so, filled a significant gap in the existing literature and opened the door for more future research. Knowing teachers' perspectives on such thorough study may enhance our knowledge and insight of such type of learners and their needs fulfillment.

To sum up, the sub-section on attitude, motivation and anxiety shed light on some research studies that have gone beyond the linguistic performance of HLLs to investigate



other psychological and non-linguistic aspects. It highlighted the HLLs and parents' attitudes toward heritage language, students' motivations for learning, the effects of mixed classes on ASL learners' motivation and anxiety as well as other related socio-psychological factors. Such student-based research studies contributed to the literature as they highlighted many challenges that teachers face in the ASL learning settings at linguistic and psychological levels. Therefore, it becomes meaningful that the current research would investigate the ASL/AFL teachers' perspectives on such linguistic and non-linguistic challenges and how they respond to them.

### ***1.3. Research on HLLs' Learning challenges and strategies***

In this part of the literature review, the focus is turned to research studies that investigated the HL and Non-HL learners' dynamics and strategies of how both types of students acquire and learn the language. Studying such aspects, in fact, played a vital role in the HL literature as they surveyed the challenges and strategies of learning in a student-based type of research. Toward a more thorough understanding of the phenomenon, the current research examined the challenges and instructional practices of teaching and educating ASL mixed classrooms. The research also would explore to what extent teachers are aware of the students' learning challenges and strategies, and if such awareness does help teachers respond to the learners' needs. In this part of the review, reference is made to some non-Arabic literature that tapped into the current research focus and objectives.

In this regard, Walls (2013) investigated the learning dynamics of heritage and non-heritage students in separate and mixed classes. The study focused mainly on the

dyad types of interaction between HL and ASL learners of Spanish using collaborative writing activities. It came to the conclusion that separate groups were more cooperative and attending to language than mixed groups. These findings promoted that idea suggested by Husen (2011) and Lee (2005) that HL and ASL learners should be placed in separate classes or at least work separately during the classroom activities. Since HLLs are increasing in the ASL classes for variant reasons, this study attempted to evaluate and determine the effectiveness of collaborative work and presented considerable pedagogical implications that could be useful for learners and teachers alike. In AHL literature, the current study explores the teachers' perspectives on the HLLs and Non-HLLs' separation in classes and activities as suggested by the literature.

To assess the teaching and learning of Arabic, Zouhir (2011) critically investigated the learning strategies as well as the challenges and difficulties inherent in reading, speaking, writing, listening, grammar and conversation. The study aimed to present some pedagogical recommendations that would address the challenges encountered by ASL learners in the US academic environment. The author also emphasized that the scope of research should go beyond the study of linguistic complexity to tackle other psychological and pedagogical factors.

The researcher surveyed, interviewed, observed, and assessed ASL learners as well as one teacher. Some of those students were from Arabic/Muslim decent; however, the research dealt with them as regular ASL learners. What relate to the current study are the findings that elaborated partially on the teaching strategies used in teaching the four skills. When asked about challenges, the interviewed teacher talked about class size, positioning, unavailability of resources and materials and the use of technology.

However, he did not refer to the presence of HLLs as a challenge. Therefore, the current study would initially explore to what extent other ASL teachers see the presence of HLLs as a challenge in their classes and whether the same strategies are applied.

### ***Research on L2/FL Teacher's Perceptions and Performance in Mixed Classes***

#### ***2.1. Research on Teacher's Perceptions and attitude***

In this section, attention was focused on studies that investigated the teacher's perceptions of L2/FL classes and their learners as well as the studies focusing on teaching challenges and instructional practices in mixed classes. It highlighted the importance of studying teacher's perceptions and their influence on the selection of methods and teaching practices. Such elaboration on teachers' perceptions may clarify the importance of teachers' perspectives and practices in HLL research.

One of the useful studies in this area is Lawson's (2010) that focused mainly on teacher's attitude toward Black English and its impact on reading achievement. Although this study did not directly relate to the HL literature, it targeted a very similar learning setting in which a group of learners show linguistic proficiency that differ from regular L2 learners leading to mixed class situation similar to mixed classes this study is dealing with. The study revealed some useful implications about teachers' perceptions of learning and teaching techniques in such settings. It also highlighted the importance of teachers' awareness of the special needs of particular learners in a given learning setting.

The study surveyed about 61 teachers and interviewed six others to investigate whether they have a positive, neutral or negative attitude toward Black English. Results showed that teacher's attitudes toward Black English were not statistically significant

predictors of student's reading achievement. Also, they showed that teachers have good perceptions about Black English speakers as well as the influence of some environmental factors that control the use of Black English. In terms of teaching strategies, the study revealed that teachers indirectly employed some strategies as to how to deal with Black English speakers in the language class. The study also highlighted some challenges such as the teacher's lack of knowledge about non-standard dialects and how they impact learning, and the lack of cultural and linguistic elements that should fit diverse classrooms.

To cater to the needs of Black English speakers, the study concluded with a recommendation of providing “culturally responsive pedagogical techniques for the instruction.” (p. 2) It is clear then that a language classroom that encompassed two types of learners (speakers and non-speakers of Black English) necessitated a special treatment of such learning setting through incorporating certain elements in curriculum as well as other instructional practices as cited above.

Another similar study is Byrnes, Kiger, & Manning (1997) that addressed teachers' attitudes toward language diversity and diverse student in language classes. The study surveyed 191 teachers' attitudes along variables like field experience, region, and formal training. Conclusions showed that formal training and experience could help teachers develop a more positive attitude toward linguistic minority students and cater to their linguistic and cultural needs.

Findings also presented some strategies that could be useful in teaching such diverse classes. In this context, the current study examines variables like field experience

and formal training through investigating short and long experienced teachers' perspectives on such elements. Such investigation may provide significant findings that could help in situating learners in their appropriate learning settings.

In the previous illustration, the study of teachers' attitudes has revealed some important insights about teacher's perceptions of their diverse classrooms and how do they respond to their needs. It has also shown that teacher's characteristics relate directly to the formation of teacher's positive or negative attitudes. Studying variables like field experience, formal training, teacher's background, and awareness of learners' cultural and pedagogical needs may play a significant role as reflected in the teaching techniques and preferences.

## ***2.2. Research on Teaching Materials***

In terms of teaching materials, Geisherik (2005) advanced a research study on the methodological and linguistic aspects of involving Russian HLLs at university-level classes. The study focused in part on the availability of any sections designed in particular to cater to the needs of HLLs as well as the instructional materials and other placement strategies. Another detailed evaluation of resources has been carried out to see how suitable the textbooks and materials are to fit mixed classes.

In conclusion, the study shed light on some linguistic gaps and suggested some strategies to handle them. It also presented significant insights about the development of curricular sections designed specifically for HLLs. It, moreover, recommended the inclusion of the so-called 'individualized tasks' as a strategy to address HLLs' motivational goals. In case of Arabic, the current research attempted to look into

teachers' perspectives on such instructional practices and special curriculums for HLLs and how necessary they are in teaching mixed language classes and catering to the needs of HLLs.

Such investigation of teachers' perspectives could ultimately set a platform for developing a follow-up study that highlights the linguistic gaps, and compares the HL and L2 motivational goals. It could, then, evaluate the resources and materials available for mixed classes, and assess the materials' suitability to create an optimal classroom environment that caters to the needs of both HL and non-HL learners.

### ***2.3. Research on Teaching Challenges and Strategies***

In terms of challenges and strategies, Chandrasekaran's (2008) study investigated the obstacles and the teaching strategies used by high schools Spanish teachers to involve the increasing number of HLLs in their Spanish language classes. This study was qualitative in nature and provided valuable insights about classroom challenges and how teachers respond to them. Carrying out such teacher-based research shows us how teachers' perspectives matter when it comes to fulfilling learners' needs. It also clarifies what strategies teachers use, whether these strategies are suggested or supported by the literature, and if it is possible to generalize the use of particular strategies to fulfill better the learners' needs. Such study is exploratory in nature and aimed at a mere exploration of the HLS's teaching challenges, strategies and any evidence or support from literature to a given employed strategy or technique. That is exactly the plan that will be followed in the current research but for Arabic HLLs at the university level.

In this respect, Campanaro (2013) studied the perceptions of both students and teachers in the Spanish classroom in an attempt to address the needs of learners (heritage and non-heritage) in the mixed classes. The study investigated teachers' perceptions of the dynamics and challenges of having mixed classes. Such investigation, in fact, reflected how teachers responded to students' motivational goals and highlighted the significance of collaborative learning in providing opportunities to HL and non-HL learners to grow. The study also emphasized the idea that teachers' methods in facilitating the classroom activities are essential to a successful mixed language class. Such conclusions are further supported by Moon's (2013) study that investigated the challenges faced by L2 English teachers and reported that the methods and strategies employed in facilitating the classroom activities have a significant effect on the learner's acquisition, and in search for the "right approach", teachers are in need for experience-based trainings to develop the learner's linguistic literacy and be aware of the cultural differences within the classroom environment (p.3). Although the current study aims primarily to explore the challenges and strategies of teaching HLLs, it is expected to open the door for future research that could evaluate, suggest and guide on the best practices for the best outcome of teaching mixed classes as did Moon's (2013).

As stated earlier, studies on a teacher's perceptions and performance could provide a broad range of insights about teaching challenges and strategies that ultimately help in facilitating the teaching and learning processes. While some studies helped to fill gaps in the existing literature, there is still a lot of research required to come up with more reliable and valid results in the field.

To sum up, research that has been developed so far in the area of AHL broadly covers some topics in linguistic competence as well as attitudinal and motivational factors affecting the whole learning process at the teacher's and learner's levels. In addition, there are also some studies on teachers' attitudes and teaching strategies applied in the context of L2 and foreign language education; however, the field still lacks teacher-based research that directly relates to teaching and learning strategies. When it comes to the field of Arabic teaching, the current research could help fill in a paucity of scholarship addressing specifically, the area of teaching challenges and strategies.

### ***Critical Perspectives***

The literature reviewed above has broadly outlined what topics of research have been attempted and what is still missing. Seemingly, there is little or no teacher-based research that was developed to explore teacher's perspectives on classroom challenges and instructional practices in ASL/AFL Arabic mixed classes. Therefore, the literature would welcome a teacher-based study that examines the challenges ASL/AFL Arabic teachers may encounter when dealing with mixed classes as well as the instructional practices used in such learning setting.

