



NOTAT FRA PROGRAMSTYRE KNYTTET TIL PROGRAMSENSORRAPPORT I ARABISK FOR VÅREN 2015

Dato for håndtering i programstyret: 5. april 2016

Kommentarar frå programstyret til programsensorrapport på arabisk våren 2016

Kommentarar til rapporten frå studentar:

Programsensorrapporten var altfor generell, og inneheldt ikkje nok konkret informasjon om korleis faga ikkje strekk heilt til i læringa vår av arabisk. Ettersom alle studentintervjua vart gjort på hausten har ikkje programsensor fått snakka med nokon om vårsemesterfaga. Dette fann studentane særskilt svekkjande for rapporten. Med bakgrunn i dette leverte studentrepresentant eit skriv til fagkoordinator og studierettleiar med forslag til forbetringar av emna ARA111, ARA112, ARA113 og ARA252. Skrivet var levert på vegne nokre av arabisk-studentane. Studentrepresentant ytra sterkt ynskje om tilrettelagde pensumtekstar, som inneheld vokalisererte versjonar å jobbe med.

Kommentarar frå vitenskapleg tilsette:

- Wardini har eit godt kritisk blikk, og er konkret i kommentarane. God evaluering generelt.
- Somme er overraska over forslaget om korleis ein inkluderer arabisk kultur i undervisninga. Frå hausten / i framtida bør dette også vere ein del av pensum. Innarbeide også fleire førelesingar på kulturdelen (frå 1-4).
- Han har ikkje nemnt i rapporten talet på undervisingstimar bør aukast.

- Vi bør snakke på førehand i programstyremøtet om kva det skal fokuserast på i rapporten vi bestiller. Det bør bli klarlagt om det var noko spesielt ein burde førebu seg på, for at møtet med sensor skal kunne bli meir effektivt.
- Rapporten er for vag. Han må konkretisere kva han meiner er vegen vidare (mellom anna i høve samarbeidsproblem).
- Sakna diskusjonar om eksamen i rapporten. Han har ikkje sett på eksamensoppgåvene eller på eksamenssvar. Han burde ha sett på forma til eksamenen. Utan dette kan han ikkje sjå om studentane har lært det vi vil dei skal lære. Ein må sjå korleis nye eksamensformer fungerer.
- Ein bør jamleg gå gjennom evalueringsformene, som ei kvalitetssikring.
- Vedr. bruken av læreboka: ei lærebok er ei tekstbok, ikkje ein bibel. Kan/bør supplerast med anna materiale (s.9).

Pernille Myrvold / Ingvild Nilssen 25.05.16

Tilleggskommentar mottatt på e-post 20.06.16 fra, Ludmila Torlakova (påtroppende fagkoordinator for arabisk) og Esmira Nahhri:

Wardini har en god kritisk blick og er konkret i kommentarene. God evaluering generelt. For første gang får vi på faget tydelige forslag hvordan vi kan forbedre opplegget. En del ting er allerede innført.

BAHF-ARAB Bachelor Program in Arabic
University of Bergen

Program Evaluation

Report for the year 2015
(Addendum: Exams, Feb. 23rd 2016)

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External Sensor for the period of: 01.01.2015–31.12.2018.
Programsensor for [BAHF-ARAB Bachelor Program in Arabic](#), University of Bergen

Appointment

As of letter, dated 13.03.2015, I have been appointed as *programsensør* for ARABISK, for a period of four years, starting from 01.01.2015, ending 31.12.2018.

The report is structured as follows:

1. Introduction
2. The Programs: Goals and Structure
3. Students
4. Teachers
5. Tutoring
6. Courses
7. Conclusion

The present report is based on:

- *Information available on the program website* (also provided by the department):
 - <http://www.uib.no/studieprogram/BAHF-ARAB>
- *Previous reports for the same program:*
 - reports by Prof. Lutz 2014 and 2015
- *Previous report for French (for comparison):*
 - report by Gundersen and Helland 2013
- *Teaching material:*
 - Textbooks
 - Material provided by the teachers
- *Student evaluations:*
 - ARA100 H15 (4 respondents)
 - ARA112 H15 (2 respondents)
- *Exam results:*
 - ARA100 H15
 - ARA112 H15
 - ARA115 H15
 - ARA210 H15
 - ARA301 H15
 - ARA302 H15
- *Interviews with teaching staff* 24-25th Nov. 2015 (NB: Professorship is vacant):
 - Ludmila Ivanova Torlakova, Førsteamanuensis,
 - Pernille Myrvold , Universitetslektor
 - Esmira Nahhri, Førsteamanuensis,
 - Frank Weigelt, PhD student
- *Interviews with student representatives* for 24-25th Nov. 2015 (anonymous in this report):
 - ARA100
 - ARA112
 - ARA115
 - ARA211
 - ARA301
 - ARA350

