The Cultural Requirements in Arabic Classes to Non-Native Speakers

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Abstract

The aim of the current study was to identify the cultural needs in Arabic language classes for non-native speakers. Using a descriptive approach, the researcher collected data through a questionnaire that covered four main areas: Social Cultural Needs, Political Cultural Needs, Economic Cultural Needs, and Literature, Arts, and Heritage Cultural Needs. The questionnaire was administered to a sample of 100 participants. The findings revealed a variation in the cultural needs of the students, with the highest need being for Social Cultural Needs and the lowest for Political Cultural Needs. The overall mean score was 3.9, indicating a high degree of need based on the established standard. This study is significant as it leverages the identified cultural needs of non-native Arabic learners, aiming to incorporate them into the curriculum. It also provides a valuable reference for teachers, including guidelines on cultural concepts and contemporary methods for teaching and evaluating culture for non-native Arabic learners.

Keywords: A Foreign Languages, Multiculturalism, Curriculum Development, Teaching and Evaluating Culture

Introduction

Languages across the globe display a wide array of differences, yet they share common elements: audible letters, spoken words, and written texts that communicate agreed-upon meanings. Language acts as a medium for societal communication, allowing individuals to express their ideas and emotions, thereby integrating into the community. Occasionally, some individuals in a society may not speak the host society's language, prompting them to learn a new language and culture for better integration, communication, and understanding. Humans are inherently social beings, and their nature compels them to engage with society. However, transitioning from one's native environment to a new linguistic and cultural setting can be challenging. Foreign language learners often face obstacles that impede their comprehension of the target language speaker. These challenges stem from two sources: the intrinsic characteristics of the target language (such as its sounds, vocabulary, and grammar) and the

social and cultural context. Integrating culture into language learning adds a vital dimension to the process, helping learners grasp the cultural context of the foreign language community. This facilitates social interaction and promotes respect for cultural differences in various life situations (Eldin, 2015). Language learning, in general, demands effort, and mastering Arabic, in particular, involves more than just acquiring linguistic skills like listening, speaking, reading, and writing. It extends to becoming part of the Arab community to understand its culture (Omar, 2017). Several theories explore the interplay between language, culture, and society. The Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, as summarized by (Kramsch, 2013), suggests that individuals do not live in a world solely defined by isolated experiences or communal interaction. Instead, they exist under the influence of an agreed-upon language, which serves as a vehicle for expressing their desires within their community. Bastide's acculturation theory posits that studying culture cannot be separated from the societal context. Bastide emphasized examining culture within social relationships to achieve social integration and outlined three essential criteria for acculturation: interaction or separation from cultural and social reality, conformity or conflict with societal culture, and acceptance or rejection by society. Moreover, (Thompson ,2012) refers to the theory of social and cultural susceptibility by Anne Robert Jacques, which addresses interconnected concepts of cultural biases, social relationships, and lifestyles. In summary, language encompasses more than phonetic and linguistic aspects; it includes a cultural dimension that reflects societal customs and traditions. This underscores the importance of incorporating cultural elements into foreign language education.

Literature Review
The Concept of Culture

The definitions of culture vary depending on their context. For instance, in sociology, culture is seen as the framework within which individuals interact, fostering peaceful coexistence and mutual respect. In the political arena, culture is viewed as a means to promote the diversity that arises from globalization and migration, leading to multicultural societies that contribute to cultural richness and socio-economic progress (Al-Rashdan, 2004). Similarly, (Madhkour ,2010) attributes the diversity in the concept of culture to different social conditions, noting that each country teaching the Arabic language is influenced by its unique historical, linguistic, political, and cultural contexts. This makes the experience of teaching Arabic in Egypt different from that in the United States due to cultural differences. Given the numerous definitions of culture influenced by the interests of the individual defining them, this part of the study focuses on definitions that highlight the relationship between language and culture, without limiting all cultural definitions. (Husseini,2019) explains that culture encompasses the spiritual, material, intellectual, and emotional attributes that define a society's identity, including arts, literature, lifestyles, values, traditions, and customs. (Al-Hadaqi, 2018) indicates that culture includes the knowledge, beliefs, art, morals, laws, customs, and habits acquired by individuals within a society. From the above, it is clear that culture is not merely about an individual's attire, eating habits, or drinking preferences; rather, it is a way of life that connects the past with the present, encompassing both material aspects like food and clothing and spiritual aspects like customs, ideas, and morals unique to a society. The researcher refers to (Daoud, 2009) broader definition of culture as the infinite and wonderful scenario of life events within each society, where culture influences expectations about thinking, behavior, eating, dressing, defending, anger, humor, worship, and other life situations.