As the HL literature surveyed above highlighted gaps in HLLs' linguistic proficiency, attitude, and motivation discovery as well as learning challenges and strategies, the teacher-based research focused on the teacher's attitude and motivation, the teaching challenges encountered when teaching HLLs and diverse classrooms, and the teaching practices, models, practices, activities, and curricular and instructional priorities that ASL/AFL teachers use in their mixed classrooms. Such tracks of research



help contextualize the current study and make it tap into the body of AHL research as it would explore how teachers perceive such challenges and respond to them.

Finally, no development could be seen without empirical research in the area of learning and teaching while holistically including teachers, students and other variables that would serve the purposes of the current study appropriately and efficiently.

### **CHAPTER III**

#### ***Methodology***

Chapter III provides a detailed account of the research methods applied in this study to explore the challenges and instructional practices that ASL/AFL teachers use in ASL/AFL Arabic mixed classes. Principally, this study followed a mixed-method approach (Creswell, 2002; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998, 2003), namely, a qualitative/quantitative design. For the purpose of this study, data collection procedures included a teacher's questionnaire, classroom observations to monitor teacher's performance, and teachers' interviews to look more in-depth into the instructional practices in the ASL/AFL mixed classes.

First, this chapter reports on the sampling strategy used in the current study as well as the participants' recruitment and characteristics. Then, it illustrated the data collection instruments, their design, and use. After that, it elaborated on the data analysis techniques and the methods used to interpret the data collected from surveys, interviews, and observations. Moreover, this chapter concluded with a feasibility report on the research design, data accessibility, resources availability, expected challenges and proposed solutions, and research steps timeline.

### *Sample*

For the purpose of generalization, the sample was intended to include at least 50 university-level instructors in the field of ASL/AFL from both genders. The sampling strategy was chosen to supply the most information possible regarding the research questions. It assigned native and non-native, male and female, and long and short-experienced teachers from the Middle East, Europe and the US colleges and universities. Such sampling had an added value to the research implications when natives vs non-natives, for instance, were compared as well as teacher's gender and experience.

In response to the online survey, 58 volunteer participants took part in this study, representing an amalgamation of experiences and backgrounds. Among the surveyed teachers, four were observed and three were interviewed. Therefore, Triangulation was employed to attain credibility and accuracy of the study (Goodwin & Goodwin, 1996). Table.1 summarizes the number of participants responding to each data collection instrument.

**Table.1**

*Samples Summary*

	Online Survey	Interview	Class Observation
Number of respondents	58	3	4

### *The Sample Characteristics*

*Section I* of the online survey was on demographics (Table. 2). Results of descriptive statistics revealed that among the sample (n = 58), 30 (51.7%) were females and 28 (48.3%) were males.

As for age, results found that the most highly represented age range was 30-39 years old (41.4%), while the groups representing 20-29 (29.3%) years of age was the next highest representation. Other categories were as follows: 9 respondents were of 40-49 (15.5%), 5 were 50-59 (8.6%), and 3 were 60 or more (5.2%).

As for the academic background, demographics revealed that 13 respondents (22.4%) were holders of Bachelor's, 36 (62.1%) were of Master's, 8 (13.8%) of Ph.D. and 1 (1.7%) of post graduate diplomas.

Regarding the years of ASL/AFL teaching experience, 15 participants were fresh teachers (1-2 year), 17 were of the (3-5) category, 13 were of the (6-10) category, 5 were of the (11-15) category, 2 were of the (16-20) category, and 6 were of the (21-25) category. All of respondents were of university Arabic teaching experience when filling in the survey.

As for the respondents' current teaching status, data revealed that 45 (77.6%) teachers were teaching Arabic as a foreign language when filling in the survey whereas the other 13 (13.4%) were not.

In response for the formal training received in teaching ASL/AFL Arabic (e.g. TAFL MA, PhD, Diploma), 29 (52.7%) participants hold an MA degree in teaching

Arabic as a foreign language, 3 (5.5%) hold a diploma in TAFL while the rest 21 (41.8%) hold variant degrees in relevant fields such as TESOL, Arabic Literature, and TEFL as well as non-degree holders.

As for the teacher's Arabic background, data revealed that 50 (86.2%) respondents were native speakers of Arabic, while 7 (12.1%) were non-natives and only one respondent (1.7%) was a heritage speaker of Arabic. Such finding is also important when analyzing the variable of native vs. non-native background in relation to the types of challenges and how each group responds to them.

Regarding the teacher's experience of having Arabic HLLs in their ASL/AFL classes, data revealed that 49 (84.5%) participants had HLLs in their classes while only 9 (15.5%) teachers did not have such experience. Data, moreover, revealed that only 16 (27.6%) participants received a training on teaching HLLs while the majority 42 (72.4%) did not receive any training for such purpose.

Therefore, the Demographics section of the survey revealed details about the respondents' background, formal training and experience in the field. Such variables are treated in the data analysis section in relation to the findings of both quantitative and qualitative sections of the study.

**Table. 2**

*Demographic Characteristics of Respondents (n=58).*

Variable		Freq. (n)	Percent. (%)
Gender:	Male	28	51.7
	Female	30	48.3

Age:	20-29	17	29.3
	30-39	24	41.4
	40-49	9	15.5
	50-59	5	8.6
	60-more	3	5.2
Arabic Background:	Heritage Speaker	1	1.7
	Native Speaker	50	86.2
	Non-native Speaker	7	12.1
Teaching Experience:	1-2	15	25.9
	3-5	17	29.3
	6-10	13	22.4
	11-15	5	8.6
	16-20	2	3.4
	21-25	6	10.3
Degree:	Bachelor's	13	22.4
	Master's	36	62.1
	PhD	8	13.8
	Post-Graduate Diploma	1	1.7
HLLs Training Received:	Yes	16	27.6
	No	42	72.4
Currently Teaching Arabic:	Yes	45	77.6
	No	13	13.4

HLLs	Yes	49	84.5
Teaching experience:	No	9	15.5

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Table Notes: Frequency=number of participants.

### ***Data Collection***

For the purpose of this study, data collection instruments included respectively an online questionnaire, class observation, and teacher's interviews.

As for the *online survey*, it was adapted from Elmahjoubi's (2011) and Chandrasekaran's (2008) surveys. It consisted of three main sections starting with the *Teacher's Demographics*. *Section II* of the questionnaire was quantitative in nature and included statements on some proposed challenges encountered when working with mixed classes as well as some instructional practices and strategies suggested by literature about the topic, following a Likert-scale-type. The section included 18 statements on some proposed challenges (statements 1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, and 12) and strategies (3, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, and 18) to explore how teachers respond to them. The statements elaborated on challenges like HLLs' presence in the ASL/AFL Classroom, linguistic gaps (attrition and incomplete acquisition), variability in HLLs' linguistic proficiency, dominance, and availability of materials and resources. They also covered curriculum designs and selection of materials and activity types, the absence of teacher-training packages, dialectal variations, and diglossic situation.

Moreover, section II, included statements on selection strategies for class materials or activities, collaborative learning, and topics matching HLLs' needs. It further investigated strategies such as leading group activities, collaborative learning activities, and separation of the two groups, giving extra homework and assignment, and feedback. Respondents were expected to indicate their perspectives as to what extent they agree, or disagree with such statements.



As for *Section III* of the questionnaire, it was qualitative in nature and included open-ended questions about teachers' performance in case he/she should add any extra input that was not covered in the quantitative section. These questions related to the same challenges and strategies covered in Section II. Issues addressed in this section were expected to indicate why respondents agree or disagree with the statements in Section II. Such input was supposed to help the researcher run an in-depth analysis of the issues addressed in the quantitative section of the questionnaire. Participants were encouraged to mention additional challenges and strategies that were not covered in the previous sections.

As for the questionnaire format, it was developed online using *Google Documents* and included different question types: multiple choice, yes-no, and open-ended questions. To measure the questionnaire's internal consistency, responses on each item addressing challenges and strategies were analyzed and reported, running the analysis in SPSS. Moreover, to ensure a complete understanding of the questionnaire items, it was given in the teacher's first language, namely, Arabic (the language of instruction) and also in English.

The second procedure was classroom *Observations*. It came after the online questionnaire as a secondary data collection instrument to validate and give credibility to the survey results. Observation was also intended to come up with some evaluative judgments regarding the teacher's strategies and practices referred to in the survey, to see if data from both sources were similar. Furthermore, observation data were gathered here in the form of verbal explanations. It means that the researcher/observer observed the strategies and methods used in an ASL/AFL mixed classroom using a rubric (Appendix

III). Such rubric was made up of two sections: one included a matrix of the proposed strategies with spaces to fill them in while the other section was for note-taking. The items listed in the form were adapted from the questionnaire results and literature, and were used to figure out if the data from the survey and the class observation were similar. The second section of the rubric was for note-taking. It described the classroom events and any other observation items that the matrix did not have. Therefore, the observation was intended to observe the instructional practices, the forms of interaction in the classroom, the assignment of different roles and the types of class participation.

The techniques employed in these contexts followed Nunan's (1997a) observation tools that encompass formal experiments, interaction analysis, and stimulated recall and observation schemes. The significance of using the observation instrument, in fact, has to do with its ability to "test the veracity of the teachers' claims and the learners' judgments" (Soliman, 2001, p. 234).

All observations took place at university-level classes that ranged from beginners to low and upper-intermediate classes. Data were collected by four trained observers, including the researcher, who taught Arabic as a second language and each teacher was observed for one full session. It worked easily as all of the observers were part of the survey respondents and got to know a lot of details about the study. Each observer was contacted personally and instructed by the researcher on how to use the rubric and document any extra strategies or practices that directly relate to the current research questions. Observation showed that the number of HLLs varied in every class and teachers' practices were similar to a great extent. Table.3 summarizes the observation

data collection process, where it took place, and the number of HLLs in each learning setting.

**Table. 3**

*A summary of the classes observed and the number of HLLs therein.*

School	Class Level	Observation time	Number of HLLs
University of Arizona	Intermediate	50 min.	5
University of Minnesota	Novice-High	50 min.	2
University of Indiana	Med-Low	50 min.	3
Bayreuth University, Germany	Novice	45 min.	2

Numbers of HLLs in ASL/AFL classes showed the increasing number of mixed classes (having HLLs and Non-HLLs) where in some cases HLLs represented the majority or at least half of the class capacity as in case of University of Arizona. With the expanded definition of Heritage Speakers (Husen 2001), some teachers treated Non-Arab Muslim students as HLLs. The classes varied greatly at all levels; cultural origin, educational background, and linguistic needs and interests.

