

Analysis of Arabic Cultural Aspects in Three Main Arabic Textbooks

A THESIS

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by

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THESIS APPROVAL

Arabic Language and Linguistics

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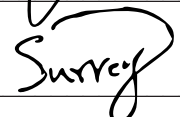
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Abstract

There is no doubt that culture represents a vital component in the foreign language curriculum. Over the past decades, foreign language textbooks, as a key element in the teaching and learning process, covered culture differently qualitatively and quantitatively and the Arabic textbooks are no exception. This study aims to evaluate the presence of Arab culture in three main Arabic textbooks widely used in western institutions. The researcher applied a content analysis methodology to extract and examine the cultural aspects incorporated into these textbooks. The findings show a strong emphasis on the geographical, religious, and literary aspects and less focus on the societal and economic aspects and those related to the Arabs' daily lifestyle and leisure. The results could be used to decide which textbooks are more suitable for a specific curriculum and to help improve future educational material's content.

Keywords: Arab culture, Arabic textbooks, cultural content, foreign language

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Every nation has its own culture that is distinguished from others, and that culture is reflected in the language of its people. Language and culture are reciprocally connected and both acquired socially. This undeniable interconnection is evident in the field of foreign language teaching in general, and Arabic language education in particular. Teaching culture without language does not benefit learners. Likewise, teaching language without its cultural content is teaching meaningless symbols and formative templates.

Culture in the broad meaning consists of two main components: on one hand, it is the anthropological or social culture, which includes customs, attitudes, and traditions, and on the other hand, it is the history of civilization, which contains arts, scientific achievements, and social sciences. The second component is based on the first element, as it presents the heritage of the society, and therefore must be known to learners to understand the target culture.

Also, the combination of language and culture leads to the development of linguistic and cultural skills among learners, makes them better responsive to native speakers and therefore understand their ideas and behaviors. We can perceive the importance of this interrelationship while noticing that foreign language learners not only broaden their horizons for the targeted culture but also rediscover their own culture to the point that they look at it differently than before. Consequently, learners become more respectful toward other cultures and more appreciative of the feelings of others as they can grasp their cultural implications.

Brown (2007), Schultz (2007), and Tang (1999) have demonstrated that teaching a language along with culture and without an intermediate language is very effective. Otherwise, the teaching process becomes a waste of time and effort for both the educator and the learner besides the language becoming useless and difficult to understand. Hence, culture has a great impact on learners, as it causes to develop a positive attitude towards the language they are

learning especially if the teaching process is enjoyable and interesting as learners discover new cultural patterns different from their own which leads to increasing their interests and stimulating their motivation to learn about cultural habits and customs.

Acquiring knowledge and learning new skills to succeed professionally and personally have been always the main goal of receiving an education. That is why the teachers' role is vital as they continually "engage the student and find what makes the student interested in the subject" (Slapik, 2017, para. 9). Their role becomes more challenging while teaching foreign languages which is one of the social science's major subjects. Social science is the study of human society and social relationships where students learn a range of sciences such as anthropology, archaeology, economics, geography, history, and law. Teaching and learning foreign languages have constantly been the subject of several studies and researches in the 20th century and the first two decades of the 21st century.

While there are several reasons behind learning a new language, from being able to speak to more people (Duffin, 2020), to boosting cross-cultural understanding (Boroditsky, 2010), to improving test scores in core subjects (the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages, n.d.), the process of learning a foreign language allows learners to discover other civilizations and gives them a unique opportunity to exchange experiences and knowledge with others; thus, cultural awareness empowers learners to build relationships with people from various regions of the world, as well as to respect their values, races, and backgrounds.

Also, by being able to understand foreign cultures, learners can watch foreign movies, listen to foreign music, discover foreign literature in the native speakers' language, and uncover the history of other countries. At a certain point, language learners reconsider their own culture

and understand it in a new way as they draw new perspectives while discovering the benefit of being emancipated from monolingualism.

On the personal level, learning a foreign language will make traveling much easier as mastering the local language enables learners to read local newspapers and easily order local food, besides finding more loving and welcoming native speakers as a result of speaking their language, showing interest and understanding of their history and culture (Gorsky, 2019).

On the professional level, several studies show that acquiring a new language will benefit businesses (Jolin, 2014) by improving analytical skills, along with work skills, creativity and problem solving, and promotes opportunities to participate in the business, medicine, law, trade, technology, industry, and marketing.

Undeniably, learning a new language implies discovering a whole new culture: the true meaning of a language is within the culture conveyed not its vocabulary, grammar or syntax. Hence, learners are expected to not only use the language to communicate and interact with native speakers but employ the language's cultural trait and excel in various real-life experiences. To this end, educators should assist language learners in acquiring every skill needed to achieve language and cultural proficiency.

The World-Readiness Standards for Learning Languages identify culture as the “true content of the foreign language course” and as one of the standards' goal areas or also one of the five Cs in learning a foreign language (Clementi & Terrill, 2017). While teaching a foreign language, the cultural part is sometimes overlooked and even disregarded especially at the beginner and intermediate level or when barriers exist such as beliefs and attitudes (Yang & Chen, 2016). This could happen when teachers only rely on outdated and/or non-authentic

material which may omit crucial cultural elements that are part of the language being taught. Furthermore, language learners often focus on the communicative facet of the language and ignore the fact that a word or a sentence might have more than one meaning which varies according to the context.

Textbooks, as the most widely used educational materials, still represent a valuable resource that supports learners in developing their foreign language proficiency. They are an essential tool used by educational institutions to ensure a successful teaching and learning experience. In a typical foreign language classroom, most educators tend to focus on teaching syntax, phonology and other communication skills to improve their learners' reading, listening, writing and speaking skills in the target language.

Occasionally, they are unaware that grasping those skills is insufficient for learners to be capable of reflecting on several issues and concepts appropriately once they are in a culturally different context. That is why it is crucial to incorporate cultural content as much as possible in every single step of the foreign language course curriculum.

This study intends to investigate, assess and compare the cultural content in three main Arabic textbooks used by English-speaking learners and determine the extent of cultural elements incorporated into these textbooks to develop a conception of how culture is represented in each textbook. The results should provide the readers with a clear picture of how each textbook and series of textbooks integrated Arab culture and the type of cultures that is most and least represented on each one.

Statement of the Problem

Given the importance of the culture's role in enhancing language learning, and notwithstanding the emergence of several technology tools, such as websites and applications, as part of learning, textbooks are still considered a vital part of the teaching and learning processes for both educators and learners.

Moreover, as indicated in the StarTalk endorsed principles for effective teaching and learning, an idealistic learning curriculum incorporates culture, content, and language where learners benefit from age-appropriate authentic materials and engage in “meaningful, real-world learning experiences that prepare them to use the target language beyond the classroom” (STARTALK Principles for Effective Teaching & Learning, 2020, para 1).

Despite classifying Arabic by the U.S. Foreign Service Institute (2019) as a "super-hard language" along with Chinese Cantonese, Chinese–Mandarin, Japanese and Korean (Foreign Language Training, n.d.), educators and learners have been encouraged to not focus only on the communicative part of the language, but also take the Arab culture and civilization in consideration and incorporate it as much as they can in the course curriculum.

Culture represents the pillar of the language itself. Thus, language educators should make every effort to include all cultural aspects in every step of their curriculum. Despite the rise of technology, textbooks are still indispensable for foreign language learners since they include a wealth of reliable resources and references that help them achieve higher proficiency. Through these same textbooks, educators try to convey the appropriate cultural content to their learners hoping to supply them with the necessary tools that enable them to become culturally aware and ready to interact in cross-cultural situations.