The Characteristics of the Culture

Culture has several distinctive features. It is human-made, acquired through interaction among individuals within a society, transmitted across generations, and integrative, combining both material and immaterial elements. These cultural features enhance understanding and respect among community members. In light of these characteristics, studies by (Mabrouk ,2006), (Tayma ,2006), and (Othman ,2015) have addressed the unique features of religion culture, highlighting its divine source, reference to God, and suitability for humanity due to its inherent human values. (Al-Daajah, 2019) emphasizes the participatory nature of culture, noting that it is not merely the behavior of isolated individuals but a collective set of behaviors and values shared by individuals from a common social environment. This sharing and participation result from daily interactions among community members. Al-Mahrouqi, (2009) observes that Omani culture shares many aspects with religion and Arab culture, yet it has its unique identity. This uniqueness is reflected in dialects, traditional Omani attire, foods, and social life, influenced by religious values, social upbringing, and Omani politics, which aim to dissolve tribal and sectarian differences within the Sultanate. Despite variations in traditions and dialects based on urban and rural environments, Omani identity is interconnected through the unity of land, religion, and language, carrying a shared social and cultural character for most Omanis. The shared cultural character is attributed to religion, symbolizing faith, and the Arabic language.

The Importance of Teaching Culture in the Foreign Languages

Culture serves as a bridge between communities, providing opportunities to understand their customs and traditions. Learning a new language goes beyond vocabulary and grammar; it also involves grasping cultural aspects. By integrating these cultural insights, learners can achieve a deeper understanding and integration within the community, enhancing mutual respect and understanding between different cultures. Al-Jabri (2020) clarifies that culture is a fundamental element in teaching foreign languages. Effective communication with speakers of the target language requires not only linguistic skills but also an understanding of the culture and interaction with the community. This cultural awareness fosters closeness between learners and community members, necessitating the inclusion of cultural aspects in educational content. AL-Bahri (2018) explains that learners may encounter challenges when integrating into a society with a different culture. A lack of cultural understanding can lead to misunderstandings and negative reactions from the host community. Therefore, equipping learners with cultural knowledge helps them overcome these challenges. Additionally, Brown (1994) states that language is intrinsically linked to its culture, reflected in daily life situations. Incorporating culture into language teaching helps learners overcome feelings of alienation and boosts their motivation to learn the language. Al-Husseini (2019) mentions that successful communication with Arabic speakers requires more than just language proficiency; understanding the culture and being aware of cultural similarities and differences are essential for fostering closeness and interaction within the community. Madhkour (2010) adds that culture plays a central role in the context of foreign language teaching and learning, shaping educational curricula. Integrating the cultural aspects of the target language into teaching materials enhances language comprehension and cultural appreciation. Given the vital role of culture, its importance in foreign language education lies in its ability to bridge gaps caused by cultural differences. Providing learners with accurate cultural knowledge helps them develop honest and correct concepts and ideas, especially since media sources can distort culture.

The Study

Aims and Research Questions

The current study seeks to identify the cultural needs of non-native Arabic language learners in Oman, aiming to ascertain the specific cultural needs as perceived by these learners. This will be achieved by addressing the following research question: What are the cultural needs of non-native Arabic language learners in Oman in terms of social culture, political culture, economic culture, and the culture of literature, arts, and heritage?

Participants

The study population includes the centers and institutes that teach Arabic to non-native speakers in the Sultanate of Oman. These are: The Language Center at Sohar University, The Sultan Qaboos Institute for Teaching Arabic to Non-Native Speakers, Noor Majan Institute, Al-Dhad Institute, Lugati Institute, and Khubrah Institute. The study spans the academic term from June to July 2023-2024, with a total of 100 learners participating in the survey.