To sum up, the purpose of observation was to primarily explore what teachers do in their ASL/AFL classes in terms of teaching strategies and practices and to what extent these practices match the questionnaire output. Therefore, observation validated the

questionnaire results and showed to a great extent, conformity among teachers regarding the type of strategies employed and the degree of HLLs involvement. Table.4 summarizes the most common observed strategies and how repeatedly it took place.

**Table.4**

*Observation rubric results.*

	Teacher uses HLLs as a resource to explain or introduce any entry	Teacher demonstrates awareness of individual student learning needs	Teacher provides culturally relevant materials	Teacher asks HLL to clarify unknown cultural entry	Teacher clarifies unknown words used by HLL	Teacher makes HLL lead a class activity	Teacher separates HLL in class activity	Teacher involves HLL in group work	Teacher involves HLL in pair work	Teacher gives priority to HLL to answer
Class 1	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗	✓	✓	✗
Class 2	✗	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓
Class 3	✓	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗	✓	✗	✗	✗
Class 4	✓	✗	✗	✗	✗	✗	✓	✓	✓	✗

The third data collection technique used in the study was teacher's *Interviews*. Interviews were held either in person, based on the teacher's availability and accessibility, or online via Skype. Like observations, interviews were intended to get more in-depth information and clarification of the survey input. Also, they were meant to highlight the reasons behind the teachers' responses to the questionnaire items and observed class practices as Perry (2011) reported that "interviewing the participants after making ... inferences would have been an excellent way to check on the validity of ... conclusions" (p. 117). Three teachers were interviewed. The first teacher was a native

speaker with a fresh experience; the second was a native experienced in the field of ASL/AFL and the third was a heritage speaker. For the purpose of generalizing the study results, the selection process aimed at interviewing a representative of all types of respondents to the survey. The interview procedures began with an informed consent form to be signed by the participant willing to take part in the research. Then a number of questions (Appendix IV) were directed to the interviewees.

Interviews were semi-structured since they had a set of predetermined questions with a possibility that the interviewer may follow up a question with additional issues that probe further. Interviews were conducted in Arabic and English. The interviewer recorded notes and then used the notes to write expanded English summaries of each respondent's answers to the questions. Individual answers varied in length, content, complexity, and the extent to which they agreed with a specific statement. For example, the second question asked during the interview was "How do you engage HLLs in your class activities?" The following quotes show responses of the three interviewees:

[Two important things: First, encouraging them to apply for abroad summer programs and assign to them special tasks like doing a research on a specific cultural phenomenon or collect data for a short movie that documents their experience before and after the program. Second, engaging HLLs in the Arabic club activities, Arabic tables, Arabic magazines, and field trips to local communities.]

[I mix them with non-heritage students. Another method I use is that I put them in groups and ask them for extra work.]

[First of all, the activities should be challenging. Easy activities will make them drop out the class. Second, the teacher should point out the importance of each activity to them (HLLs) and make it clear how they benefit from the activity.]

The participants' input was compared to find out the similarities and differences. Also, Glesne's (2006) coding and thematic analysis was employed. The coding process took place as the transcripts of data collected from the qualitative survey section, interviews and observations were searched for patterns and themes.

After sorting and defining themes and patterns, each theme was supported by examples extracted from the available resources (*e.g.*, notes, observation sheets and interview excerpts). After that, a comparison was held between the results of all the available data to figure out the similarities and differences among respondents. Therefore, approaching the research questions from different angles by doing the questionnaire, the observation and the interview, would help achieve triangulation and increase the validity of results as various methods have led to the same results. Such plan matched Perry's (2011) report that "qualitative methods of data collection often look for information-rich data to build theoretical hypotheses." (113)

### ***Data Analysis***

As for the data analysis section, it manifested two subsections addressing the two parts of the research question; respectively, classroom challenges and teaching strategies. The first subsection focused on challenges. In this portion of the study, data were collected and analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. The survey quantitative section primarily investigated teachers' perspectives about 11 statements (items 1, 2, 4, 5,

6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, and 12), on class challenges to figure out to what extent teachers agree/disagree with these statements. Then, reference was made to other qualitative data (open-ended questions, observations and interviews) to support each item of the survey.

The second subsection was for the teaching strategies. The survey quantitative section investigated teachers' perspectives about 7 statements (items 3, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, and 18) on teaching strategies and instructional practices employed in ASL/AFL mixed classes. As in the previous section, each item here was analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics, and supported by other data elicited from the qualitative parts.

Quantitative data were analyzed and tested for validity and reliability using Cronbach alpha test to compute the internal consistency of the questionnaire in SPSS software. In addition, non-parametric tests such as t-test were made to define the mean and standard deviation for each factor and figure out if there are any statistically significant differences among respondents based on gender. Data are summarized and presented below in a form of verbal explanations.

### ***Reliability Analysis***

In order to understand whether the questions in this questionnaire were internally consistent, a Cronbach's alpha test was run. The 18 items used in the online survey were subcategorized under two main sections; respectively, challenges that consisted of 11 items (1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, and 12), and instructional practices that consisted of 7 items (3, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, and 18).

Regarding the section on *challenges*, the scale (i.e. the 11 items) had a high level of internal consistency, as determined by a Cronbach's alpha of .784. As for the section

on *instructional practices*, the scale (i.e. the 7 items) had a moderate level of internal consistency, as determined by a Cronbach's alpha of .698. Therefore, it could be concluded here that the questionnaire used in the current study was reliable. Table 22 below summarizes the results of the Cronbach alpha test for the two sections of the questionnaire.

**Table. 22**

*Reliability Statistics for Challenges and Instructional Practices Parts*

Factor	N of Items	Cronbach's Alpha
Challenges	11	.784
Instructional Practices	7	.698

To investigate whether there are any statistically significant differences between the two groups of respondents, males and females, independent-samples t-test was run to compare teachers' perceptions regarding the challenges and instructional practices in an ASL/AFL classroom in male and female conditions. As for the challenges part, there was no statistically significant differences in the scores for males ( $M=3.4123$ ,  $SD=.56987$ ) and females ( $M= 3.2273$ ,  $SD=.69798$ ) conditions;  $t(56) = 1.101$ ,  $p = .275$  and  $t(55.054) = 1.1.09$ ,  $p = .272$ .

Regarding the instructional practices part, another paired t-test was conducted and showed no statistically significant differences between males ( $M=3.4796$ ,  $SD = .57303$ ) and females ( $M= 3.5667$ ,  $SD = .79626$ ) responses;  $t(56) = -.475$ ,  $p = .637$  and  $t(52.688) = -.480$ ,  $p = .633$



Table 23 below summarizes the t-test results in both conditions. These results suggest that gender really does not have an effect on teacher's perceptions of challenges and instructional practices.

**Table.23**

*Independent Samples Test*

		Levene's Test for		Equality of		Variances		t-test for Equality of Means			95% Confidence	
											Interval of the	
											Difference	
		F	Sig.	T	df	Sig.	Mean	Std. Error			Lower	Upper
						(2-	Difference	Difference				
						tailed)						
Challenges	Equal											
	variances	.895	.348	1.101	56	.275	.18506	.16802			-.15152	.52165
	assumed											
	Equal											
	variances not			1.109	55.054	.272	.18506	.16685			-.14929	.51942
	assumed											
Instructional	Equal											
	variances	2.880	.095	-.475	56	.637	-.08707	.18331			-.45429	.28014
Practices	assumed											
	Equal											
	variances not			-.480	52.688	.633	-.08707	.18128			-.45072	.27657
	assumed											

As for the qualitative section, it showed a wealth of data received from the respondents. Data were reduced to the most meaningful and usable themes and patterns that are relevant to the research questions. In order to define the themes and patterns, the process was conducted in two primary ways; respectively, content analysis and thematic analysis. Content analysis, on the one hand, included coding data for certain words, identifying their patterns, and interpreting their meanings. On the other hand, thematic analysis grouped the data into themes to help answer the research questions. The elicited

data were shown in a display that facilitates conclusion drawing. The display includes a graphic, table/matrix, and textual display. The constant comparative data analysis technique (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) was used in the data analysis of this section along with other techniques that figured out similarities and differences in teacher's responses.

### ***Feasibility of the Study***

Since this area of research is relatively new, the majority of research studies are recent and published in most databases, online journals, and digital libraries. Through the American University in Cairo Library access and other subscriptions, I had access to most journals and databases in addition to digital archives and regular libraries. Through an initial review of the literature, mostly all resources were available and accessible.

As for the forms that needed approval, they included the Informed Consent Form as well as other bureaucratic formalities for thesis application. Once the feasibility was approved, IRB permission was given before sending the questionnaire out to participants. The first section of the questionnaire was to read the Informed Consent Form and sign it online before proceeding to the demographical data section and then the question list.

The technical skills needed for this study included basic computer literacy, knowledge of using Microsoft Office, and Internet applications and online programs. For the researcher, computer literacy was important to write the thesis, design graphic charts, gather data, access online resources like journals and digital archives, design the questionnaire, receive feedback, and contact participants. On the part of the respondents, it was also important to have the essential online literacy of accessing and surfing the web, filling in applications and submitting final results and using emails.

One of the challenges was that the online questionnaire might not be accessible for participants, or some participants might not be literate in using online applications. An alternative plan was to send the questionnaire via email or in a hard copy format and wait for results or refer directly to online interviews via Skype/cell phones. Another challenge for the questionnaire was to avoid repetitive responses and allow only one response per person as the former might affect the validity of the study. To control such repetitiveness, the participant should have a Google account to be able to access the questionnaire only once. If participants are not able to access the Google application, then a soft/hard copy is sent via email/mail. A third challenge was if the researcher is not literate in some computer and Internet applications and programs required for the thesis writing. In this case, assistance was sought from experienced members or the technology unit at AUC that offers technical training and services.