Purpose of the Research

The purpose of this study is to analyze selected Arabic textbooks, extract their Arabic cultural content and make comparisons and inferences about the amount and type of cultural elements that have been incorporated in each one of them.

Research Questions

The following are the questions this study attempted to answer:

- Does every textbook reflect a variety of Arabic cultural aspects?
- Does the cultural content differ from a textbook to another? If so, to what extent?
- Is there enough cultural content on each textbook for Arabic learners to reach a minimum of cultural competence? In other words, how well these textbooks prepare Arabic learners to achieve cultural proficiency?

Significance of the Study

This study is an effort to help Arabic language educators, as well as educational institutions, make an informed decision about the most suitable academic materials for Arabic learners regarding the Arabic cultural content richness and diversity. The study's findings are meant to create some sort of reference for Arabic language teachers along for learners from different levels and backgrounds who are discovering the Arab culture and intending to become more familiar with the native speakers' customs and traditions in their journey of learning Arabic. Therefore, learners should be able to select the textbooks that match their proficiency level while, at the same time, they consider their motivation and aspirations behind learning a foreign language such as Arabic.

The results of the study could be relevant to potential researchers as these results may become useful to improve future curriculum and supplement the teaching process with additional materials. This research was conducted mainly to:

- Investigate, analyze and compare the cultural content incorporated in various Arabic textbooks used in western universities.
- Assess and interpret the cultural information being taught on these textbooks.

Limitations and Delimitations

While the researcher made every effort to include all relevant data into the study, it worth mentioning the following points:

- The textbooks included textual and visual contents about various Arabic cultural aspects in a contextual setting in English and Arabic: the researcher extracted only unambiguous data related to different cultural categories in both Standard Modern Arabic and local dialect.
- Cultural content in the source language: the researcher took into consideration the cultural data presented in Arabic only. There are instances where the textbooks explained Arab culture in English; these instances were not included.
- Cultural elements related to the communicative part of the language such as the Arabic Alphabet were not counted as a cultural element in this research as it is presented to be learned mainly as a linguistic tool.
- Analyzed cultural content: for the simplicity and brevity of the study, the researcher intentionally omitted the online content as it is more frequently updated compared to the physical textbooks.

Literature Review

Importance of the Culture

The relation between language and culture has been always the subject of several studies. Researches findings demonstrated that mastering a language does not only imply grasping its vocabulary and grammar, it also entails assimilating all aspects related to that language most importantly the cultural aspect. "To speak a language is to take on a world, a culture." (Fanon, 1967, p.25).

Arabic, as one of the fastest-growing languages in the U.S. with an increase of 42 percent from 2010 to 2017 (Zeigler & Camarota, 2018), is considered a language with a significant cultural richness. Merriam-Webster (n.d.) defines culture as "the customary beliefs, social forms, and material traits of a racial, religious, or social group." It also describes it as the "characteristic features of everyday existence (such as diversions, or a way of life) shared by people in a place or time." Since the language is not seen as a way of communication solely, culture became a vital component of language learning.

In effect, culture is one of the five goal areas outlined in the world-readiness standards for learning languages published by the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL). Byram and Esarte-Sarries (1991) emphasized the significance of incorporating culture as a part of the language learning curriculum. What corroborates the relation between learning a language and acquiring the secrets of its culture is that learners find

themselves facing a new world, different from their own and wonder about their ability to apply this new language in real life. That is when they decide to either accept it and continue their journey in acquiring more vocabulary and knowledge or reject it and refuse to dig more into its culture and literature.

This is so true in the case of the Arabic language since learners assess their ability to master Arabic while confronting native speakers in the real-life setting and using their speaking, writing and reading skills, and most importantly, their cultural awareness and discovering the differences between their own culture and the one being studied. Failure to identify those differences might put them in an ironic position or become a subject of misinterpretation and disagreement.

While learners may have diverse reasons behind learning a foreign language, there are three main goals they are seeking to accomplish which are:

- Language proficiency: Robinson (2013) define language proficiency as “a measurement of how well an individual has mastered a language. It is often measured in terms of receptive and expressive language skills, syntax, vocabulary, semantics and other areas that demonstrate language abilities”
- Communicative competence: learners can use the language accurately, appropriately and flexibly. According to Hymes (1972), it refers to the use of language in situationally and socially appropriate ways. Canale and Swain (1980) defined communicative competence as the learner's ability to use the language to engage in an exchange of information or ideas effectively in four areas: words and rules, appropriacy, cohesion and coherence, and use of communication strategies.

- Intercultural Communication: defined by ACTFL and the National Council of State Supervisors for Languages (NCSSFL) as “a complex activity that combines cross-cultural knowledge and language skills. It involves initiating, understanding and responding to what is communicated, using culturally appropriate language and behavior in a given context”.

Without culture, learners cannot assimilate the meanings behind the words being said or written in the foreign language and without language, they cannot uncover its cultural attributes. The main question that all educators and scholars involved in teaching culture in the Arabic language classroom may ask is: which culture should we convey and emphasize to our learners and which one is considered most useful and pertinent to their background and expectations?

While teaching Arabic to non-Arabic speakers, educators should consider four major cultural categories to incorporate in their curriculum:

- Local culture: the one that distinguishes each Arab country or region within a country from another. It could be related to the specific local customs and rituals such as greetings and weddings, or a particular place or event such as a monument or a national holiday.
- Islamic culture: religious aspects originated from Islam that refers to cultural practices common to Muslims.
- Arabic culture: all the cultural characteristics found originally in the Arab world and shared across all Arab countries.
- Universal culture: culture shared everywhere all over the world regardless of local customs and traditions such as respect and kindness.

Integrating Culture in the Foreign Language Curriculum

The intertwined relationship between culture and language is undeniable. Culture is, without a doubt, a crucial element in teaching a foreign language. Recent studies and research findings confirm that learners are incapable to achieve a high level of successful language communication proficiency without comprehending its cultural context. The latest methodologies in teaching foreign language suggest that lessons, discussions, stories, and writings cannot be separated from their diverse cultural backgrounds.

For a language learner, being proficient in speaking, listening, reading and writing used to be the exclusive goal of teaching a foreign language; not anymore! Today, this can be done using a wealth of tools, besides the “classic” textbooks, such as mobile applications, specialized websites, and online instructional videos. The challenge of the 21st century, within a global economy, is to be culturally aware of the differences, beliefs, views, and prejudices while pursuing and take part in meaningful interactions with people and organizations of diverse backgrounds around the globe.

This idea emphasized the integration of culture in the textbooks as a pillar of language teaching. As Bateman and Mattos (2006) mentioned, a wave of efforts to incorporate cultural elements into some textbooks started between the 1930s and the 1960s by “incorporating photographs and narratives about aspects of daily life in the target cultures” in Spanish and Portuguese. Since then, textbooks targeting language learners became more and more inclusive of authentic materials portraying pictures of native speakers, real conversations and stories originated from the target culture.

The interest in the cultural characteristic incorporated in the teaching textbooks targeting foreign language learners keeps growing in recent years and language proficiency became

contingent on cultural proficiency. Brooks (1968) recommended that since teaching culture is essential in the language curriculum, culture should be interpreted at two different levels:

“scientific and humanistic” suggesting considering a framework for each level.

In 1975, Brooks highlighted the need for centering foreign language teaching on learners’ desires and making foreign culture more acceptable and reassuring to the language learner. This era followed the rise of the audiolingual method in teaching foreign languages, which emphasizes learning to listen and speak before reading and writing. It is when the memorization of short sentences through repetition was introduced to help learners acquire some of the cultural aspects of the target language.