Data Collection

To assess the learners' interest in learning about cultural need, the researcher conducted a survey with a sample of 25 learners. The survey included three language proficiency levels: lower intermediate (B1), upper intermediate (B2), and lower advanced (C1). The sample represented ten nationalities: South Korea, France, Latvia, UK, Kazakhstan, Iran, Brunei Darussalam, Ireland, Czech Republic, and Austria. After collecting the data, the learners' responses indicated a strong interest in the cultural aspect and their support for incorporating culture into Arabic language lessons. On the other hand, their responses varied regarding the type of cultural needs, leading the researcher to identify multiple types of cultural needs. The researcher utilized the survey, previous research and studies, and the expertise of specialists in teaching Arabic to non-native speakers to prepare the questionnaire.

Data Analysis

After collecting the learners' responses, their answers were entered by using the SPSS statistical, version 23. The researcher used a variety of statistical methods in the SPSS, including frequencies and percentages for each axis to determine the sample characteristics and their responses. Mean values (Means) and standard deviations (Standard Deviations) were used to estimate the cultural needs scores across the tool's axes and items. Pearson correlation coefficient (Pearson) and Cronbach's Alpha coefficient were used to verify the internal consistency validity of the study tool to report the findings.

Findings

The results of Social, Political, Economic, and Literature, Arts, and Heritage Cultural Needs. Showed a range of needs from very high to high. (Table 1).

Table 1

The Classifying of response scores

Response Score					
The Mean	Very Low	Low	Moderate	High	Very High
From	1	1.8	2.6	3.4	4.2
To	Less than 1.8	Less than 2.6	Less than 3.4	Less than 4.2	**5**

Results and Discussions

Results and Discussion of the Social Cultural Needs

The results of the social cultural needs axis showed that the cultural need represented by the statement "I want to understand the etiquette of visiting, such as wearing modest clothing and removing shoes" ranked first, with a mean score of (4.56) and a standard deviation of (0.74). In second place was the statement "I want to use phrases related to condolences, marriage, welcoming a newborn in Omani society, and others" with a mean score of (4.46) and a standard deviation of (0.96). In third place was the statement "I want to learn about Omani hospitality customs, such as welcoming guests, serving coffee, and burning incense" with a mean score of (4.31) and a standard deviation of (0.98). The statement "I want to learn about Omani traditional clothing, the differences between governorates, and the customs of wearing them" had the lowest need, with a mean score of (3.70) and a standard deviation of(0.71) . The researcher attributes the ranking of the statement "I want to understand the etiquette of visiting, such as wearing modest clothing and removing shoes at the doorstep" in first place to the learner's desire to avoid feeling embarrassed or being stared at by the host family or the community due to wearing short or tight clothes that are acceptable in their own culture but may be deemed inappropriate in the cultures of some Arab Islamic countries. This need may also arise from the lack of educational materials addressing the etiquette of visiting Arab households and what should be done to respect the culture of the society. For the statement "I want to use phrases related to condolences, marriage, welcoming a newborn in Omani society" which ranked second, the researcher suggests that this need might stem from the learner's desire to integrate into Omani society and their wish to know and use appropriate words and phrases in different life situations. In the case of the statement "I want to learn about Omani hospitality customs, such as welcoming guests, serving coffee, and burning incense" which ranked third, one possible explanation is the learner's interest in understanding the culture of the host country, particularly the rituals of guest hospitality, how coffee is served, and the traditional offering of food, followed by the custom of bidding farewell with incense practices the learner may not be accustomed to in their own culture. For the statement "I want to learn about Omani traditional clothing, the differences between governorates, and the customs of wearing them" which ranked lowest in need, the researcher attributes this to the belief among some learners that Omani traditional attire is uniform across the Sultanate's governorates. In reality, there is a variety of traditional clothing styles across the governorates, and it is important to introduce this diversity to non-native Arabic speakers. (Table 2).