1. Introduction

The present report being my first for Arabic at UiB, I will concentrate on issues that, in my opinion, are a priority and the most in need of attention.

I have read two previous reports and all the available documentation. I have also had interviews with students and teachers. One miss, which ones hope to remedy in 2016, is that I have not talked to the leadership at the department.

I have looked at the exam results. These in themselves do not say much. I have not seen the actual exam questions nor sample student responses. I have nonetheless enquired about them in my interviews with the teachers and students. Exams and exam results are important. Nevertheless, I have deemed that there are other matters that are more in need of attention at this point.

Thus the report for 2015 will concentrate on the “*vision*” of the program, i.e. profile and structure of the program, and the “*implementation*” of the program, i.e. the teaching and the content and syllabi of the courses. As can be seen, special mention of tutoring is included, since it is deemed a priority.

2. The Programs: Goals and Structure

There is no doubt that Arabic is an important language, not only due to the sad situation in the Middle East and its implications for the world and Europe more generally, but also for Norway specifically. Arabic is one of the major languages represented by over 300 million speakers. There are great financial and cultural benefits from interaction with the Arabic speaking world. Therefore, it is of utmost importance that many Norwegian students get a chance to learn Arabic.

There are many reasons for learning languages. Not all require courses at university. If someone were to study Arabic, for example, for primarily communicative purposes, then it would be much more efficient, and probably cheaper, to spend longer periods of time in Arabic speaking countries and taking language courses there. University courses would be an overkill and achieve fewer results. Though important, communication is not and cannot be the only purpose for studying language, especially at university.

Studying language at university implies much more than communicative skills. A student at university acquires more than just linguistics. University studies in a certain language involve acquiring three types of skills:

- 1) linguistic;
- 2) specialist knowledge of a region (area studies); and
- 3) analytical skills.

Thus a university education in Arabic is not only important to train students and researchers to be skilled linguists, more importantly for society at large, the university is the ideal place to train students in the combination of deeper knowledge of language, regional expertise and analytical skills.

My evaluation of the program rests on this premise. I have therefore posed the following question: *Do the programs have clear goals and a structure that are aimed at achieving the skills presented above?*

- The Goals

The Bachelor and Master Arabic programs at UiB state the following as their goals:

Bachelor Program

Læringsutbytte

Kandidaten skal ved avslutta program ha følgjande læringsutbytte definert i kunnskapar, dugleikar/ferdigheiter og generell kompetanse:

Kunnskapar:

Kandidaten

- Har god dugleik i lesing og skriftleg omsetjing
- Er kjend med eit breitt utval av fagprosa og skjønlitteraturtekstar
- Har grunnleggjande dugleik i lesing og forståing av arabisk pressespråk, til dømes i nettaviser
- Har grunnleggjande dugleik i bruk av nokre arabiske ordbøker
- Har god kompetanse i moderne arabisk grammatikk

Dugleikar/ferdigheiter:

Kandidaten

- Har moderate skrive- og taleferdigheiter i lesing og forståing av arabisk pressespråk
- Har lesedugleik i klassisk arabisk
- Har moderat skrive- og taledugleik i moderne standardarabisk

Generell kompetanse:

Kandidaten

- Kan bruke sine kunnskapar om språket på ein kritisk og sjølvstendig måte
- Kan nytta sin kombinasjon av fag i spesialiseringen og frie studiepoeng i vidare utdanning eller yrkesplanar