At the beginning of the 21st century, we witnessed a significant increase in the studies and researches attempting to further investigate the importance of incorporating more cultural elements in the foreign language curriculum and trying to uncover the best practices to achieve communicative and cultural proficiency. In their analysis of the cultural content in English as a foreign language (EFL) textbooks in Colombia, Rodriguez and Fernando (2015) discovered that these textbooks contain mainly information representing the surface culture and almost completely ignore deep culture.

Cutshall (2012) stressed that the most valuable content taught in the foreign language classroom is the culture communicated through that language, not its vocabulary nor grammar. Cutshall described culture as a framework in the form of a triangle comprised of three components: perspectives, products, and practices, or the “3Ps”. The perspectives represent the meanings, attitudes, values, and ideas. The products include the tangible and intangible parts of the culture such as books, food, and dress. The practices are the patterns of social interactions or behaviors such as rites of passage and use of space.

In her thesis submitted to the faculty of Brigham Young University, Asay (2016) investigated the integration of culture in the secondary foreign language classroom by surveying foreign language teachers. Many of them stated that culture is “very important, the main reason why kids take a language” course. While studying the cultural aspects of two Turkish EFL books in Turkey, Arslan (2016) discovered a disequilibrium between local culture and “target and intercultural” elements. This may show a lack of interconnection between cultures and discourage learners to compare and investigate the target culture and their own.

Research Methodology

This chapter details the techniques and steps taken by the researcher to conduct the actual study. A research methodology represents the steps that the researcher follows sequentially so that the study is completed systematically with a logical and documented process. It uses special techniques that organize and facilitate data saving and classification.

Research Design

This study is a descriptive content analysis where quantitative data are collected via checklists and item frequency analysis. The data consists of words and pictures extracted from the undermentioned textbooks. Content analysis is a research tool used to discover certain vocabulary or concepts in some given qualitative data. Walliman (2011) described it as

A quantitative form of analysis that consists of an examination of what can be counted in text of any form (articles, advertisements, news items, etc.) or other media such as pictures, television or radio programmes or films, and live situations such as interviews, plays, concerts. (p.86)

Content analysis can also be identified as “the systematic, objective, quantitative analysis of message characteristics” (Neuendorf, 2002, p. 1). This research is an examination investigating the cultural content in Arabic textbooks targeting English speakers and widely used in western universities. It is a method of making inferences derived from analyzing text and other forms of qualitative data.

Advantages of Content Analysis

The benefits of content analysis include:

- The reliance on textual communication which contributes to understanding the real meaning behind social interaction.
- Providing information of historical value that can be consulted anytime.
- Allows the construction of statistical analyzes in the form of symbols distributed between relationships and specific groups.
- The ability to use content analysis to interpret complicated textual elements by considering unambiguous characteristics of the text.
- Content analysis is an unobtrusive interactive medium.

Disadvantages of Content Analysis

The following are characteristics that negatively affect content analysis:

- The need for a very long time to implement the content analysis.
- Excess errors occur when trying to achieve a better level of interpretation.
- The absence of a theoretical base that contributes to reaching meaningful conclusions related to the effects and the special relationships in the study.
- Ignore the specific context in the text, specifically after it is produced.
- It might be difficult to add content analysis to a computer system.

The researcher implemented a content analysis approach by applying a combination of qualitative and quantitative techniques to extract and analyze data incorporated into the textbooks listed in the table below.

Table 1*List of the textbooks subjects of this study*

Title	Edition	Author(s)	Publisher	ISBN
Alif Baa: Introduction to Arabic Letters and Sounds				9781589016323
Al-Kitaab: A Textbook for Beginning Arabic: Part One	Third	Kristen Brustad, Mahmoud Al-Batal, Abbas Al-Tonsi	Georgetown University Press	9781589017368
Al-Kitaab: A Textbook for Intermediate Arabic: Part Two				9781589019621
Ahlan wa Sahlan: Functional Modern Standard Arabic for Beginners	Second	Mahdi Alish, revised by Allen Clark	Yale University Press	9780300219890
Ahlan wa Sahlan: Functional Modern Standard Arabic for Intermediate Learners				9780300178777
Arabiyyat al-Naas (Part One) An Introductory Course in Arabic		Munther Younes, Makda Weatherspoon, Maha Saliba Foster		9780203744574
Arabiyyat al-Naas (Part Two) An Intermediate Course in Arabic	First	Munther Younes, Hanada Al-Masri	Routledge	9780203124734
Arabiyyat al-Naas (Part Three) An Advanced Course in Arabic		Munther Younes, Yomna Chami		9780203124710

To fulfill the purpose of this study, the researcher chose the beforementioned textbooks as they are the most used Arabic textbooks in the post-secondary educational institutions in western universities. It is noteworthy that, although all textbooks have online content associated with each of them called a "companion website," for this study, the researcher analyzed solely texts and images included in the hard copy of each textbook.

Steps of Content Analysis

In the beginning, the researcher read through the transcript of each of the analyzed textbooks, made brief notes in the margin when interesting or relevant information was found. The information could take the form of text or picture. Then, the researcher went through the notes written in the margins and created lists and categories by sorting different types of relevant information extracted.

The researcher applied the following steps, outlined by Avineri (2017), to complete the content analysis's process:

- Read through the list and categorized each item in a way that offers a description of what it is about.
- Identified whether the categories can be linked any way and listed them as major categories and/or minor categories.
- Compared and contrasted the various major and minor categories.
- Collected all of the categories and examined each in detail and considered whether it fits and assess its relevance.
- Reviewed all information to ensure that it is categorized as it should be based on criteria previously determined.
- Reviewed all the categories and determined whether some categories can be merged or if some need to be sub-categorized.
- Returned to the original transcripts and ensured that all the information that needs to be categorized has been so.

Data Analysis

The data in selected textbooks were analyzed according to specific criteria and classified into nine categories as follow:

Economy & Organizations: all economic components and any mention to a local, regional or national organization in the Arab world. An example could be a name of a currency, a picture of a bank, storefront selling spices or a Souk located in an Arabic city, or the word “دينار” or “ليرة” or “مطعم باب الحارة”.

Religion & Rituals: any religious or sacred concept, object, place of worship, ceremonies, holidays or celebration that is part of the Arab people’s believes and customs such as “عيد الاضحى”, “رمضان”, “المسيح”, “أقباط”, “صلاة الجمعة”, “الدروز”, etc., and for instance, a picture of worshipers at a mosque.

Garments: items related to the traditional men’s, women’s and kids’ dresses specific to the local culture such as “كوفية”, “عباية”, “عقال” and pictures depicting an Arab person wearing a traditional dress such us “دشداشة” or “قفطان”.

Locations & Landmarks: places, monuments, lakes, seas and mountains located in the Arab world such as a picture of the Pyramids of Giza, a name of an Arab country such as “فلسطين”, “العراق”, “سوريا”, “تونس”, and “موريتانيا”, and a name of an Arab city like “بيروت”, “الاسكندرية” and “حلب”.

Social Relations: examples are commonly used words or sentences used in social interaction such as “ان شاء الله”, a picture illustrating two Arab people shaking hands and a notion like “بنت الحلال” and “ابن الحلال”, and any word or item related to the social behavior in general.

Food & Beverages: elements related to food recipes, eating habits and utensils, and anything portraying the Arab cuisine in general such as “قهوة عربي”, “شاي عربي”, “تبولة”, “كسكسي”, “فلافل”, “كنافة”, “طاجين”, “حمص”, or “هريسة”.

Literature & Media: Arabic literary works and personages and Arab media such as books, educational institutions, radio stations, television channels, poets, scientists, etc. Some examples are: “جامعة دمشق”, “قناة الجزيرة”, “محمود درويش”, and “كتاب الاجنحة المنكسرة”.

