



## **QATAR FOUNDATION: PAVING THE WAY FOR THE REVITALISATION OF THE ARABIC LANGUAGE**

*Addressing Modern Day Linguistic Challenges With A Traditional Passion*

**Doha, Qatar, 14 March 2016** – Like many other Arab countries, Qatar’s unique identity is intrinsically linked to the Arabic language. Serving as a vehicle to express deeply embedded national values, culture, and heritage, it is an inextricable part of Arabic society and plays an important role in depicting the rich traditions and religious history of the Middle East.

However, despite its eminence in historic literature, the Arabic language must make significant progress to cope with modern demands, including rapid technological developments. In addition, alternative overpowering dialects are increasingly at odds with ‘Fus’ha’, a formal standardised Arabic style which has to compete against the widely diverging colloquial language used in everyday conversations. This is also complicated by ‘Arabizi’, a popular hybrid text involving the use of Roman characters to abbreviate the written Arabic language. These contemporary influences, which distort classical Arabic, are also compounded by globalisation, linguistic evolution, outdated teaching methods, and regional infusion.

Under the patronage of Her Highness Sheikha Moza bint Nasser, Chairperson of Qatar Foundation for Education, Science and Community Development (QF), QF is committed to developing and preserving the Arabic language. This endeavour is diffused across all associated institutions, centres, and events, and demonstrates the Foundation’s commitment to fostering a progressive society that values its linguistic heritage.

Recently, the World Organization for Renaissance of Arabic Language (WORAL), a member of QF, hosted the second Renaissance of Arabic Language Forum discussing the ‘Linguistic Upbringing of The Arab Child - The Reality and Prospects for the Future’. The event brought together more than 300 prominent figures from the education field, with participants conversing about the progression of the Arabic language and the role academia plays in stimulating linguistic development in Qatar.

At the end of the two-day forum, participants presented a series of realistic and achievable recommendations designed to address some of the challenges facing the Arabic language. These ranged from publishing an updated, basic vocabulary for elementary pupils; to creating a ‘Pictionary’ using visual cues; to the recognition of the importance of engaging Arabic families, outlining their role in the transfer of linguistic knowledge.



Reinforcing QF's commitment to the promotion of the Arabic language, QF centres and institutions play an integral role in bolstering preservation and advancement. Qatar Computing Research Institute (QCRI), one of the three national research institutes within Hamad bin Khalifa University (HBKU), a member of QF, is dedicated to providing technological support to address challenges facing the Arabic language.

Dr Kareem Darwish, Senior Scientist, QCRI, commented, saying: "The preservation of a language requires that the language itself develops as the world around it evolves. QCRI has been working since its inception, through the Arabic Language Technologies team, on advancing the Natural Language Processing, which is the stepping stone for the computing and digitisation of any language."

Dr Ahmed Elmagarmid, Executive Director, QCRI, went on to say, "The long-term plan for QCRI, with regards to the preservation of the Arabic language, is to make more information accessible through language technologies, such as the processing of Arabic documents, automatic translation between languages, information extraction, and question answering, among others. We believe this will strengthen the standing of the Arabic language and serve Arabic speakers by providing a wider and richer pool of content."

As part of this endeavour, a key output of QCRI includes 'Jalees', an Arabic eBook Reader which has been adopted by the Ministry of Education and Higher Education as the default reader in its eLearning programme. Since its launch, it has benefited over 20,000 schoolchildren in Qatar. Further QCRI developments also include state-of-the-art speech recognition, transcription, and translation systems. The institute is also pioneering technology which makes the Arabic language accessible to all members of the community. This includes developing a one-handed Arabic Braille keyboard for the visually impaired, and audio/video programmes for the hearing impaired utilising speech-to-text technology solutions.

Carnegie Mellon University Qatar (CMU-Q) has likewise joined Qatar Foundation's efforts to elevate the status of the Arabic language. In 2015, CMU-Q hosted an 'Enhancing Teaching Arabic in Qatar' workshop to update national teaching methods, as well as linguistic theories that deal with language acquisition and learning. The workshop was led by Dr Zeinab Ibrahim, PhD, Professor of Arabic Studies at Carnegie Mellon University in Qatar and renowned sociolinguist. The event materialised as part of wider efforts to build positive attitudes towards Arabic by engaging children through interactive methods. This endeavour was supported by the Qatar National Research Fund (QNRF), an organisation committed to fostering original, competitively selected research.