## **Chapter IV**

### ***Results***

Chapter IV presents the findings of the qualitative and quantitative data collected from the survey, interviews and class observations that have been carried out to explore the teaching challenges and strategies ASL teachers use in their ASL mixed classes. The research questions were:

1. What are the perceptions of teachers of Arabic as a foreign/second language about challenges encountered when teaching mixed classes? How do they respond to such challenges?
2. What are the instructional practices that teachers use in Arabic as a foreign/second language mixed classes?

As the research question(s) directly addressed the challenges and instructional practices being employed in the ASL/AFL mixed classroom, results are presented and analyzed under two main themes; respectively, challenges and instructional practices. The plan is to incorporate selected qualitative data findings gathered from the open-ended questions, interviews and class observations in attempts to provide further explanation for these quantitative results of the online survey. In this respect, Hickey (1997) states that “self-report measures, particularly Likert-style scales....don’t capture the full range of responses, making different contexts appear more similar than they really are” (p. 182). Hence, qualitative data of this study were purposefully collected to support the interpretation of the quantitative data findings.

### ***Research Question I***

What are the perceptions of teachers of Arabic as a foreign/second language about challenges encountered when teaching mixed classes? How do they respond to such challenges?

#### ***Presence of HLLs in ASL Arabic classes***

Statement 1 in the online survey stated that HLLs presence in ASL classes represents a challenge for ASL/AFL teachers. Responses (Table.5) showed that 9 (15.5%) disagree, 25 (43.1%) neutral, and 24 (41.4%) agree. Despite the high percentage of agreement vs. disagreement, neutral respondents are still higher. This might be due the fact that participants may avoid using extreme response categories (central tendency bias). Responses to the open-ended questions section of the survey showed that few teachers prefer having mixed classes and that HLLs are not a challenge at all. In this context, one respondent reported the following:

[I like having mixed classes because the non-heritage students benefit from the dialect and cultural knowledge of the heritage students and the heritage students benefit from being around non-Arabs who are so interested in their language.]

However, another experienced teacher, when interviewed, reported that the challenge is not due to the mere presence of HLLs, but may be due to their proficiency level or even teacher's lack of experience as to how to deal with such learners. He said regarding variability of level of proficiency:

[I once had a HLL whose level was almost fluent in Arabic in my beginners' class. The university policy was not to admit any student in upper levels before taking the 100 level classes. As a fresh teacher, I decided to get him extra work that fits his level and meanwhile asked him to assist other students in pronunciation and conversation activities.]

Based on such findings, it could be concluded that before judging whether HLLs' presences is a challenge, many factors should be considered such as HLL's linguistic proficiency and teacher's experience.

Table. 5

*1. HLLs presence in Arabic L2 classes is a challenge for L2 teachers.*

Extent	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Strongly Disagree	4	6.9	6.9
Disagree	5	8.6	15.5
Neutral	25	43.1	58.6
Agree	11	19.0	77.6
Strongly Agree	13	22.4	100.0
Total	58	100.0	

Statement 2 proposed that the presence of HLLs affects the way the teacher plans for his/her lessons as well as the choice of instructional materials and activities. Results (Table. 6) showed that 14 (29.3%) disagree, 10 (17.2%) neither agree nor disagree, and 21 (53.4%) agree. In the open-ended section of the survey, question 4 investigated how

HLLs affect the teacher's planning and selection of materials. A high number of respondents reported in what way they experience this effect. One teacher wrote:

[It seems that I put two lesson plans; one for a regular class, and the other for a mixed class. Presence of HLLs definitely makes me think of them every time I plan a lesson or look for activities and materials.]

However, class observations revealed that such effect is related to factors like the level and number of HLLs in class, the type of activity and lesson content, and the learner's and school objectives. Therefore, taking a decision regarding the material and type of activity to be planned depends on class objectives, how many and how proficient they are in Arabic. In an interview, one respondent said that the HLLs she has in her elementary class are non-Arab Muslim students; therefore, they are treated like non-HL learners with no much difference made.

To overcome such challenges, respondents to the open-ended questions suggested adapting the content to meet the pedagogical and educational needs of HLLs after knowing their interests first. In addition, teacher should present something new to HLLs every time. Even if the topic is not new for HLLs, it could be presented in a more challenging way.

The teacher's interviews also revealed that the presence of HLLs could be problematic when it comes to introducing something cultural for the first time. It could be interesting for ASL learners but not for HLLs as they may have grown up with it. In such case, teacher may change his/her strategy/instructional procedures by putting some of the

work on them and asking them to talk about the topic from their own experience. This also could be considered a first-hand experience that would enhance and enrich the class.

**Table. 6**

*2. Presence of HLLs affects the way I plan for my lessons, choose instructional materials and select activities.*

Extent	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Strongly Disagree	4	6.9	6.9
Disagree	13	22.4	29.3
Neutral	10	17.2	46.6
Agree	21	36.2	82.8
Strongly Agree	10	17.2	100.0
Total	58	100.0	

### *HLLs' linguistic gaps and variability*

Talking about linguistic challenges of HLLs, statement 4 addressed the issue of variability in HLLs' linguistic proficiency as one of the teaching challenges. Responses (Table.7) showed that 6 (10.3%) disagree, 12 (20.7%) neither agree nor disagree, and 40 (69 %) agree. It is clearly stated that the majority of respondents marked variability in HLLs' performance as a challenge.

The open-ended questions section of the online survey questioned how teachers deal with such linguistic variability. Participants shared common practices such as pre-class planning, placement test, varied activities, individualized tasks, office hour meetings, and extra-curricular activities. In this respect, respondents recommended balancing activities and distributing varied-level students in activity groups. While low-



level HL students need extra office hour time and may need tutoring in order to catch up with the rest, high-proficient students need extra challenging tasks. Sometimes, the latter group might be assigned a part of a higher book if they seem motivated to learn more.

Interviews also suggested that HLLs could be asked to participate in extra-curricular activities, do a group project, or do a presentation. In terms of group activities, one interviewee suggested the following:

[In group activities, certain roles could be assigned for each one based on their levels and skills and maybe shuffle that later when they seem making progress. Moreover, during accomplishing his/her role, they will be observing what other colleagues are doing, and so they can learn about the responsibilities of other roles. Another important point to take into consideration is to have a safe environment where students can do mistakes freely in order to build their self-confidence and motivation to learn.] (Interview, March 27, 2016).

If such suggestions did not work, some respondents to the online open-ended section suggested separating them into high and low group levels.

**Table. 7**

*4. Variability in HLLs' linguistic proficiency is one of the teaching challenges*

Extent	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Strongly Disagree	4	6.9	6.9
Disagree	2	3.4	10.3
Neutral	12	20.7	31.0

Agree	23	39.7	70.7
Strongly Agree	17	29.3	100.0
Total	58	100.0	

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### ***Lack of teacher training programs***

Another challenge addressed in this study was on teacher trainings. The demographic section of the survey (Table.2) revealed that only 16 teachers (27.6%) received training on how to teach mixed classes and involve HLLs and non-HLLs learners in class activities while 42 respondents (72.4%) did not receive any training.

In the quantitative section, statement 5 questioned the issue of lack of teacher training programs on how to deal with HLLs as it might have a negative effect on dealing with HLLs in ASL/AFL mixed classes. Results (Table. 8) revealed that 6 (10.3%) disagree, 20 (34.5%) neither agree nor disagree, and 32 (55.2%) do agree. These findings were further enhanced by teacher interviews that revealed that most of the methods and strategies are personal initiatives and ideas. They highly recommended designing training packages for fresh and experienced teachers alike.

In the interviews, some teachers expressed their concerns about the lack of training programs. One respondent said:

[All the activities and materials I use with mixed classes are just personal efforts. I am not sure if such practices fulfill the students' needs. Judging from my experience, I think it is necessary to have trainings on how to teach ASL classes that have HLLs.]

Therefore, these findings suggest the necessity of developing training packages that better help teachers deal with mixed classes and cater to the learners' needs.

**Table. 8**

*5. The lack of teacher training programs as to how to deal with HLLs has a negative effect on their involvement in the language class.*

Extent	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Strongly Disagree	2	3.4	3.4
Disagree	4	6.9	10.3
Neutral	20	34.5	44.8
Agree	21	36.2	81.0
Strongly Agree	11	19.0	100.0
Total	58	100.0	

#### ***HLLs' dialects and use of colloquial varieties***

Another issue relates to HLLs' dialects. In this respect, statement 6 in the survey addressed the issue of dialectal differences among HLLs and to what extent teachers consider it a teaching challenge. Findings revealed that 16 (27.6%) disagree, 15 (25.9%) neither agree nor disagree, and 27(46.6%) agree. Responses varied significantly regarding this statement even in reply to the open-ended and interview questions. One interviewee responded:

[It is not necessarily a challenge for an Arab teacher to have speakers of different dialects in the same class. However, it may be challenging for other learners who expect to learn one register of Arabic but discover that Arabic is not just one

dialect. It is dialects. However, such dialectal differences could be resourceful for ASL learners and expose them to the varieties of Arabic.]

In this regard, class observations revealed that teachers at Intermediate-mid classes asked HLLs to explain some concepts in their own dialects. A teacher would explain a certain part and then ask HLLs to report or summarize their understanding using their own dialects. As far as such practice may seem interesting, it should be noticed that class level and objectives play a major role in the employment of dialects in an MSA class. For beginner classes, for instance, one teacher said in the interview that he tried to minimize HLLs' use of *Ammyia* by “*recasting*” with standard Arabic to keep all learners equally motivated. Such interference by the teacher may support the notion that variation in dialects could negatively affect other students' motivation.

**Table. 9**

*6. Dialectal differences among HLLs are a teaching challenge in the L2 Arabic class.*

Extent	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Strongly Disagree	4	6.9	6.9
Disagree	12	20.7	27.6
Neutral	15	25.9	53.4
Agree	16	27.6	81.0
Strongly Agree	11	19.0	100.0
Total	58	100.0	

Similar to the previous issue of dialects is statement 11 that investigated if HLLs' use of colloquial varieties in an ASL/AFL environment has a negative effect on non-heritage ASL learners' performance and motivation. From a teacher's point of view, results showed that 20 respondents (34.4%) disagree, 16 (27.6%) neither agree nor disagree, and 22 (37.9%) agree. Responses varied again here depending on teachers' experiences and practices. In this respect, data elicited from class observations also revealed that one teacher in an MSA beginners class would control participations in whole class activities making them within the formal variety (*Fusha*) being used, but allow colloquial usage in pair and small groups work. When asked about that, he said:

[All-class participations may demotivate ASL learners if HLLs used a different variety than the one being taught, while pair work would minimize such anxiety.]