Politics & History: all political and historical personages, major events and places, flags, and governments such as “الشركس”, “الدولة العثمانية”, “الثورة المصرية”, “صلاح الدين الايوبي”.

Art & Sports: cultural elements related to music, film, sculpture, paintings, sporting events, and famous sports players. Some examples are “ملعب القاهرة”, “الدبكة”, “فيروز”, and a picture of “Hicham El Guerrouj” or “Nizar Qabbani”.

Criteria Applied

The data was collected and analyzed over several months in the years 2019 and 2020. The researcher created eight Excel files with nine column table in each of them. Every column represents a cultural category. The researcher then read every textbook subject of this study, extracted the words and pictures that depict a cultural aspect of the Arab culture and recorded it in the corresponding Excel file. If a word or a picture seems to describe more than one cultural aspect, the researcher logged it in each cultural category that may represent. For instance, the word “Hijab” or “حجاب” would be categorized under “religions and rituals” as it is a religious symbol, and also under the “garments” category as it is a veil used for modesty and privacy. Also, a historical site or monument, either in textual or visual form, is counted twice: one under “politics and history”, and the other one under “locations and landmarks” category.

Alif Baa

Despite being a textbook intended to help in teaching the Arabic alphabet and basic vocabulary and grammar concepts, Alif Baa's authors were keen to include all forms of culture in all units of the textbook; the culture was mentioned in every single unit beside the vocabulary and the grammar content.

Table 2 demonstrates that the Alif Baa textbook's authors allocated almost 69% of the Arabic cultural content to the following three cultural elements: the social aspect (25%), the religious aspect (22.9%) and the geographical aspect (20.8%). Arabic culture was represented largely in textual content and the textbook included about ten authentic pictures presenting a few cultural elements.

Table 2

Frequency of cultural elements in Alif Baa

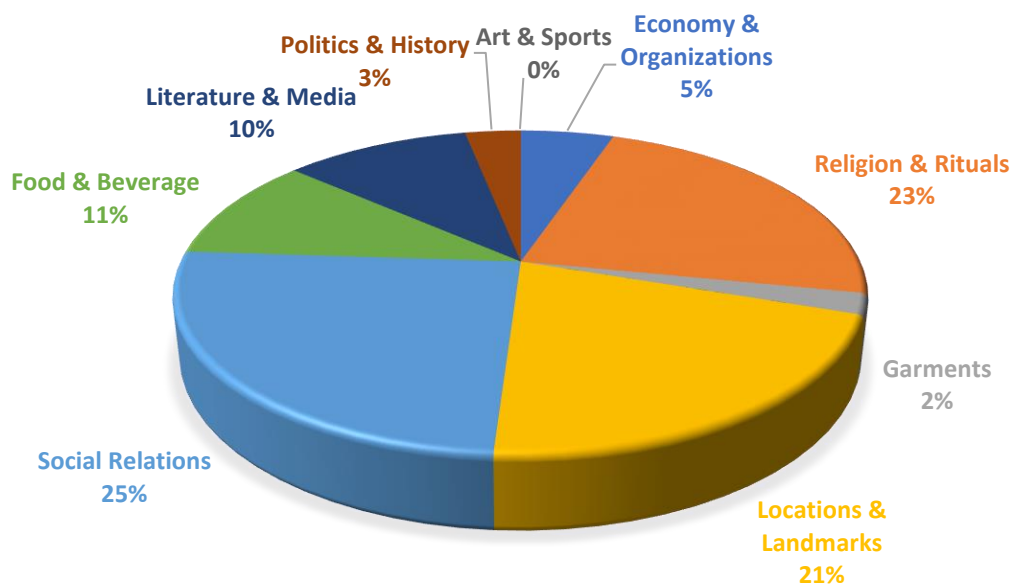
Cultural element	Terms	Pictures	Total
Economy & Organizations	2	3	5
Religion & Rituals	21	1	22
Garments	2	0	2
Locations & Landmarks	20	0	20
Social Relations	24	0	24
Food & Drinks	8	2	10
Literature & Media	6	4	10
Politics & History	3	0	3
Art & Sports	0	0	0
Total	86	10	96

Alif Baa comprises several pictures throughout its ten units, most of them are not authentic in form of drawings. Even the authentic ones do not depict Arab culture properly as they include non-Arabic origin words transliterated from English. For instance, on page 175, there are two pictures showing signs of two stores that have English names but written in the Arabic alphabet: “The caravan” (restaurant) and “The One, total home express”. Another example on page 114 is a picture of a can of iced coffee with “City Café Ice - Vanilla” all written in Arabic letters on it.

The researcher thinks that the “Alif Baa” authors missed the opportunity to present the original Arab culture without reference to the western’s. Indeed, most authentic pictures in the textbook represent western cultures such as Arby’s and Friday’s restaurants on pages 85 and 88 respectively and Toys R Us store on page 106, just to name a few.

Figure 1

Part of each cultural element in Alif Baa



While the “Arts and Sports” aspect was completely absent, cultural content related to the “Garments” category and the “Politics and History” category appeared only in two and three terms respectively. Most of the pictures incorporated in the “Alif Baa” textbook represented the economic aspect in three pictures and the literature and media in four.

Al-Kitaab - Part One

Despite being a textbook that focuses primarily on grammar and vocabulary, there is no doubt that the first part of Al-Kitaab incorporated more variety of cultural elements compared to Alif Baa. More than 30% of the first part of “Al-Kitaab” represented and described locations and landmarks in the Arab world. A little more than one-quarter of the cultural content (26.5%) was depicting the religious and rituals’ aspect.

Table 3

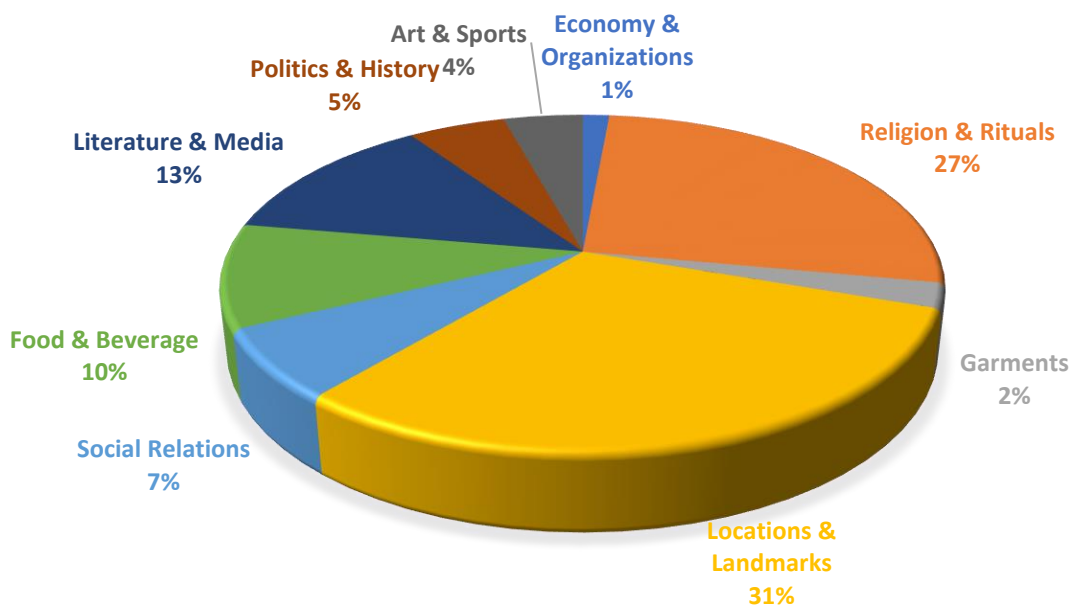
Frequency of cultural elements in Al-Kitaab - Part One

Cultural element	Terms	Pictures	Total
Economy & Organizations	3	0	3
Religion & Rituals	49	7	56
Garments	0	5	5
Locations & Landmarks	65	0	65
Social Relations	12	2	14
Food & Beverage	15	6	21
Literature & Media	23	4	27
Politics & History	11	0	11
Art & Sports	7	2	9
Total	185	26	211

Most pictures incorporated in the textbook represented traditional dress, religious traits, and fictional arts. It should be noted that the researcher did not find any clear textual reference to the Arab dress. On the other hand, there are a handful of pictures representing Arabic food such as hummus on page 83 and the Arabic coffee on page 251.