Eager to build bridges of understanding between people of different cultures, Qatar Foundation also supports the global spread of the Arabic language through various programmes that reach out to non-Arabic speakers around the world.

Qatar Foundation International (QFI), a member of Qatar Foundation based in the United States, launched the 'Arabic Language and Culture Program' in 2009, responding to the pressing need for international Arabic language opportunities. The programme also addresses the deeper need for positive engagement and connections between people living inside and outside the Arab world. Since its inauguration, QFI has partnered with 26 schools across the US engaging in various student and teacher initiatives, facilitating over 30 virtual and cultural-exchanges. The leading annual cultural-exchange trip, Áber, brings together over 60 American and Qatari students to study Arab arts and strengthen Arabic language skills through cultural immersion, and has benefitted 210 students since 2013.

Extending its aspiration to unlock human potential in the Arab world, QFI has also expanded their outreach with partnerships across the Americas in both Brazil and Canada. Furthermore, QFI has partnered with the British Council to support Arabic language instruction in the UK, publishing an Arab culture curriculum that is now available for UK classrooms through online software and print media.

In addition to in-school programmes, QFI provides professional development and certification support to Arabic teachers, increasing the supply and proficiency of qualified teachers across the US, reaching over 850 Arabic teachers annually. An additional 52 teachers are currently in the process of becoming qualified to teach Arabic in public schools in the United States through QFI's Teacher Fellowship programme. The initiative works by enhancing the linguistic levels of American Arabic teachers through various workshops, seminars, and conferences, so far benefitting more than 2,200 secondary students of Arabic origin.

Furthermore, Qatar National Library (QNL), another member of QF, is one of a select number of national libraries from the Arab world actively contributing to the content of the World Digital Library (WDL). QNL also provides Qatar's residents with access to a variety of leading Arabic databases including, 'Al Manhal' with its rich Arabic e-books list; 'Dar Almandumah', which provides access to specialised Arabic academic journals and research; 'eduTechnoz', which aims to improve reading in Arabic in a fun and educational way for children; and 'E-Marefa', an Arabic language database containing over 1,000 scholarly journals. In addition, QNL is keen to preserve the Arab culture through its Heritage Collection, which preserves rare examples of early works that shed light on the history of the Arabic press.



As a result of a further QF partnership with the British Library, QNL launched Qatar Digital Library (QDL); a free online portal that provides users with global access to an extensive collection of historical archival items and manuscripts related to Qatar and the Middle East. QNL has also been accredited by the International Federation of Library Association and Institutions (IFLA), as the Regional Arabic Speaking Preservation and Conservation Centre (PAC), representing 25 countries in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region.

As 2016 continues to hold immense potential for both Qatar and Qatar Foundation, a strengthening commitment to improving the standing of the Arabic language is well underway. This includes various events, programmes, initiatives, and institutions which not only enhance Education, Science, Research and Community Development in Qatar, but assist in helping the Arabic language transition along with a modern social metamorphosis.

#### **Image Captions:**

**Image 1:** One of the many panel discussions that took place at the World Organization for Renaissance of Arabic Language (WORAL) held at the Qatar National Convention Centre.

**Image 2:** Linguistic professionals engage with the audience through a lively question and answer session at the World Organization for Renaissance of Arabic Language (WORAL).

**Image 3:** Participants from ‘Enhancing Teaching Arabic in Qatar’, hosted by Carnegie Mellon University in Qatar, discuss national teaching methods, as well as linguistic theories that deal with language acquisition and learning.

**ENDS**

#### **Qatar Foundation – Unlocking Human Potential**

Qatar Foundation for Education, Science, and Community Development (QF) is a private, non-profit organisation that is supporting Qatar on its journey from carbon economy to knowledge economy by unlocking human potential, for the benefit of not only Qatar, but the world. QF was co-founded in 1995 by His Highness Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani, the Father Amir, and Her Highness Sheikha Moza bint Nasser, Qatar Foundation’s Chairperson. QF’s work



encompasses education, research and community development. World-class universities are brought to Qatar to help create an education sector in which young people can develop the attitudes and skills required for a knowledge economy. At the same time, QF builds Qatar's innovation and technology capacity by developing and commercialising solutions through key sciences. The Foundation also works to foster a progressive society while enhancing cultural life, protecting Qatar's heritage and addressing immediate social needs in the community.

For a complete list of QF's initiatives and projects, visit <http://www.qf.org.qa>