Table 2

The Arithmetic Means and Standard Deviations for the Items of: Social Cultural Needs

N	Second Axis	Mean	Standard Deviation	Need OF Degree	Rank
13	Learn about Oman's hospitality traditions like greeting guests, serving coffee and offering frankincense.	4.5	0.74	Very high	13
20	Understand visiting etiquettes like to dress modestly and to take shoes off.	4.4	0.96	Very high	20
12	Learn about the various traditional Omani cuisine, participate in making them and know how Omanis eat them.	4.3	0.98	Very high	12
21	Learn about the various traditional Omani dresses for each Governorate and customs of wearing.	4.2	1.00	Very high	21
19	Understand the nature of familial bond and cohesion, and the role of the tribe in the Omani society	4.1	1.07	High	19
16	Learn about aspects of Bedouin life.	4.0	0.91	High	16
14	Learn about writing personal details like name, father, and tribe in the Omani society.	3.9	1.00	High	14
18	Learn about the Omani society different occasions like condolence, Eid, weddings, welcoming a new baby and others.	3.8	1.10	High	18
17	Learn about using the right expressions or words in expressing condolence, offering Eid, and wedding wishes, welcoming a new baby and others.	3.7	1.12	high	17
15	Learn about Omani woman's rights.	3.7	1.08	High	15
	The overall average of the Second axis:	4.1	0.71	High	

Results and Discussion of the Political Cultural Needs

The results indicate that the cultural need represented by the statement "I want to learn about the history of the Sultanate of Oman" ranked first, with a mean score of (4.26) and a standard deviation of (0.91). In second place was the statement "I want to learn about Oman's political role in the Gulf Cooperation Council countries and its neutral stance internationally" with a mean score of (4.05) and a standard deviation of (1.14). In third place was the statement "I want to learn about the system of government in the Sultanate of Oman" with a mean score of (3.89) and a standard deviation of (1.08). The statement "I want to learn about the concept of Shura, municipal councils, their history, and the voting mechanism" ranked the lowest in terms of need, with a mean score of (3.49) and a standard deviation of (1.19). The researcher attributes the ranking of the statement "I want to learn about the history of the Sultanate of Oman" in first place, and the statement "I want to learn about Oman's political role in the Gulf Cooperation Council countries and its neutral stance internationally" in second place, to the specialization of some learners in history, politics, and international relations, as well as the limited exposure to the history of the Sultanate and its political role in the curriculum. As for the statement with the lowest need, "I want to learn about the concept of Shura, municipal councils, their history, and the voting mechanism" the researcher suggests that this may be due to the learner's familiarity with the voting mechanisms in their own society, which might be similar to those in the target language community. However, some learners are interested in understanding the concept of Shura, how it relates to parliamentary systems, and what the idea of municipal councils means in Omani society. (Table 3).

Table 3

The Arithmetic means and Standard Deviations for the Items of: Political cultural Needs

N	Third Axis	Mean	Standard Deviation	Need OF Degree	Rank
24	Learn about the governance system or regime of the Sultanate of Oman.	4.2	0.91	Very high	24
27	Learn about the *Shura* Council and Municipal Councils, their history and voting system.	4.0	1.14	High	27
22	Learn about Sultanate of Oman's history.	3.8	1.08	High	22
25	Learn more about Sultan Qaboos's biography.	3.7	1.11	High	25
26	Learn more about Sultan Haitham's biography.	3.6	1.14	High	26
23	Learn about Oman's political role in the Gulf Cooperation Countries (GCC), and its neutral role internationally	3.4	1.19	high	23
	The overall average of the Third axis:	3.8	0.87	high	