Figure 2

Part of each cultural element in Al-Kitaab - Part One



Almost one-third of the cultural elements in the first part of Al-Kitaab are textual and visual content embodying locations, monuments, and landmarks such as countries, cities, areas, and streets; almost all Arab countries are named besides prominent cities such as Damascus, Baghdad, Amman, Beirut, and Jerusalem, in addition to popular places as Al-Mansur street and Souq Al-Hamidiyah.

A considerable portion (27%) of the cultural content was illustrating the religious element. This can be seen as the authors cited major religious concepts such as Halal, Haram,

Islamic prayers and the Quran. In this textbook, the authors did not overlook other cultural components such as the social, political and historical which are present with much less frequency than the religious and the geographical elements.

Al-Kitaab - Part Two

This part of “Al-Kitaab” did not significantly differ from the first one; about half of the cultural content was allocated to the geographical (24%) and religious (23%) aspects.

Table 4

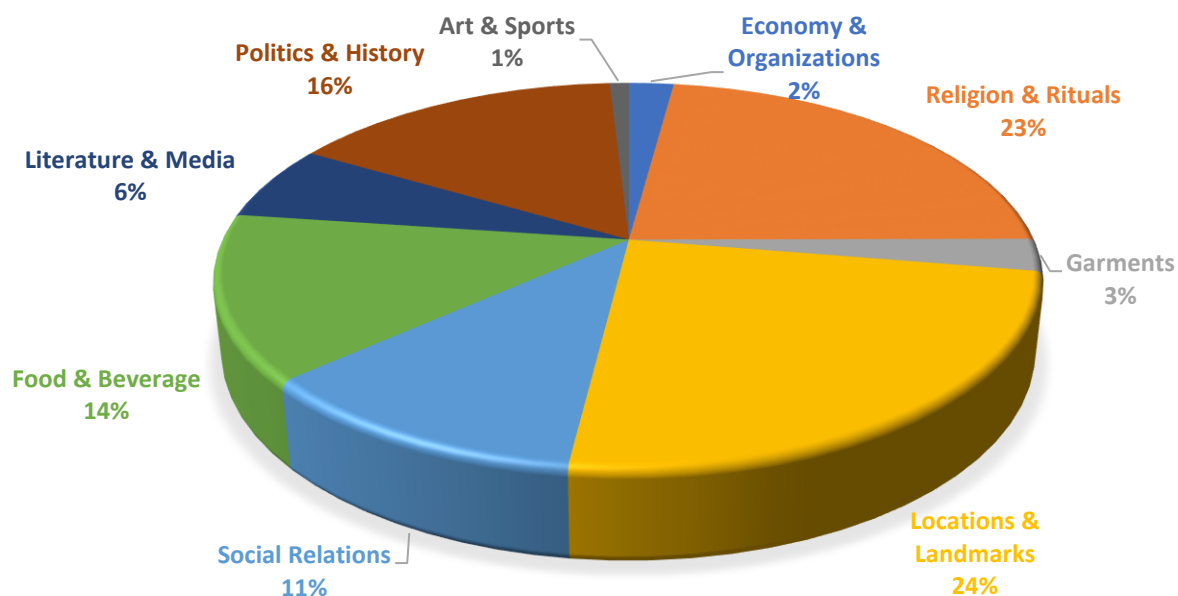
Frequency of cultural elements in Al-Kitaab - Part Two

Cultural element	Terms	Pictures	Total
Economy & Organizations	7	0	7
Religion & Rituals	75	1	75
Garments	8	1	8
Locations & Landmarks	81	0	81
Social Relations	38	0	38
Food & Beverage	46	0	46
Literature & Media	21	0	21
Politics & History	52	0	52
Art & Sports	3	0	3
Total	331	0	331

It is noteworthy that, despite having more than 500 pages, this textbook significantly lacked authentic pictures as it included few only (not counting the book cover which is not the subject of this study). Almost all pictures are drawings or sketches most of them are black and white.

Figure 3

Part of each cultural element in Al-Kitaab - Part Two



The second part of Al-Kitaab was culturally diversified with more balanced content between the Locations and Landmarks element and the Religion and Rituals element. The cultural content related to the food, politics and social life gained a larger part compared to the first part of the textbook. However, the Arts and Sports aspect represented the least incorporated cultural content besides the garments’.

With the lion’s share given to the locations and landmarks’ element, the textbook authors emphasized the mention of popular markets especially in the Levant and particularly in Syria such as Al-Hamidiyah Souq (already mentioned in part one of Al-Kitaab) and the Souk of Al Manakhliya to name few.

Ahlan wa Sahlan – Part One

As a textbook targeting beginners, this part of Ahlan wa Sahlan incorporated a load of various cultural contents: except for the cultural aspects depicting the garments and the economic life, the textbook’s authors included a variety of cultural aspects ranging from geography and literature to social relations and politics. Arts and sports were well represented compared to Al-Kitaab and Alif Baa.

Table 5

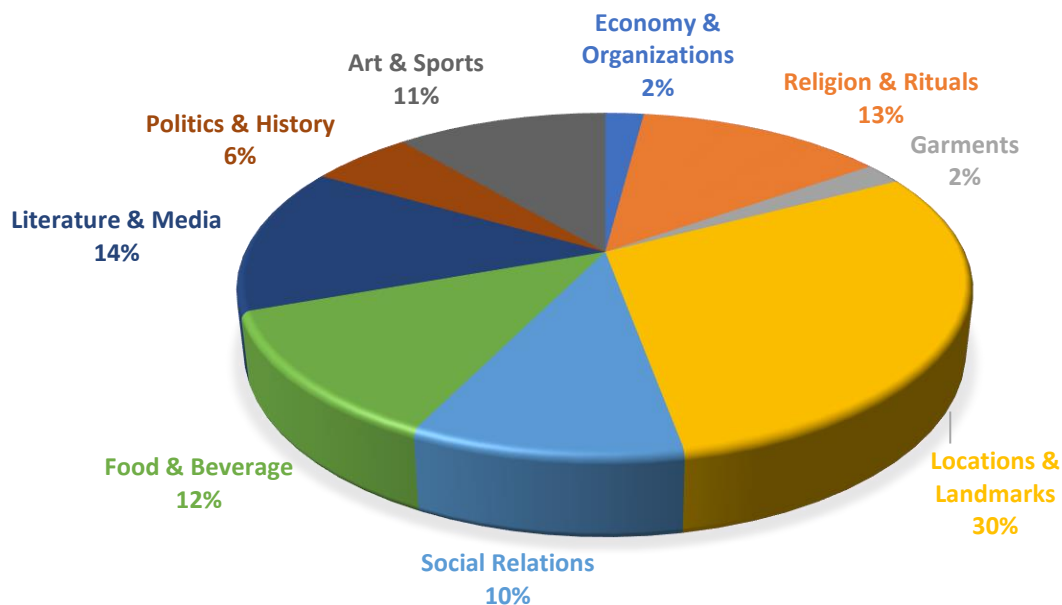
Frequency of cultural elements in Ahlan wa Sahlan - Part One

Cultural element	Terms	Pictures	Total
Economy & Organizations	3	3	6
Religion & Rituals	37	2	39
Garments	3	3	6
Locations & Landmarks	86	2	88
Social Relations	29	1	30
Food & Beverage	31	5	36
Literature & Media	36	5	41
Politics & History	9	7	16
Art & Sports	22	11	33
Total	256	39	295

Unlike “Al-Kitaab”, the first part of “Ahlan wa Sahlan” emphasized more cultural elements such as the geography, religion, and literature. It also incorporated far more authentic pictures than both parts of Al-Kitaab and Alif Baa. The author made sure to include culture in each of the 24 lessons of the textbook by combining textual and visual elements along with the grammar and the vocabulary content.