Such finding supports the notion that HLLs' use of colloquial varieties may negatively affect ASL learners' performance and motivation. However, interviews revealed that in upper level classes, where fluency is highly encouraged, HLLs are welcomed to enrich the learning environment and communication in the target language.

**Table. 10**

*11. HLLs' use of colloquial (Ammiya) to ask or answer questions, has a negative effect on L2 learners performance and motivation.*

Extent	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Strongly Disagree	6	10.3	10.3
Disagree	14	24.1	34.5
Neutral	16	27.6	62.1

Agree	14	24.1	86.2
Strongly Agree	8	13.8	100.0
Total	58	100.0	

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### ***Dominance and class management***

Statement 7 addressed the issue of HLLs' dominance over the class activities and participation, and to what extent it has a negative effect on teachers' performance.

Results were as follows: 31 participants (53.5%) disagree, 14 (24.1%) neither agree nor disagree, and 13 (22.4%) agree. More than half of the respondents did not consider it negatively affecting their performance. In response to question 5 in the open-ended questions that investigated teachers' reactions to HLLs dominance over activities and participation, responses ranged from completely stopping to giving them the lead depending on the situation and the activity being done. Respondents, for instance, suggested that a teacher may ask HLLs to lead a group activity and, meanwhile, make sure that all students are involved. However, in four class observations (table.4), it was not recorded that teachers gave the lead in any activity to HLLs.

The open-ended section also suggested another way to overcome HLLs dominance. Teachers may challenge HLLs with extra tasks or questions. Such suggestion was also supported by the interviews output. Furthermore, teachers may talk to him/her after class, call students by name to participate, and group dominant students together, if applicable. Moreover, some participants recommended using indirect ways to reduce dominance such as throwing a few questions they would not answer to convey a message to all students that being HLLs does not necessarily mean they are better students or they

know everything. If it did not work, such dominant learners may be contacted personally or assigned a teaching assistant duty.

**Table. 11**

*7. HLLs' dominance over the class activities and participation has a negative effect on my performance as a teacher.*

Extent	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Strongly Disagree	12	20.7	20.7
Disagree	19	32.8	53.4
Neutral	14	24.1	77.6
Agree	11	19.0	96.6
Strongly Agree	2	3.4	100.0
Total	58	100.0	

The same question was again asked to explore teachers' perspectives about the effect of HLLs' dominance on other students' performance from a teacher's point of view. Results (Table. 11) revealed that 18 participants (31%) disagree, 17 (29.3%) neither agree nor disagree, and 23 (39.7%) agree. Respondents who agreed with this statement are relatively higher than the previous one despite the fact that answers were highly varied. A better understanding is expected if the question was directed to ASL learners, but since the current research objective is to investigate teachers' perspectives, the question was directed to teachers.

The qualitative section of the questionnaire revealed that some teachers interfere to minimize the HLLs dominance by assigning a student to answer. It also revealed that priority is not usually given to HLLs to answer.

Observations, in addition, reported that teachers use certain types of class activities such as individual and pair works to help create a more motivating learning environment. In this context, one teacher said: “I put them in groups together and give them a different assignment, mostly focusing on grammatical and lexical issues rather than conversation”. Such findings, in fact, suggest the idea that teachers are aware of this issue as they presented some suggestions and experience-backed practices to minimize the negative effect of dominance on other ASL learners.

**Table. 12**

*8. HLLs' dominance over the class activities and participation has a negative effect on L2 learners' performance.*

Extent	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Strongly Disagree	6	10.3	10.3
Disagree	12	20.7	31.0
Neutral	17	29.3	60.3
Agree	16	27.6	87.9
Strongly Agree	7	12.1	100.0
Total	58	100.0	

#### ***HLLs' interest and topic selection***

Statements 9 elaborated on the issue of topic selection and to what extent do teachers experience a lack of or no interest in their teaching materials on the part of



Arabic HLLs. Results showed that 11 respondents (18%) disagree, 12 (20.7%) neither agree nor disagree, and 35 (60.3%) agree. Responses showed that the majority of teachers experienced this before; hence, the qualitative section and interviews questioned what teachers usually do when they have such experience. In response to question 2 in the open-ended section of the survey that investigated teachers' action if the topic being covered is not interesting for HLLs or they seemed uninvolved, responses highlighted a number of patterns that repeatedly came to enhance themes like topic selection, nature of students' participation, and teachers' interactive decision before and during the class.

Before class, respondents suggested that teachers may explore HLLs' interests and consult them before the introduction of topics. Another suggestion was to ask at the beginning of the class about students' needs and what they expect to learn from it. Also, HLLs may contribute in building the activities as this may make them feel partners in the course development, not just passive recipients. One teacher suggested that HLLs could be asked to search the web to get more input about the topic to be covered.

During class, respondents suggested that a topic may be introduced in a catchy or interesting way by providing visual aids and conducting a debate. In addition, teachers should be flexible with doing activity modification, e.g. conversation rather than writing, having plan B, stories, short videos, educational games ...etc. On the students' part, HLLs could be asked personalized questions or asking them what they think or how they do it (depending on the topic).

In case the topic selected did not work, participants suggest finishing up the activity and trying another one, shortening the length of the duration of this topic if it

proves useless for them, involving HLLs in teaching some parts to spark their interest, asking them to share their experiences, improvising a group activity and giving them some leadership role. Therefore, activity differentiation, replacement and modification, activity lead, multi-task activities (reading and writing about a given topic), as well as participating as TAs, organizers, and assistants could help address the challenge of noninvolvement in class activities.

Other input in the interviews suggested talking to them in class as it may help know their motivation for learning and make use of them as an authentic resource of the target language in class. They could also be separated and given an extra or different activity. Class observations did not record any case of lack of interest toward the topics chosen for classroom activities. However, further research including student interviews may reveal insights about this issue.

**Table. 13**

*9. Sometimes, HLLs show lack of interest towards the topics chosen for the L2 classroom.*

Extent	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Strongly Disagree	4	6.9	6.9
Disagree	7	12.1	19.0
Neutral	12	20.7	39.7
Agree	22	37.9	77.6
Strongly Agree	13	22.4	100.0
Total	58	100.0	

### ***Teacher's ethnic background***

Statement 10 tackled another teaching issue that pertains to the teacher's Arabic background and to what extent he/she may be challenged by having HLLs in their ASL/AFL classes. Among the 68 respondents there were 7 non-native teachers and a heritage speaker teacher. Here, we considered only the answers of non-native teachers to figure out their perspectives and to what extent they feel anxious due to teaching HLLs. Results showed that 5 respondents (62.5%) disagree, 2 (25%) neither agree nor disagree, and 1 (12.5%) agree. According to such findings, the assumption that non-native teachers are negatively affected when teaching HLLs is not valid.

Such findings are further supported by the interviews. One interviewee said:

[Regardless of the advantages HLLs may have over their non-HLLs counterparts; there are many gaps in their grammar and MSA knowledge that still make them learners. Even if they show high proficiency at some parts of the curriculum, they still need many things in grammar and structures.]

**Table. 14**

*10. Non-native L2 Arabic teachers suffer from anxiety when teaching HLLs which negatively affects their performance as L2 educators.*

Extent	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Strongly Disagree	2	25	25
Disagree	3	37.5	62.5
Neutral	2	25	87.5
Agree	1	12.5	100.0

Total	8	100.0
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### ***Class level and appropriate placement***

Statement 12 discussed the issue of inappropriate placement of HLLs in ASL/AFL classes and to what extent it complicates teacher's job to cater to HLLs' needs. Results stated that 9 respondents (15.5%) disagree, 12 (20.7%) neither agree nor disagree, and 37 (63.8%) do agree. It could be seen that the majority of respondents agree with the statement that such action hardens teachers' job to fulfill HLLs' needs.

The qualitative section of the survey also revealed that inappropriate placement could be a source for many other challenges such as variability in HLLs levels, linguistic gaps, non-involvement, and dominance. To overcome this challenge, the following section of teaching strategies would demonstrate a lot of techniques and suggestions from literature and experience that teachers use to accommodate all types of learners, no matter how different their levels and proficiencies are.

**Table. 15**

*12. Inappropriate placement of HLLs in L2 Arabic classes complicates teachers' job to cater to the HLLs needs.*

Extent	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Strongly Disagree	5	8.6	8.6
Disagree	4	6.9	15.5
Neutral	12	20.7	36.2
Agree	18	31.0	67.2
Strongly Agree	19	32.8	100.0

Total	58	100.0
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In summary, the data reported above elaborated on teaching challenges like HLLs' presence in the ASL/AFL classroom, linguistic gaps (attrition and incomplete acquisition), variability in HLLs' linguistic proficiency, dominance, and availability of materials and resources. They also covered curriculum designs and selection of materials and activity types, the absence of teacher-training packages, dialectal variations, and diglossic situation.

### ***Research Question II***

What are the instructional practices that teachers use in Arabic as a foreign/second language mixed classes?

### ***Investigating HLLs' motives and objectives***

As a primary action, statement 3 in the online survey suggested the importance of identifying the HLLs' type of motivations before starting ASL/AFL classes. Results (Table.16) revealed that 5 (8.6%) disagree, 5 (8.6%) neither agree nor disagree, and 48 (82.7%) agree. Responses show that the majority of participants support the idea of identifying HLLs' motives as a strategy to better fulfill their needs. The three interviewed teachers reported that they hold meetings and spread questionnaires to better understand the HLLs' backgrounds and objectives of enrollment in an ASL/AFL classroom. According to one teacher, such meetings help define the HLLs' proficiency level and give the teacher a good background to better design a curriculum that meets the needs of all learners. Another respondent reported that he recommended some HLLs to go to

upper levels, if the institution policy allows, or at least give extra work and individualized tasks if the number of HLLs is small (one or two students at most).