Results and Discussion of the Economic Cultural Needs

The results showed that the cultural need represented by the statement "I want to learn about the most famous traditional markets and see local products in the Sultanate of Oman" ranked first, with a mean score of (4.24) and a standard deviation of (0.91). In second place was the statement "I want to learn about the Friday market and its importance in Omani society" with a mean score of (4.12) and a standard deviation of (0.97). In third place was the statement "I want to understand the auction system in Omani souks" with a mean score of (3.85) and a standard deviation of (1.06). The statement "I want to learn about the role of the Sultanate of Oman in minting and circulating currencies historically" ranked the lowest in terms of need, with a mean score of (3.38) and a standard deviation of (1.27), indicating a moderate level of need. The researcher attributes the high ranking of the statement "I want to learn about the most famous traditional markets and see local products in the Sultanate of Oman" to the desire of some learners to acquire products made in Oman, which are distinctive and related to Omani culture, such as frankincense, khanjars (daggers), models of castles, pottery, ships, and other symbols associated with Oman. Learners may want to keep these items as souvenirs or purchase them as gifts. This is based on real experience, as in the researcher's work teaching Arabic to non-native speakers, learners often look for local products, especially in a time when Chinese-made goods dominate local markets. On the other hand, regarding the statement "I want to learn about the Friday market and its importance in Omani society" which ranked second, the researcher attributes this to the novelty of the idea for some learners. They may have only heard of "Black Friday" at the end of November, but the concept of the Friday market in Omani society might be new and intriguing to them, especially if they were born in a capital city bustling with global markets but lacking traditional souks that combine the sale of animals, local food products, traditional weapons, and various goods. In the statement "I want to learn about the role of the Sultanate of Oman in minting and circulating currency historically" which ranked the lowest in terms of need, the researcher attributes this to the potential difficulty in understanding the topic at the learner's linguistic level. The need may be more suitable for advanced learners rather than intermediate or beginner levels, as this statement includes information related to historical stages of currency, such as the type of metal, the Islamic calendar year, the minting house, or inscriptions with Islamic significance. These details may be challenging for learners, which is why it ranked the lowest in terms of need. (Table 4).

Table 4

The Arithmetic Means and Standard Deviations for the Items of: Economic Cultural Needs

N	Fourth Axis	Mean	Standard Deviation	Need OF Degree	Rank
31	Learn about the historic role of the Sultanate of Oman in minting and trading currencies.	4.2	0.91	Very high	1
32	Learn about Sultanate of Oman's new and old sources of economic income.	4.1	0.97	High	2
33	Learn about Sultanate of Oman's currency and fractional units.	3.8	1.06	High	3
29	Learn about the popular traditional markets, and see the locally-made products in the Sultanate of Oman.	3.8	1.04	High	4
30	Learn about *Souq aljumah* (Friday Market) and its significance to the Omani society.	3.7	1.11	High	5
28	Understand the auctioning process in the traditional markets in the Sultanate of Oman.	3.3	1.27	Medium	6
	The overall average of the Fourth axis:	3.85	0.80	High	

Results and Discussion of the Cultural Needs in Literature, Arts, and Heritage Dimension

The results show that the cultural need for the statement: "To learn about the most prominent Omani archaeological sites on the UNESCO list" ranked first, with a mean of (4.00) and a standard deviation of (1.14). In second place was the statement: "To use Omani proverbs and sayings in real-life situations" with a mean of (3.99) and a standard deviation of (1.18). In third place was the statement: "To practice Arabic calligraphy" with a mean of (3.98) and a standard deviation of (1.14), indicating a high level of need. The statement: "To learn about some ancient and contemporary Omani writers and poets" ranked the lowest in terms of need, with a mean of (3.80) and a standard deviation of (1.08). The researcher attributes the ranking of the statement: "To learn about the most prominent Omani archaeological sites on the UNESCO list" in first place to the interest of some learners in historical places that are unique to the Sultanate of Oman, or the scarcity of archaeological sites and aflaj (traditional irrigation systems) in their environment. The researcher also explains the ranking of the statement: "To use Omani proverbs and sayings in real-life situations" in second place due to the importance of proverbs and sayings in understanding the culture of the language community, and their role in effective expression when learners try to integrate into society. As for the statement: "To learn about some ancient and contemporary Omani writers and poets," which ranked lowest in terms of need, the researcher suggests that some learners may prefer to read about a specific Arab author or poet they favor, without geographical limitations related to the literature. The reasons for this could also be linked to the learner's language proficiency level and the appropriateness of the literary content for their language level. This requires selecting a variety of poetic texts that match the learner's abilities. (Table 5).