Figure 4

Part of each cultural element in Ahlan wa Sahlan - Part One



It is clear that in the locations and landmarks cultural aspect, the author enumerated several places, countries, and cities mainly in Syria and the Levant. Some examples include Aleppo, Latakia, Tartus, and Beirut. Also, the textbook included several mentions of prominent scientific and educational references such as the University of Damascus, the Egyptian Museum, Ibn Khaldun, and Al-Farabi.

Ahlan wa Sahlan – Part Two

The second part of Ahlan wa Sahlan is designed for intermediate level learners. It included more diversified content in terms of cultural elements. Except for the aspect related to garments, this textbook included a wealth of balanced cultural content ranging from social and political aspects to artistic and religious subjects. In this textbook only, the literature and media element equals the one related to the locations and landmarks with 22% for each.

Table 6*Frequency of cultural elements in Ahlan wa Sahlan - Part Two*

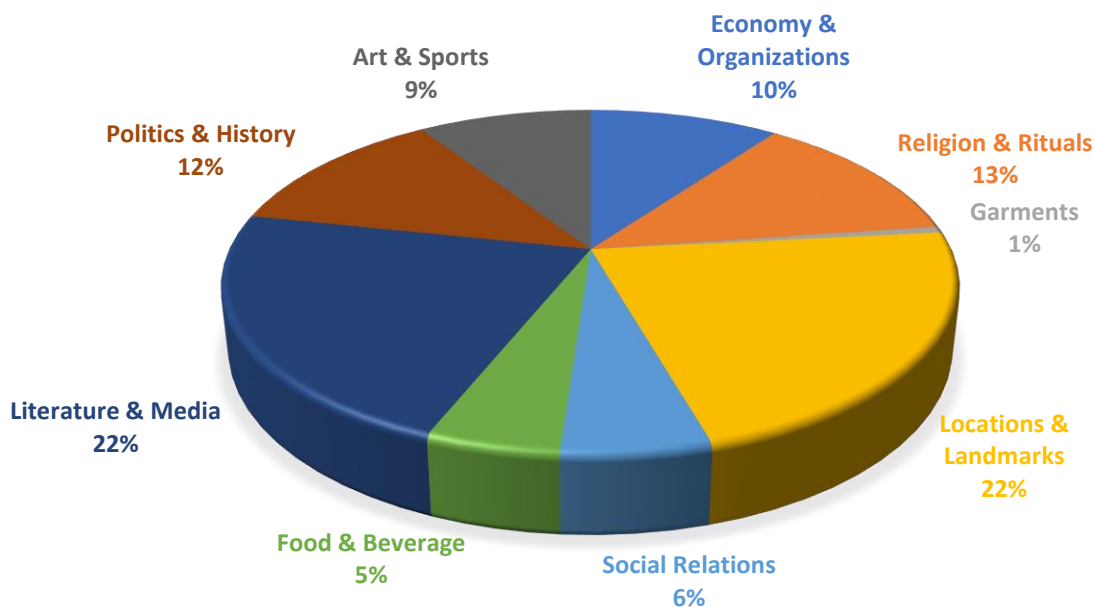
Cultural element	Terms	Pictures	Total
Economy & Organizations	8	28	36
Religion & Rituals	31	15	46
Garments	0	2	2
Locations & Landmarks	73	7	80
Social Relations	13	7	20
Food & Beverage	9	9	18
Literature & Media	60	20	80
Politics & History	40	5	45
Art & Sports	15	18	33
Total	249	111	360

Also, this textbook incorporated far more authentic pictures illustrating the Arab culture compared to other textbooks. As part of the religious aspect, the author included pictures of mosques, such as the Granada mosque, and churches, such as the Jerusalem church. Pictures depicting the economic local life and Islamic architecture are the most incorporated in this textbook such as monuments in Amman, Jordan, a scripture and a currency.

As social habits in the Arab people's daily life and the cultural heritage of the Arabs, this textbook mentioned several elements such as Al-Hakawati and some popular proverbs. In terms of food and beverage, the textbook cited the local dates, Sudanese pistachio, and Kebabs. In the artistic aspect, the author listed many musical instruments such as the Oud, the Ney, the Def, and the goblet drum.

Figure 5

Part of each cultural element in Ahlan wa Sahlan - Part Two



As Chart 5 shows, the vast majority of the analyzed cultural elements are incorporated within this textbook which is loaded with various textual and visual references to the Arab culture. It is worth mentioning that this part of *Ahlan wa Sahlan* has the most of pictures representing the different cultural aspects of the Arab culture compared to the rest of the analyzed textbooks.

Moreover, there is a great number of references to Arabic literature in forms of famous Arab writers and scholars such as Ibn Rushd (Averroes), Al-Farabi, Ibn Sina (Avicenna) and Mahmoud Darwish. Also, the author mentioned several popular literary works like *Kalila and Demna* and *Alf Layla Wa Layla* (The Thousand and One Nights). In addition to the Arabic literature, the textbook included many references to places, landmarks, and monuments with the focus on Syria and the Levant mainly.

Arabiyyat-al-Naas – Part One

Half of the cultural content included in the first part of “Arabiyyat Al-Naas” was about locations and landmarks where the author cited different names of Arabic countries, cities, monuments, rivers, mountains, etc. This textbook is, by far, the one that mentioned the most locations (mainly countries and cities) with the majority located in Syria, Lebanon, Palestine, Jordan, and Egypt such as Aleppo, Sidon, Nablus, Jerash, and Aswan.

Table 7

Frequency of cultural elements in Arabiyyat-al-Naas-Part One

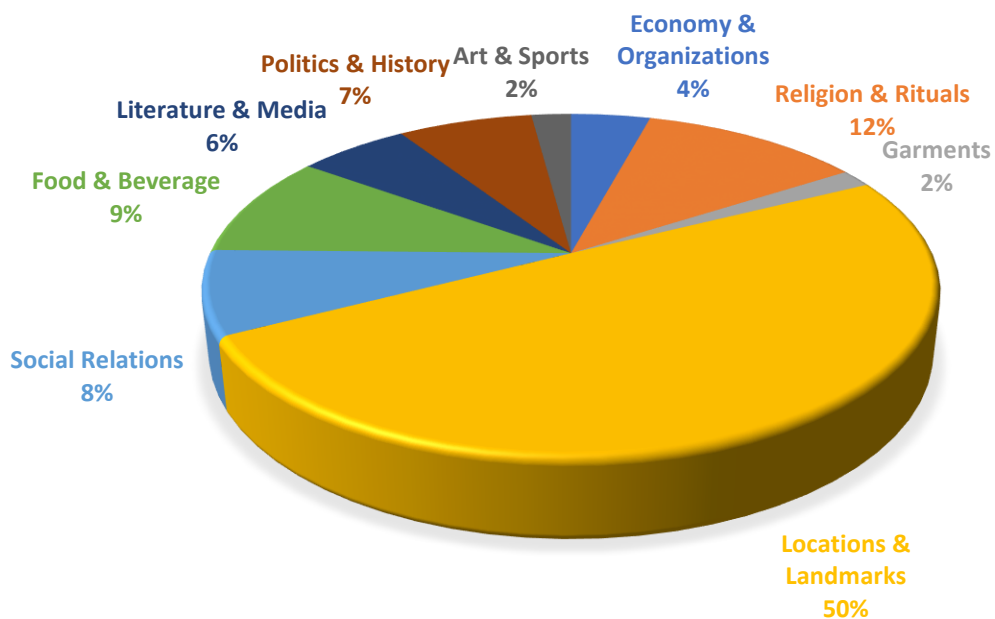
Cultural element	Terms	Pictures	Total
Economy & Organizations	4	6	10
Religion & Rituals	24	4	28
Garments	2	2	4
Locations & Landmarks	114	5	119
Social Relations	18	1	19
Food & Beverage	23	0	23
Literature & Media	13	1	14
Politics & History	17	0	17
Art & Sports	5	0	5
Total	220	19	239