<http://www.uib.no/studieprogram/BAHF-ARAB#uib-tabs-laringsutbyte>

Jan 25th 2016

Master Program

Presentasjon

Mål og innhald

Mastergraden i arabisk skal gi studentane djupare fagleg og metodisk innsyn, dels gjennom eit utvida studium av språket og dels gjennom eit djupare studium av eit avgrensa område, der studentane får rettleiing. Det problemet som masteroppgåva konsentrerer seg om, kan til dømes vere språkvitskapleg, litteraturvitskapleg, historisk, religionshistorisk, resepsjonshistorisk, osv. Det kan òg liggja innanfor andre disiplinar som til dømes økonomi, politikk, jus, utviklingsstudiar, sosionomi, med meir, når studenten kan presentera gode grunnar for det. I slike høve vil studenten kunna få ein siderettleiar frå eit relevant institutt eller senter. I oppgåva skal en vise at en har førstehandskjennskap til kjeldematerialet, kritisk overblikk over tidlegare forskning og evne til å bruke vitskapleg synsmåte og metode.

Opplegget skal både kontrollera og utdjupa dei allmenne språkkunnskapane og teoretiske kunnskapane som studentane vil trenga for å bruka arabisk som forskingsreiskap. Oppgåva skal vise at studentane har førstehandskjennskap til kjeldematerialet, kritisk overblikk over tidlegare forskning og evne til å bruke vitskapleg synsmåte og metode.

<http://www.uib.no/studieprogram/MAHF-ARAB>

Jan 25th 2016

It is clear that the programs focus essentially on language learning, grammar and to a lesser extent literature. Only exceptionally does the Master program accept themes in other disciplines.

From my interview with students, there is no doubt that their main goal for studying Arabic is to use it at the workplace. A key for job opportunities. Knowledge of Arabic grammar and literature alone, do not prepare students for the needs of society. More on this in section 6. Courses.

- The Structure

I have evaluated the structure of the program based in the available documents, the web-pages mentioned below, as well as my interviews with students and teachers.

Bachelorprogram i arabisk (krav 180 SP)

Studieplan:

<http://www.uib.no/studieprogram/BAHF-ARAB/plan>

Studiesløp:

<http://www.uib.no/studieprogram/BAHF-ARAB> (Nov. 10th 2015)

Masterprogram i arabisk (krav 120 SP)

Studieplan:

<http://www.uib.no/nb/studieprogram/MAHF-ARAB/plan>

Studiesløp:

<http://www.uib.no/studieprogram/MAHF-ARAB#uib-tabs-construction> (Nov. 22nd 2015)

The main feature of the Bachelor programs is that Arabic takes up roughly 15 credits of a total of 30 per term. Half of a student's courses per term over a period of three years. The whole Master program is dedicated to Arabic. The last year of the Master program is dedicated fully to the Master Thesis (60 credits).

On the Bachelor level, only ARA100 (10 credits, thus 1/3 of a term) lays claim to train the students in "cultural", non-linguistic/ literary skills. Otherwise it is up to the student to get this type of knowledge at other departments.

On the Master level, it seems that ARA302, 303 and 304 can offer an opening for cross departmental training. This though, seems to be more the exception than the rule.

Experience and my interviews with the students show that such a structure is rather a hindrance than a help. One could argue that the present structure presents the student with choice and freedom. Yet this freedom and the choices are not always easy to deal with as a student. Nor are they always clear. More on this theme under 3. Students and 5. Tutoring.

The combination of subjects and disciplines in an education is an essential element for broadening the scope and strengthening one's knowledge and analytical skills. So the question is rather of structure and organization as well as course content.

3. Students

Universities have several functions: education, research and outreach to state the more classical ones. The present report is concerned with the education part. In this context, it is necessary to put the students first.

As mentioned above one of the main goals for students to learn Arabic is to gain a special tool in their arsenal when applying for and conducting their work in society.

They want to be able to speak Arabic, use Arabic, understand Arabic, etc. But they also want to apply this knowledge to their concrete work situations.

Thus the frustration is high among the students. The argument is that they study grammar for three years and are still not able to use Arabic in any meaningful way. This is clearly seen in the high degree of dropouts in Arabic. A high degree of dropout is expected when offering courses in Arabic. Many underestimate the amount of effort needed to learn a language as Arabic. Clearly, some of these students would benefit much more from taking evening classes, or traveling to an Arabic speaking country.

Experience shows that, on the other hand, clearer and relevant goals, a balanced structure and well thought through and planned courses, could help the students maintain focus and sustain them through the hardships of learning Arabic, not only on the Bachelor level, but also aiming for a Master degree. Clearly, a strict focus on grammar and literature is not enough to sustain the students through their education. More on this in section 6. Courses.