Table. 16

*3. It is important to identify the HLLs' type of motivations before starting L2 Arabic classes*

Extent	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Strongly Disagree	3	5.2	5.2
Disagree	2	3.4	8.6
Neutral	5	8.6	17.2
Agree	30	51.7	69.0
Strongly Agree	18	31.0	100.0
Total	58	100.0	

### ***Separate Classes or Separate Groups***

Statement 13 surveyed the teachers' views on the issue of separating the two groups of learners in class activities as this may be a good strategy to fulfill both learners' needs. Results revealed that 31 respondents (53.4%) disagree, 10 (17.2%) neither agree nor disagree, 17 (29.3%) agree. As stated, the highest percentage of teachers opposed the idea of separating learners (HLLs and ASL learners) in one learning setting. Such finding nullified one of the research hypotheses that ASL/AFL teachers would prefer separating the two groups of learners in class activities or even putting them in separate classes.

The interview data, in addition, revealed that separating the two groups has negative consequences on HLLs and ASL learners' performance and collaboration. One teacher said: "I once separated two HLLs from ASL learners in all class activities. But I

felt that they were neither learning nor involved. Later on, I contacted the HLLs and they did not prefer to work separately”.

It was also reported that it may be challenging for a teacher to teach two classes in one learning setting. A third teacher, however, reported that he would group HLLs in a separate groups if their level is notably higher than other learners and make their task more challenging than others.

**Table. 17**

*13. Separating the two groups (Heritage & Non-Heritage) in activity assignment is a good strategy to cater to their needs.*

Extent	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Strongly Disagree	14	24.1	24.1
Disagree	17	29.3	53.4
Neither	10	17.2	70.7
Agree	11	19.0	89.7
Strongly Agree	6	10.3	100.0
Total	58	100.0	

Statement 17 suggested the idea of separating the two groups completely and putting them in separate classes as a way to fulfill each group’s needs. Responses came as follows: 25 respondents (43.1%) disagree, 14 (24.1%) neither agree nor disagree, and only 19 (32.7%) agree. Responses varied here as well; however, the highest percentage opposed the idea of full separation.

According to the interviews findings, it is not a practical solution for the majority of institutions to make separate classes for each type of learners. Even if HLLs are in one class, there emerges the challenge of variability in their linguistic proficiencies; therefore, a better choice would be to put them in appropriate-level classes based on primary assessments of proficiency and motives. This statement again nullified the hypothesis that teachers would prefer the full separation of the two types of learners to better cater to each learner's needs.

**Table. 18**

*17. It is preferable to completely separate the two groups (HLLs & L2 learners) and put them in different classes.*

Extent	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Strongly Disagree	14	24.1	24.1
Disagree	11	19.0	43.1
Neither	14	24.1	67.2
Agree	9	15.5	82.8
Strongly Agree	10	17.2	100.0
Total	58	100.0	

#### *Selection of culturally relevant materials*

Statement 14 handled the strategy of covering topics that have cultural relevance to HLLs and to what extent should such strategy help involve HLLs in the ASL/AFL classes. Results revealed that 4 respondents (6.9%) disagree, 8 (13.8%) neither agree nor disagree, and 46 (79.3%) agree. It seems that teachers by practice employ such strategy



as it gets HLLs involved to share and talk about something that directly relate to them. In this respect, one teacher reported: “I tend to add cultural flavor to the lesson. The heritage students tend to help in answering non-heritage ones questions about the things I present in my class. Mixing them is the best way to achieve this goal.”

Class observations, in addition, revealed that teachers included some cultural concepts in their lessons and asked HLLs to clarify them either in pairs or to classmates. One teacher in the interviewed reported that he prefers that HLLs do this job of clarifying a cultural concept and helping others to whom the concept is new.

**Table. 18**

*14. Teachers' use of lessons that have cultural appeal to the HLLs facilitates their involvement in the L2 Arabic classes.*

Extent	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Strongly Disagree	1	1.7	1.7
Disagree	3	5.2	6.9
Neither	8	13.8	20.7
Agree	24	41.4	62.1
Strongly Agree	22	37.9	100.0
Total	58	100.0	

#### *Using collaborative learning practices*

Statement 15 followed up with another strategy that relates to the techniques of collaborative learning, and to what extent teachers believe that it may serve in involving HLLs in the ASL/AFL class activities. Results showed that 5 (8.6%) respondents disagree, 7 (12.1%) neither agree nor disagree, and 46 (79.3%) agree. It seems that such

strategies and instructional are widely used as it was repeatedly reported in the open-ended questions, interviews and class observations.

**Table. 19**

*15. Using collaborative learning (work in pairs & small groups) in the classroom helps HLLs to feel involved.*

Extent	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Strongly Disagree	3	5.2	5.2
Disagree	2	3.4	8.6
Neither	7	12.1	20.7
Agree	22	37.9	58.6
Strongly Agree	24	41.4	100.0
Total	58	100.0	

#### ***Extra work and special curriculum design***

Statement 16 elaborated on one more strategy related to extra work and individualized tasks to fulfill HLLs needs and how teachers think of it. Results showed that 10 respondents (17.2%) disagree, 15 (25.9%) neither agree nor disagree, and 33 (56.9%) agree. Based on class observations and teachers interviews, it is also common that teachers ask HLLs to do extra work or take a more challenging task. One teacher said that he designs the same lesson plan for both types of learners, but gives HLLs extra questions on the same activity.

**Table. 20**

*16. Giving HLLs extra homework and assignment (individualized tasks) would cater to some of their needs.*

Extent	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Strongly Disagree	2	3.4	3.4
Disagree	8	13.8	17.2
Neither	15	25.9	43.1
Agree	21	36.2	79.3
Strongly Agree	12	20.7	100.0
Total	58	100.0	

Statement 18 questioned respondents on the idea of designing curricula for HLLs that differ from ASL curricula. Responses showed that 13 participants (22.4%) disagree, 13 (22.4%) neither agree nor disagree, and 32 (55.1%) agree. Responses varied with a high tendency toward agreement. Interviews, in addition, revealed that ASL curriculums barely fulfill HLLs' needs in ASL/AFL classes; hence, curriculums should be built based on the nature of class population. According to the qualitative data regarding curriculum design and topic selection, many patterns like adding cultural flavor to the lesson, selecting topics of cultural appeal, making culture references, explaining a cultural concept, and introducing cultural aspects, were commonly suggested in the respondents input. Such culture-related content could be introduced through HLLs as they may be asked to answer cultural questions, report to the class about a movie he/she has watched, telling jokes, and performing sketches in colloquial Arabic. In addition, a more effective curriculum may encompass critical thinking and problem solving strategies as well as more focus on writing and reading skills.

**Table. 21**

*18. It is preferable to design curricula specific to HLLs that are different from L2 curricula.*

Extent	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Strongly Disagree	4	6.9	6.9
Disagree	9	15.5	22.4
Neither	13	22.4	44.8
Agree	18	31.0	75.9
Strongly Agree	14	24.1	100.0
Total	58	100.0	

### ***Summary***

To sum up, the 2<sup>nd</sup> research question investigated the teaching methods ASL/AFL teachers employ in terms of strategies and instructional practices in ASL/AFL mixed classes. Respondents' input addressed respectively class management techniques, skills and grammar teaching, HL and Non-HL learners' roles, teacher's role, and curriculum design and topic selection.

In terms of class management techniques, patterns like in mixed groups, teamwork, homogeneous and heterogeneous grouping, working in pairs/small groups, collaborative learning, and peer reviews, communicative and interactive activities emerged. The purpose of such techniques is to benefit from HLLs and get them involved in class activities all the time. Teachers also suggested the flipped classroom technique where students prepare the material before coming to class.

As for skills and grammar teaching, teachers recommended giving HLLs extra writing and conversation activities; involve them in group writing, reading, and listening tasks. They also recommended preparing extra activities, individualized tasks, and additional materials in case HLLs finished their non-communicative jobs before non-heritage peers. Moreover, they emphasized the importance of grammar to remind HLLs that they too have to learn something new. The same applies to skills like writing and reading where HLLs show deficiency/lack of knowledge and to a great extent comparable with ASL learners.

As for HL and Non-HL students' roles in class, teachers narrated that HLLs could be a major asset and valuable source to facilitate and enhance the classroom activities and output. They recommended a placement test and a level-appropriate enrollment of HLLs. Such step is expected to minimize the learning anxiety of learners and homogenize the team work. In addition, teachers recommended notifying HLLs to minimize the use of the colloquial variety (Ammiya) in the classroom environment and practice more speaking in pairs and small groups.

In terms of activity leading, some respondents recommended Non-HLLs to lead the activities in order to minimize their anxiety and make them feel comfortable and involved. However, few respondents suggested giving the lead to HLLs because of their prior knowledge and Arabic background.

In terms of role playing and interactive learning, participants suggested the learning strategy of negotiation of meaning based on HLLs' Arabic background and use

of colloquial varieties in upper-level classes. They could be asked to find the differences between their dialect and Standard Arabic.

Another role is to assign heritage students to help the non-heritage in completing their assignments and projects. In the same context, some teachers suggested that HLLs could teach vocabulary and pronunciation to non-heritage peers while the latter could teach and explain grammar. Moreover, teachers highly recommend giving HLLs the chance to answer questions of cultural appeal.

As for teachers' role in a mixed classroom, respondents recommended teachers interference to minimize HLLs' dominance over the class activities, consulting students (HLLs and Non-HLLs) for their topic recommendations, facilitating and monitoring the group activities and students performance, preparing the extra activities and individualized tasks for HLLs, evaluating HLLs' level, deciding when and who leads a type of activity, employing peer reviews and student-to-student feedback, and using simple language instructions.

## **CHAPTER V**

### ***Discussion***

Chapter V reports the conclusions of data presented in the previous chapter followed by a discussion of the results in light of the research questions and hypotheses. As the study's main purpose was to investigate teachers' perceptions of teaching challenges and strategies of mixed classes, it hypothesized that HLLs' presence in an ASL/AFL classroom entails challenges and teaching strategies that might be different from regular non-mixed Arabic language classes. In addition, it added that ASL/AFL teachers may be negatively challenged by the presence of both heritage and non-heritage learners in language classes. Moreover, it stated that ASL/AFL teachers may prefer the complete separation of the two types of learners in separate classes. Discussion is mainly focused on the challenges and how teachers respond to them as well as the teaching strategies and instructional practices being used in ASL/AFL mixed classes.