The rest of the cultural content was shared unequally among other categories with a dominant part for the religious and social aspects; for instance, the author included pictures of people praying and veiled women to emphasize the Islamic part of the Arab culture. The author also incorporated several words representing the proper social etiquette such as expressing appreciation or praise like “ما شاء الله” and showing respect like “حضرتك”.

As the table above shows, among all analyzed textbooks, part one of “Arabiyyat Al Naas” comprised the most number of references to locations and places with more than a hundred mentions to popular cities, countries (all the Arab countries), and landmarks from all over the Arab world besides famous rivers and seas such as the Mediterranean Sea and the Nile. within the textbook’s 21 units, the textbook included several references to some of the popular monuments and museums in the Arab world like Amman's Roman Theater and the Soap museum in Sidon (or Sayda) in Lebanon.

Figure 6

Part of each cultural element in Arabiyyat-al-Naas-Part One



The religious aspect is the second most represented with 12% of the cultural content where the author referred to numerous concepts, symbols, events, and personages that belong to the three major religions: Islam, Christianity, and Judaism such as words like Torah, Ramadan, and Church. Garments were the least mentioned in this textbook with only 2% with only very

few pictures depicting the local traditional dress (like the one on unit 10) and the mention of the Keffiyeh or kufiya and Hattah.

In the literature and the scientific aspect, the textbook mentioned several famous universities in the Arab world such as the University of Al-Azhar, the American Universities in Cairo and Beirut, Al-Zaytoonah University, and the University of al-Qarawiyyin. The textbook also included many references to Arabic cuisine such as Falafel, Kanafeh, Harissa, and Tabbouleh without including enough pictures representing this cultural element.

Arabiyyat-al-Naas – Part two

This textbook comes in second place after the third part in terms of how much cultural content included. It has more than a hundred references to places, cities, areas, and countries (more than 28%) such as the Fertile Crescent and the Sinai Peninsula in Egypt.

Table 8

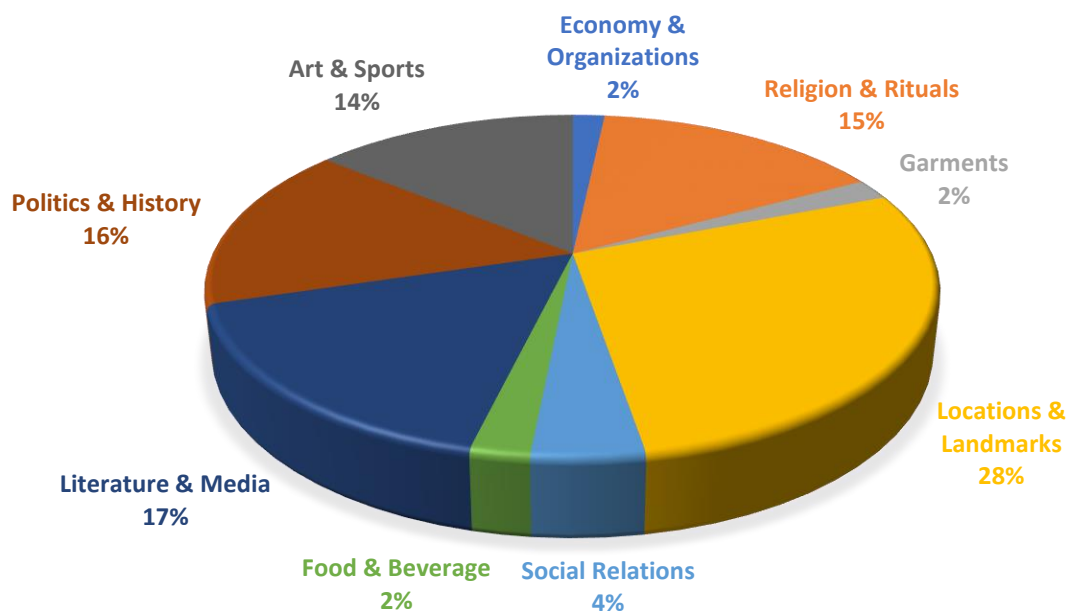
Frequency of cultural elements in Arabiyyat-al-Naas-Part Two

Cultural element	Terms	Pictures	Total
Economy & Organizations	4	2	6
Religion & Rituals	52	3	55
Garments	4	3	7
Locations & Landmarks	97	4	101
Social Relations	14	1	15
Food & Beverage	6	2	8
Literature & Media	57	2	59
Politics & History	55	1	56
Art & Sports	47	3	50
Total	336	21	357

The literature and media content counted 17% of the total cultural content and comes in second place. It included prominent writers and poets such as Naguib Mahfouz and Abbas Mahmoud al-Aqqad, educational institutions such as the House of Wisdom and the University of Marrakech, and popular media such as newspapers and magazines like Al-Ahram, Al-Karmel, and Al Ghad.

Figure 7

Part of each cultural element in Arabiyyat-al-Naas-Part Two



The religious and rituals element, which represented 15% of the cultural content included various references to religious names and concepts from different religions and faiths such as the words Christians, Jews, Sunni, Shia, Druze, Maronites, and Muslims.

As part of the economic aspect, the textbook mentioned a few related elements such as the Dinar, Cairo International airport, in addition to pictures illustrating a Royal Jordanian aircraft and the local Egyptian currency. Along with part three, this textbook was loaded with a

great number of popular artists and artistic works such as Fairuz, Umm Kulthum, and Nazem al-Ghazali in addition to some of the most famous Arab athletes like Hicham El Guerrouj, Nouredine Morceli, and Said Aouita.

In terms of politics and history, the textbook mentioned many political and historical events such as the Arab Spring, the Battle of Hattin, and the Oslo Accords, and personalities like Saladin, Al-Mamun, and Saddam Hussein.

Arabiyyat-al-Naas – Part Three

As the table below shows, this textbook is the most loaded in cultural content compared to all others. The author incorporated different aspects of Arab culture more than 360 times in its 18 units.