4. Teachers

The present report in no way claims to evaluate the teachers. Neither does the method nor the documentation used in the report allow for such an evaluation. The focus is rather on the interaction between the teachers and the students and the studying/ teaching environment.

From my interviews with the students and the teachers, as well as the student evaluations two matters are clear:

- 1) The teachers are highly motivated, highly regarded, and appreciated as individuals.
- 2) As a team, there seems to be a break down in communication, coordination and planing.

The students have given each teacher individually high marks for their efforts, care and helpfulness as well as their expertise in their field. The teaching profession is very often unforgiving. In our case, the teachers are highly valued by the students.

This contrasts with the frustration students have expressed, in the interviews as well as in the student evaluations, towards the lack of coordination, cooperation and planing among the teachers. This is a serious problem.

5. Tutoring

As mentioned above the structure of the programs, especially the Bachelor program, leave 50% room for students to choose from other relevant disciplines and subjects. While this surely has its benefits, it also has its drawbacks.

Students, even if adults, are not always knowledgeable or do not have the necessary resources to make good, long term choices for their education. From my interviews with the students, it

was clear that they were not sure which combinations were optimal, and in which sequence. It seemed also that there was very little coordination between the relevant departments.

There is clearly a need for focused tutoring (*veiledning*). The students stated that they are generally advised to take courses on the Middle East. Experience shows that this is not enough. Coordination and cooperation can be achieved in different ways. These should be explored. Moreover, tutoring should also be rather concrete and conducted by persons with close knowledge of Arabic and the Middle East as well as the system at UiB.

6. Courses

The discussion here will concentrate on the courses on the Bachelor level. I will discuss the Master level shortly towards the end of this section, since there is at present only one student enrolled.

Among the courses on the Bachelor level ARA100 (10 credits) and ARA115 and ARA252 (15 credits each) stand out.

ARA111, ARA112, ARA113 are all *Grunnkurs i moderne standardarabisk (I-III)*; 15 credits each
ARA211 *Tekststudier i klassisk og moderne standardarabisk* (15 credits).

As stated above, I have not seen the exam questions, nor the student responses. I have nevertheless enquired in my interviews with the students and the teachers about the content of the courses. I have also consulted the syllabi (*pensumlister*).

- The Textbook

The Textbook used is: Schulz, E. *Standard Arabic: An Elementary-Intermediate Course*; current edition as well as E-Book.

The question of textbooks in education is always an issue. No book in itself is perfect.

While many have gone the communicative path, using relevant books, to my knowledge nearly all universities that keep to teaching Arabic at university level, in the spirit mentioned above, use Schulz. The Schulz textbook has its strengths and weaknesses. The alternatives, on the other hand, are few and far between. They too have strengths and weaknesses. At issue here is the way the book is used in the teaching. Following Schulz chapter by chapter, with no complimentary material is hardly optimal. Every textbook needs to be used with deliberate planning and adapted, taking into consideration the circumstances of each teaching milieu. Some parts of Schulz are better than others, so some complementary material is needed. Moreover, the texts of Schulz as well as the exercises are not always good or relevant to students. These may be adjusted, complemented or replaced.

- The Content of the Courses

The syllabi for ARA111-113 contain only one reference: Schulz. A dictionary (Wehr) is only introduced in ARA113.

It is only in ARA211, 5th term, that students read genuine texts. A total of some 30-35 pages distributed as follows: 4 Classical, 18-25? Modern Standard, 11 modern poetry and 5 media, of which only 2 are current.

The content of the courses needs to be reviewed in light of the principles stated above. The syllabus should be complemented with books/ articles on the history and analysis Arabic literary and media prose, as well as relevant theoretical approaches to different types of texts.

The texts should also be more central and relevant in context of the Arabic literary scene as well as the media, the socio-religious-political-etc. landscape.

- The Examination

I have not seen any exam questions nor student responses. I have nevertheless enquired about them from students and the teachers.

The impression I have gotten was that for all the courses (except ARA115 and ARA252), the focus is on grammar, transcription and translation. This including ARA211 and the Master level. While grammar and translation are essential parts of learning any language, unless one wishes to become a linguist they are not an end in themselves. They are essential means to understand the texts. But the aim is to be able to apply analytical principles so the texts get their meaning in their social, religious, political, etc. context. These elements are not only essential for understanding the text, but also to train the students to apply the same analytical principles later in their work.