As stated in the introduction of this study, the current research came to fill a gap in AHL literature through investigating the effect of HLLs on teachers' performance and selection of instructional materials. The need for a thorough understanding of the nature of ASL/AFL mixed classes and catering to their needs necessitates a "holistic approach" to studying the phenomenon (Zouhir, 2010). Hence, the current study built on what has been already developed in the field such as studying the effect of HLLs on ASL learners' performance, motivation and anxiety (Elmahjoubi, 2011), and examining the effectiveness of collaborative work in mixed classes (Walls, 2013). The other side was to conduct a teacher-based study to figure out the teaching approaches used in such context

as well as the instructional practices used to overcome any challenges in mixed classes as recommended by Elmahjoubi (2011).

In the following section, results are discussed in light of the study hypotheses as well as the AHL literature. Then, implications for practice and future research are suggested before conclusions and recommendations.

### ***Hypothesis 1***

It was hypothesized that HLLs mere presence in an ASL/AFL classroom should entail a number of challenges as well as teaching strategies that could be different from a regular non-mixed class. This hypothesis was based on research studies in the literature (e.g. Montrul, 2008; Valdes, 1995; and Chandrasekaran, 2008) that reported that mixed classes may cause serious challenges to both teachers and learners. In the current study, results from the survey, observation, and interviews supported the idea that ASL/AFL teachers experienced a number of challenges when dealing with Arabic mixed classes. Results, in addition, revealed that HLLs' presence affect the way the teacher plans for his/her lessons, selects the type of activity and chooses topics and materials for teaching. Such results tap into AHL literature that highlighted the impact of mixed classes on teacher's selection of teaching approaches and practices as cited in Elmahjoubi (2012). Therefore, the current research supports the notion that HLLs presence in an ASL classroom entails instructional practices and preparation that necessarily differ from regular ASL classes.

One of the challenges that led to the mentioned variation in teaching practices in mixed class is in HLLs' linguistic proficiency that was highlighted in AHL literature (e.g. Albirini, Benmamoun, & Chakrani, 2013; Bos, 1997; and Boumans, 2006) and might be



a result of attrition or incomplete acquisition (Albirini and Benmamoun, 2012 & Montrul, 2002). Respondents in the current study expressed that they experience many challenges as a result of variability. Meanwhile, such variability entails certain types of strategies like putting HLLs in level-appropriate groups or giving them more challenging individualized tasks. Respondents also emphasized that a careful diagnosis of the gap should help in figuring out the most effective solution. To fill in these gaps, participants suggested office hours, tutoring, and take-home tasks. In addition, HLLs should be provided with extra materials to reinforce them independently. Moreover, it was suggested that there should be a written plan and progress report for each individual student. Such input of ASL/AFL teachers, in fact, reflects how they perceive variability and try to handle it. With the movement in AHL research, such findings in the current research could play a vital role in the development of training packages and teaching guides for mixed classes.

Among the challenges related to HLLs presence in ASL/AFL Arabic classes was the issue of placement. The literature (e.g. Saddah, 2011; Ibrahim and Allam, 2006) referred to inappropriate placement of HLLs as one of the primary challenges in ASL/AFL classes. The current research showed that respondents emphasized the need for appropriate-level placement of HLLs as a means to minimize the negative effects of misplacement and better cater to the needs of HL and non-HL learners.

The current research, moreover, questioned some issues related to HLLs performance in ASL classes such as their dialectal differences (Ben Maamoun et al. 2013), use of colloquial varieties and dominance over class activities (Elmahjoubi 2011). Responses showed that teachers treated such issues accordingly and presented a set of

experience-backed strategies and instructional practices in attempts to better cater to such learning settings.

To conclude, research findings support to a great extent the notion that HLLs in ASL/AFL classes causes certain types of challenges that teachers interact with and attempt to overcome.

### ***Hypothesis 2***

It was hypothesized that ASL/AFL teachers may be negatively challenged by the presence of both heritage and non-heritage learners in language classes. Despite the fact that HLLs' presence in an ASL/AFL classroom causes challenges for teachers and entails certain teaching strategies, the majority of teachers expressed that having HLLs and ASL learners in one learning setting does not have a negative effect on their performance and class management. The majority of respondents would rather get to know HLLs' motives and objectives before teaching to set their teaching preferences.

Based on initial needs assessment, teachers attempt to handle the situation and control the type of participation and involvement. Such efforts are individual practices as respondents noted the lack of training packages as to how to deal with such type of learners. This result would agree with the conclusion presented by Seraj's (2010) study. The current research attempted to explore teachers' preferences in teaching methods in light of the lack of guidance and training packages. These findings, in fact, support Siraj's (2010) notion that "knowing teachers preferences in teaching methods can help curriculum designers when compiling training packages for teachers of Arabic as a foreign language" (p. 3-4).

Due to heterogeneous nature of ASL/AFL classes (Elmahjoubi, 2011), HLLs show lack of interest towards the topics chosen for the ASL/AFL classroom. Respondents to a great extent had such experience in their classes; however, they suggested many other ways to get HLLs involved such as talking directly to them, using them as resources to explain entries of cultural appeal, and even letting them explain for non-heritage classmates in their small groups. It was also suggested that HLLs could be acting as teaching assistants and given extra tasks or presenting the topics through them. Moreover, data revealed that respondents to a great extent support the idea that teachers' use of lessons that have cultural appeal to the HLLs facilitates their involvement in the ASL classes. The strategies and instructional practices cited above are further supported by literature studies that investigated teachers' preferences, availability of resources and guidance and curriculum contents that better serve the needs of mixed classes (*e.g.* Chandrasekaran, 2008; Campanaro, 2013; and Geisherik, 2005). Hence, research findings of the current study should pave the way to presenting suggestions on the need for developing sections specific for HLLs in curriculum designs as well as training packages to teachers as to how to cater to the needs of all learners in mixed classes.

### ***Hypothesis 3***

It was also hypothesized that ASL/AFL teachers may prefer the complete separation of the two types of learners in class activities or put them separate classes. This hypothesis was built up on the studies developed by Elmahjoubi (2011) and Ibrahim and Allam (2006) that concluded that both types of learners are less anxious and more motivated to learn when they worked in separate groups. Walls (2013), in addition, came to the conclusion that separate groups were more cooperative and attending to language than mixed groups. Such literature findings have led Husen (2011) and Lee (2005) to

promote the idea of putting the two groups in separate classes or at least let them work separately in the class activities. However, the current research findings here revealed that ASL/AFL teachers significantly discouraged such idea and rather thought of HLLs as positive assets in the Arabic learning settings.

In this context, teachers highly encouraged and supported the use of collaborative learning (work in pairs & small groups) in the classroom as it practically helps HLLs and non-heritage learners in mixed classes to feel involved (Wall, 2013). In addition, giving HLLs extra homework and assignment in the form of individualized tasks (Geisherik, 2005) was supported by ASL/AFL teachers as this would cater to some of HLLs needs. Such findings, in fact, invalidated the separation hypothesis in case of Arabic mixed classes and also showed that instructional practices and strategies used in mixed classes are supported by HL literature. Moreover, results have shown that participants supported the idea suggested by Husen (2011) to design curricula specific to HLLs that are different from ASL curricula. In this sense, one respondent said:

[I have always taught with ASL learners as the intended audience. However, with mixed classes it requires more work as I have to design curricula tailored to both learners' levels.] (Interview, March 19, 2016)

Such statement shows how ASL teachers treat the issue of building curriculum that serves the needs of HLLs and L2 learners even in the absence of any guidance or lack of resources. The current research hopes for presenting an amalgamation of pedagogical practices and strategies that may later serve the preparation of training packages and guidance tools for ASL teachers.

To conclude, the data collected for this study served the research questions and hypotheses that aimed at exploring the teaching challenges and strategies employed by ASL/AFL teachers to involve HLLs in their classes. The data collected from a variety of sources supported the major hypotheses of the study and gave more insights about the status quo and teaching practices in mixed language classes. Some of such challenges and strategies were presented and supported by the literature while many others were fresh and presented for the first time.

### ***Pedagogical Suggestions***

The most significant outcome of this study was providing an account of the teaching challenges as well as instructional practices and strategies used in ASL/AFL mixed classes. Data received from the study surveys, interviews and observations should help teachers in their planning, teaching and creating an optimal classroom environment that cater to the needs of HLLs and non-heritage learners.

Based on the research findings, it is highly recommended that ASL/AFL teachers explore the motivations and objectives of all learners in their Arabic mixed classes as this should guide them while designing curriculums and selecting materials. During lesson planning, teachers of mixed classes are advised to include cultural components that better fulfill the needs of HLLs, thus leading to higher levels of participation. It is also recommended that teachers include appropriate-level materials for teaching, specifically if HLLs' level is different from other students.

In class, teachers can put HLLs and non-HLLs in pairs or small groups to learn through collaboration/cooperation, thus minimize any type of anxiety on the part of non-

HLLs and put HL knowledge into good use. Moreover, teachers could make use of HLLs as resources for cultural input and may ask them to explain new entries to their non-heritage peers. Meanwhile, it is not recommended that HLLs and non-HLLs would work separately in class activities or study alone in separate classes.

In case of dominance over class activities and participations, teachers should interfere to control the class; for example, assigning those to answer or participate in a given activity. They may also design more communicative activities that entail the participations of all parties. For homework and assignments, HLLs could be given extra or different assignments known as individualized tasks. Such assignments should better fulfill the HLLs' needs and be appropriate for their level and performance.

### ***Suggestions for future research***

As the study focused only on teachers' performance in mixed classes, a future research could observe teachers' performance in both mixed and non-mixed classes to compare and figure out the types of strategies being used and to what extent they do match or differ. In addition, the strategies provided by respondents here are mostly personal initiatives; thus, a future research could test the effectiveness and usability of certain types of strategies and figure out whether they are supported by the literature.

Moreover, a follow-up study may compare the input of male and female, short and long experienced, as well as young and old participants to figure out any significant differences or preferences in teaching based on age, gender or experience. Another possible study may be comparing pure HLLs classes versus pure ASL learners' classes to

find out what best works for the utmost benefit of the two types of learners, and then compare the results with other mixed classes.

### ***Delimitations***

This study targeted only university-level instructors and drew conclusions considering only mixed classes and university-level, schooled HLLs. In addition, it explored only the ASL/AFL teacher's perspective(s) on the challenges and strategies and, finally, took place over a short period.