Table 5

The Arithmetic Means and Standard Deviations for the Items of: Cultural Needs in Literature, Arts, and Heritage Dimension

	Fifth Axis	Mean	Standard Deviation	Need OF Degree	Rank
40	Learn about some ancient and current Omani writers and poets.	4.0	1.14	High	1
36	Read Omani stories and novels	3.9	1.18	High	2
37	Use Omani proverbs in real life situations.	3.9	1.14	High	3
35	Practice on Arabic calligraphy.	3.9	1.05	High	4
39	Listen to Omani music and to the traditional musical instruments.	3.9	1.01	High	5
38	Learning about some Traditional crafts like weaving, pottery, and making of Omani *kumah* (cap) and Omani *khanjar* (dagger).	3.8	0.99	High	6
34	Learn about Oman's main archaeological UNESCO-listed places.	3.8	1.08	High	7
	The overall average of the fifth axis:	3.9	0.78	High	

Results and Discussion of the Comparison of Cultural Needs

When comparing the mean scores of the cultural needs dimensions cultural needs related to Islam, social cultural needs, political cultural needs, economic cultural needs, and cultural needs in literature, arts, and heritage the social cultural needs dimension ranked first with a mean of 4.11. It was followed by the dimension of cultural needs related to Islam with a mean of 4.00, then the dimension of cultural needs in literature, arts, and heritage with a mean of 3.94. The economic cultural needs dimension came next with a mean of 3.85, and finally, the political cultural needs dimension ranked last with a mean of 3.84. The prominence of the social cultural needs dimension may be attributed to the learners' desire to learn Arabic in its social and cultural context, which requires integration into the society and an understanding of its various social situations. This necessitates understanding the culture of the community. The fact that the cultural needs related to Islam ranked second on the list of cultural needs may be linked to the association of the Arabic language with Islam, as well as the learner's presence in a Muslim community where they are exposed to Islamic phrases, such as greetings and the sound of the call to prayer (adhan). As for the lower ranking of the political cultural needs dimension, this could be due to the lower proportion of learners specializing in politics and international relations in the study sample, or possibly because they respect the policies of certain centers or institutes that avoid discussions about politics. Additionally, the difficulty of political vocabulary may not align with the learners' language proficiency levels. It can be concluded that all the cultural needs dimensions for learners of Arabic as a foreign language are important. Based on the mean scores of the study sample, the social cultural needs dimension emerges as the most crucial, as it is closely tied to linguistic communication, cultural exchange, and social integration. (Table 6).

Table 6

Comparison of Mean Scores and Standard Deviations for the Cultural Needs

Number	Axis	Mean	Standard Deviation	Need Level	Rank
1	Social Cultural Needs	4.1	0.71	High	1
4	Cultural Needs in Literature, Arts, and Heritage	3.9	0.78	High	2
3	Economic Cultural Needs	3.8	0.80	High	3
2	Political Cultural Needs	3.8	0.87	High	4
	Overall Mean	3.9	0.63	High	

Conclusion

Cultural needs of learners of Arabic as a foreign language in the Sultanate of Oman form an integral part of their educational experience. These cultural needs encompass a simplified understanding of religion, social practices, the political environment, economic conditions, and the status of literature, arts, and heritage. It is crucial for educational institutions in Oman to integrate these diverse cultural aspects into their curricula to promote cultural understanding. Based on this study, the following conclusion can be summarized, all the cultural needs areas for learners of Arabic as a foreign language hold significant importance. Based on the mean scores from the study sample, the social cultural needs area is considered the most important for the learners. This is likely due to the linguistic communication, cultural exchange, and social integration it involves.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, and considering the theoretical framework and prior research, the researcher has proposed several recommendations, summarized as follows:

- The study identified a range of cultural needs for learners of Arabic as a foreign language. It is suggested that these needs be incorporated into the curricula for teaching Arabic to non-native speakers in the Sultanate of Oman.

- Cultural needs should be gradually integrated into the curriculum, aligned with the learners' language proficiency levels.

- Develop a comprehensive guide for teachers that includes cultural concepts, contemporary teaching methods, strategies, and effective educational activities. Ideally, this guide should contain practical examples from the experiences of learners in both Omani and Arab environments to enhance practical application.

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