- ARA100

ARA100 *Innføring i arabisk språk og kultur* (10 credits) seems to be a mixed basket. On the one hand it is the first introduction to Arabic, script and language, and on the other it is the only course in the program dedicated to "Arabic culture". While the language part follows the same pattern as ARA111-113, the culture part does not seem to be thought through well. The syllabus is larger and heavier than nearly any other course in the program. As an example, one could argue that it is somewhat premature to read about Arabic-Norwegian contrastive grammar already the first term, while they are learning the alphabet.

ARA100 could well be reviewed, and here is a clear case where cooperation and coordination with other departments could yield better results.

- ARA115 and ARA252

ARA115 *Innføring i arabisk språkvitenskap og dialektologi* and ARA252 *Arabisk språk og samfunn* (15 credits each) are the only courses where relevant theory is applied to Arabic studies in the program on the Bachelor level.

- Master Level

Having one student on the Master level, makes it difficult to evaluate. The structure of the program seems to allow for both theory and analysis. It also, in principle, also allows for a wider scope of themes than just linguistic and literary.

7. Conclusion

Language is an essential part of society. Ignoring language would be a great loss. But then, language does not exist in a world by itself, disconnected from the people who speak and use it. The relationship between language and society is complex. The study of language and the world that uses it, should then be placed in the relevant theoretical and methodological frameworks. Language can indeed be studied as an end in itself. But the majority of students today study the Arabic language as a tool. Students should be trained to think and write analytically.

Concluding, one would first like to stress the necessity of filling the vacant professor position. Then, one would draw attention to the goals of the programs in Arabic as well as their structure. Students need help to navigate the complicated freedom and choices they have to make in their education. Teachers should work as a team as well as cooperate and coordinate

more with other departments. The content of the courses needs to be more relevant. The Arabic milieu at UiB could do well to consult with other comparable universities to exchange ideas on how to solve many of the issues touched upon.

Bergen seems to have enough students wanting to study Arabic. Norwegian society has a clear need for people who not only master Arabic, but who also have a solid expertise on the Middle East. The motivation is there. UiB has the resources, both in Arabic and Middle Eastern studies to fulfill a good portion of this need.

Stockholm, February 5th 2016

Elie Wardini

8. Exams (addendum)

On the 15th of February 2016 I received copied of 6 exam questions for 6 courses.

These are:

ARA100 - 3rd December 2015

ARA111 - 27th May 2015

ARA112 - 18th February 2015

ARA113 - 27th May 2015

ARA 211 - 3rd December 2015

ARA 301 - 3rd December 2015

In the report I came to the conclusion, based on my interviews with the students and teachers that “[t]he impression I have gotten was that for all the courses (except ARA115 and ARA252), the focus is on grammar, transcription and translation. This including ARA211 and the Master level.”

Now that I have seen the exam questions, my impression was confirmed. The exams mentioned above, for ARA100 and ARA301 see below, focus on translation from and to Arabic and grammar: parsing, vocalization, conjugation, etc., words in their right context.

Concerning ARA100, in the report I wrote:

ARA100 *Innføring i arabisk språk og kultur* (10 credits) seems to be a mixed basket.

On the one hand it is the first introduction to Arabic, script and language, and on the other it is the only course in the program dedicated to “Arabic culture”.

While the language part follows the same pattern as ARA111-113, the culture part does not seem to be thought through well. The syllabus is larger and heavier than nearly any other course in the program.

ARA100 is the only course that includes “Realia - kultur og samfunn” questions. These are:

1. Give the names of five most important regional Arabic dialects (5/100p);
2. Give the correct name of the country or the capital of 8 countries (4/100p);
3. Give the Norwegian title and date of publication, the name and country of origin of the author, as well as the name of the translator to Norwegian of the chosen novel (3/100p).

My conclusions concerning ARA100 still hold:

ARA100 could well be reviewed [...]

ARA301, on the Master level follows exactly the same pattern.

My comments concerning the courses and their content still hold. These are clearly reflected in the exam questions. While one could argue for such an approach for ARA100-113, all exams even those on higher levels lack any questions involving critical and analytical discussions of the content of the texts read.

Stockholm, February 23rd 2016

Elie Wardini