### ***Limitations***

Self-reported data in the questionnaires and observations may affect the validity of the data collected for this study. In this respect, a big number of respondents seemed to avoid extreme options and opt to mark option 3 on Likert scale type of questions which increased the variance rate of answers. Moreover, note taking errors and subjectivity during the observations and interviews was possible. Finally, limited number of interviews and observations may affect the final results of the study.

## *Conclusions*

This study presented valuable data regarding the current situation of ASL/AFL mixed classes' teaching challenges and strategies at the university-level. The methodology of research that was used in this study included surveying teachers' perceptions, observing their performance in their classes, and interviewing them to achieve triangulation and present more reliable data and results for the readership.

The study, in addition, demonstrated first hand data by exploring in what type of challenges ASL/AFL teachers experience with mixed classes, as well as the strategies and instructional practices employed. Future research could attempt to demonstrate whether such strategies useful and what type of strategies best treats a given challenge or fits a specific context. The current study, therefore, opens the door for a lot of future and follow-up research to better understand the phenomenon and evaluate the actions taken in an ASL/AFL learning setting. Seraj (2010) pointed out in his study that "knowing teachers preferences in teaching methods can help curriculum designers when compiling training packages for teachers of Arabic as a foreign language" (p. 3-4). As results revealed that Arabic teachers suffer from the lack of training as to how to deal with HLLs, the current study would represent a resource for any future initiatives toward this goal.

Moreover, the literature review highlighted a lack of research in the area of Arabic Heritage Language. Such lack hinders our understanding of how to deal with the challenges about teaching HLLs, especially in mixed classes. Hence, the importance of conducting this teacher-focused research may ultimately manifest in the creation of an



optimal teaching environment that fulfills the needs of ASL and HL learners (Benmamoun, Montrul, & Polinsky, 2013; Chandrasekaran, 2008; and Elmahjoubi, 2011).

As no teacher-based research that was developed to explore teacher's perspectives on classroom challenges and strategies in ASL/AFL Arabic classes, the literature would welcome a teacher-based study that examined the challenges ASL/AFL Arabic teachers encounter when dealing with HLLs as well as the teaching strategies they use to involve such learners in the language classes. HL literature, in fact, suggested that such investigation of teaching challenges and strategies reflected how teachers responded to students' motivational goals and highlighted the significance of collaborative learning in providing opportunities to HL and ASL learners to grow. The literature also emphasized the idea that teachers' methods in facilitating the classroom activities are essential to a successful mixed language class.

Results of this research, therefore, would help curriculum and training designers to be aware of the commonly experienced challenges with mixed classes and the literature and experience-backed practices that address these challenges. This may offer a strong foundation for designing curricula tailored to learners' needs and aspirations. It may be also a rich source for training packages and workshops for ASL/AFL Arabic learners to better understand the situation in their mixed classes.

Furthermore, findings highlighted the significance of incorporating cultural input in ASL/AFL curriculums that better creates an optimal environment for HLLs as well as ASL students and reduce anxiety; hence, lesson planners may consider this output in their

work. It could be also concluded that ASL/AFL teachers are offered an opportunity to know about these challenges and strategies. Hence, future research may lead to an “accurate and efficient measurement of strengths and weaknesses of HL speakers that could inform [the] development of a curriculum tailored to their needs” (Sekerina, 2013; p. 203).

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## APPENDICES

## Appendix I



### Documentation of Informed Consent for Participation in Research Study

**Project Title:** Heritage Language Learners in L2 Arabic Classes: Challenges and Instructional Strategies

**Principal Investigator:** Almutazbellah Alabd

\*You are being asked to participate in a research study. The purpose of the research is exploring the teaching challenges and strategies L2 Arabic teachers use to involve the Arabic Heritage Language learners in language mixed classes, and the findings may be published, presented, or both. The expected duration of your participation is 30 minutes.

The procedures of the research will be as follows. An online-based questionnaire made up of text, multiple choice, yes-no, and open-ended questions. It consists of three main sections: Demographics, Quantitative section in a Likert-Scale format and Qualitative section in an open-ended format.

\*There *will not be* certain risks or discomforts associated with this research.

\*There *will not be* benefits to you from this research.

\*The information you provide for purposes of this research *is confidential*.

\*Questions about the research, my rights, or research-related injuries should be directed to (Almutazbellah Alabd) at (+20100506\*\*\*\*).

\*Participation in this study is voluntary. Refusal to participate will involve no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You may discontinue participation at any time without penalty or the loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Printed Name \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

***Appendix II***  
**A Questionnaire for L2 Arabic Teachers at the University Level**

This questionnaire is designed to collect data for a research study on Arabic Heritage Language Learners (HLLs) in the L2/FL Arabic Classes.

**Section I: (Demographics)**

1. Name:
2. Gender:
3. Age:
4. Highest Academic Achievement:
5. Currently Teaching or Not:
6. Years of Teaching Experience:
7. Formal Training Received in Arabic Teaching:
8. Training received in teaching HLLs:
9. Academic Institution:
10. Arabic Background (Native/Non-Native):
11. HLLs teaching Experience:

**II. Teaching Challenges and Strategies Questions: (Quantitative Section)**

Statements 1-18 describe challenges and teaching strategies employed when teaching mixed classes (Heritage & Non-Heritage Learners). Please indicate to what extent you (1) Strongly Disagree, (2) Disagree, (3) Neither Agree nor Disagree, (4) Agree, or (5) Strongly Agree with each of the following statements. Please read each statement

carefully, give your first reaction to each statement, and mark an answer for every statement.

1. HLLs presence in Arabic L2 classes is a challenge for L2 teachers.
2. Presence of HLLs affects the way I plan for my lessons, choose instructional materials and select activities.
3. It is important to identify the HLLs' type of motivations before starting L2 Arabic classes.
4. Variability in HLLs' linguistic proficiency is one of the teaching challenges.
5. The lack of teacher training programs as to how to deal with HLLs has a negative effect on their involvement in the language class.
6. Dialectal differences among HLLs are a teaching challenge in the L2 Arabic class.
7. HLLs' dominance over the class activities and participation has a negative effect on my performance as a teacher.
8. HLLs' dominance over the class activities and participation has a negative effect on L2 learners' performance.
9. Sometimes, HLLs show lack of interest towards the topics chosen for the L2 classroom.
10. Non-native L2 Arabic teachers suffer from anxiety when teaching HLLs which negatively affects their performance as L2 educators.

11. HLLs' use of colloquial (Ammyia) to ask or answer questions, has a negative effect on L2 learners performance and motivation.

12. Inappropriate placement of HLLs in L2 Arabic classes complicates teachers' job to cater to the HLLs needs.

13. Separating the two groups (Heritage & Non-Heritage) in activity assignment is a good strategy to cater to their needs.

14. Teachers' use of lessons that have cultural appeal to the HLLs facilitates their involvement in the L2 Arabic classes.

15. Using collaborative learning (work in pairs & small groups) in the classroom helps HLLs to feel involved.

16. Giving HLLs extra homework and assignment (individualized tasks) would cater to some of their needs.

17. It is preferable to completely separate the two groups (HLLs & L2 learners) and put them in different classes.

18. It is preferable to design curricula specific to HLLs that are different from L2 curricula.

### **III. Teacher's Performance Questions: (Qualitative Section)**

Answer the following questions in detail. You can answer either in English or in Arabic.



1. In the courses you teach where heritage and non-heritage students are mixed, what are the methods you use in terms of strategies and instructional techniques?
2. What would you do if you feel that the topic covered in mixed classes is not interesting for HL students (They do not seem involved)?
3. How do you engage HLLs in your class activities?
4. How does HLL presence affect your selection of materials and the type of activities you plan to employ in the classroom?
5. What do you do if a HLL(s) is/are dominant over class activities?
6. What do you do if the HLLs' levels are varied?
7. Sometimes HLLs have gaps in some linguistic areas known as language attrition or incomplete acquisition, if so, how do you address such issues? (give any examples)
8. What types of Feedback and assessment you use with HLLs? Is it the same as with non-heritage students?

**Further Comments:**

### Appendix III

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Class observed: \_\_\_\_\_

Time: \_\_\_\_\_ Observer: \_\_\_\_\_ Department: \_\_\_\_\_

Teacher act.	Teacher uses HLLs as a resource to explain or introduce any entry			
	Teacher demonstrates awareness of individual student learning needs			
	Teacher provides culturally relevant materials			
	Teacher asks HLL to clarify unknown cultural entry			
	Teacher clarifies unknown words used by HLL			
	Teacher makes HLL lead a class activity			
Teacher times	Teacher separates HLL in class activity			
	Teacher involves HLL in group work			
	Teacher involves HLL in pair work			
	Teacher gives priority to HLL to answer			

Other Comments:

[illegible]

<sup>1</sup> This observation sheet is designed for a research study that explores the Teaching Challenges and Instructional Practices L2 Arabic Teachers use to involve the Arabic Heritage Language Learners in Language Mixed Classes.

#### *Appendix IV*

Interview Questions for a research study that explores the Teaching Challenges and Instructional Practices L2 Arabic Teachers use to involve the Arabic Heritage Language Learners in Language Mixed Classes.

1. In the courses you teach when heritage and non-heritage students are mixed, do you teach the same way you teach non-heritage students alone? ( in terms of strategies and instructional methods)
2. What do you do if the topic you cover is not interesting for HL students (They seem not-involved)?
3. How do you engage HLLs in your class activities?
4. How does HLL presence affect your selection of materials and the type of activities you plan to employ in the classroom?
5. How do you feel toward HLLs inside the L2 classroom?
6. What do you do if a HLL(s) is dominant?
7. What do you do if HLLs' levels are varied?
8. Sometimes HLLs have gaps in some linguistic areas known as language attrition or incomplete acquisition, if so, how do you deal with them? (give any examples)
9. In your opinion, are HLL resourceful in your L2 classroom or should they be separated? Explain.
10. Do you believe that Heritage and non-heritage students should be in separate classes?

- 11.If Heritage learners use (Ammiya) or (Fusha) in class, that is not understandable by other non-heritage students, how do you feel about it? And how do you reply to them?
- 12.What is your reaction if heritage students volunteer to answer more than non-heritage ones?
- 13.What type of Feedback and assessment you use with HLLs? Is it the same as with non-heritage students?
- 14.Do the current textbooks sound appealing to those students?
- 15.Assessment methods?
- 16.How do they get along with other students?
- 17.Do teachers think that HLLs take classes to improve their GPA?