Table 9

Frequency of cultural elements in Arabiyyat-al-Naas-Part Three

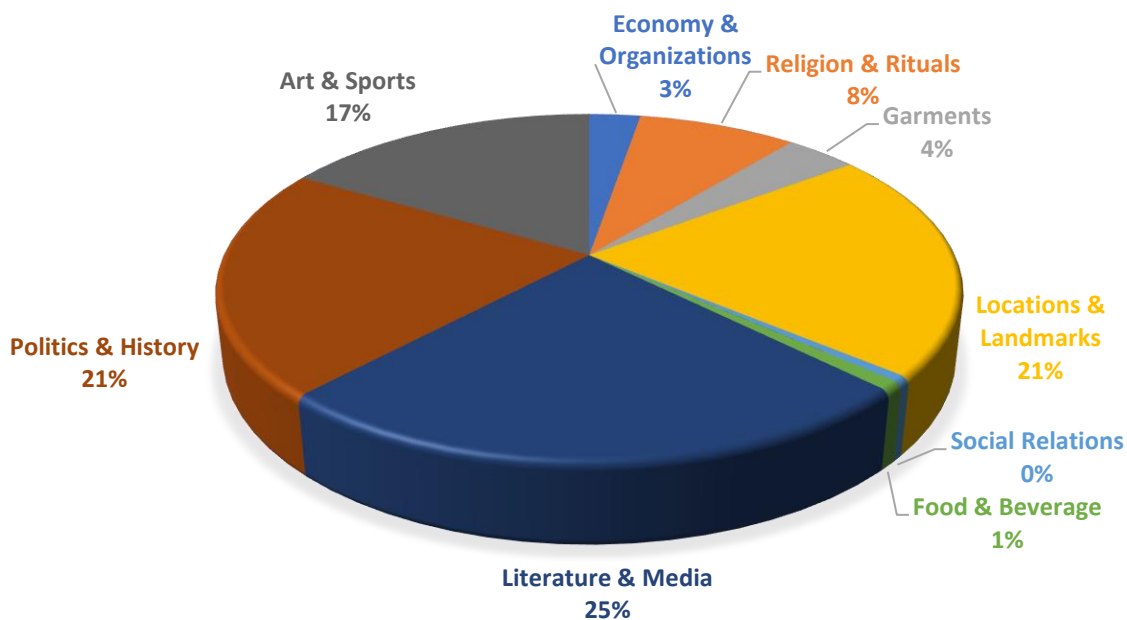
Cultural element	Terms	Pictures	Total
Economy & Organizations	8	2	10
Religion & Rituals	29	2	31
Garments	12	2	14
Locations & Landmarks	79	1	80
Social Relations	2	0	2
Food & Beverage	3	0	3
Literature & Media	91	1	92
Politics & History	76	4	80
Art & Sports	61	1	62
Total	361	13	374

In part three of Arabiyyat Al-Nas, literature and media content dominated by 25% followed by politics and history by 21% and locations/landmarks by 21%. It is worth noting that Art and sports content was significantly represented by 17%.

The researcher counted more than 90 terms related to the literature and media aspect, more than any other studied textbook. The author mentioned several elements linked to this aspect such as poets like Al-Farazdaq, Al-Mutanabbi, Al-Ma'arri, Antarah ibn Shaddad, Imru' al-Qais, Abu-l-'Atahiya, Aboul-Qacem Echebbi, Nazik Al-Malaika, Badr Shakir al-Sayyab, and Nizar Qabbani.

Figure 8

Part of each cultural element in Arabiyyat-al-Naas-Part Three



Also, there are more than 60 terms related to arts and sports such as the mention of national or regional sports clubs in several countries and a few popular sports competitions besides the reference to Shakira and Salma Hayek's Arab roots.

Research Findings

Was there a dominant cultural aspect in each textbook? To what extent the analyzed textbooks included a variety of Arabic cultural content? In what form was the Arab culture incorporated within each textbook's unit and chapter?

Table 10

Frequency of cultural elements in all textbooks

Cultural aspect	Terms	Pictures	Total
Economy & Organizations	39	44	83
Religion & Rituals	318	34	352
Garments	31	17	48
Locations & Landmarks	615	19	634
Social Relations	150	12	162
Food & Beverage	141	24	165
Literature & Media	307	37	344
Politics & History	263	17	280
Art & Sports	160	35	195
Total	2024	239	2263

Based on the criteria and rules presented in the previous chapter, the findings of this study revealed that the cultural content in each textbook was not equal in terms of quality and quantity. The Arab culture was represented differently in each textbook with various levels of cultural richness. As the following table shows, some cultural elements are much more represented and included than the others.

Garments: analyzing the previous table proves that the “Garment” element, which illustrates the items used by Arabs as clothing and local traditional dress, is the least incorporated element in all textbooks with an average of 2.2% of the total cultural content.

Locations & Landmarks: with 28% of the total cultural content, this cultural category is by far the most incorporated element in all textbooks combined with more than 600 terms and pictures. Learners are exposed to many names of cities, countries, and places in the Arab world. Comparing the textbook series against each other reveals that the “Arabiyyat Al-Nass” series contained a lot more references to cities and places than the others.

Religion and Rituals: concepts, symbols, beliefs, and personalities in the Arab world were present in all textbooks and represent 15.6 % of the culture. This cultural element is incorporated way more (almost double) in the “Al-Kitaab” series than the other series.

Literature and Media: consists of all places, cities, countries, monuments, lakes, seas, and mountains within the Arab world. It was represented, in all textbooks combined, almost equally as the religious and rituals’ component with 15.2%. Based on the present study, this cultural element was less represented in the Al-Kitaab series than the two others.

Politics and History: a little more than 12% of the total content, this element comes after the literature and media component. It took about the same part of the culture in each textbook series but was represented with very few pictures compared to the other cultural elements.

This research was limited in the number of textbooks analyzed and the content taken into consideration. Consequently, it is recommended that future researches include additional material and textbooks besides more diversified cultural content. The researcher realizes that

some of the textbooks' editions are a few years old. Therefore, it will be valuable if future researchers study recent versions of the Arabic language textbooks and their updated content.

It is worth mentioning that the cultural aspects are suitable to be presented for learners at the beginner level who are acquiring Arabic as a foreign language. Undoubtedly, we should be cautious while identifying those aspects and consider the importance of the goal of learning Arabic in determining the type of culture that should be acquired. The researcher believes that the Arabic language curriculum for beginners should incorporate the following cultural content:

1. Personal information including name, age, address, and some hobbies.
2. Greetings and farewell: the way Arabs perform salutations and the act of parting or expressing wishes.
3. School and classroom components including educational materials.
4. Family such as family members, relationships, home, and community.
5. Media like magazines, newspapers, television, and the Internet.
6. Time and weather including reading the clock, the days of the week, months and the seasons.
7. Shopping including how to buy and sell, numbers, and hotels booking, airports or restaurants.
8. "Big C" culture represented in fashion, clothing, food, way of life, literature, art, etc.
9. "Small c" culture which consists of customs and traditions, political and social systems, moral values, religious and intellectual beliefs.

Suggestions & Conclusion

An analysis of the overall results of the study demonstrates that the examined Arabic textbooks targeting English speakers are loaded with a great number of cultural aspects related to Arabic culture. Those aspects range from literature to geography to history. However, a clear disparity can be found while comparing each textbook to the rest in terms of the amount of cultural content and how much from each category is represented in each textbook.

It is noteworthy that geography, represented in this study by the category “locations and landmarks” is the most frequent and most represented category if all textbooks are taken combined. However, several categories are relatively under-represented in the majority of the textbooks such as elements symbolizing food and garments, economics and social relations.

A great number of cultural terms and pictures included in the textbooks seems to be useless for learners in terms of communicative competency such as historic concepts and names of political persons besides terms in Modern Standard Arabic used mainly in official textual communication or the media but rarely in the Arab people’s daily life and interactions.

Suggestions

- Curriculum developers should balance between cultural categories in foreign language educational materials.
- Less focus on geography as it is easily accessible and understandable by learners: information is abundant, especially online, about countries, cities, and landmarks.

- More subjects should be included that focus on stereotypes and misconceptions to increase understanding of the Arab culture so learners, who are from different cultural backgrounds, learn the correct way about the Arab people's life and beliefs.

Likewise, the researcher believes that culture should be presented in the curriculum and materials targeting Arabic learners in a way that respects the following conditions:

1. The curriculum content must reflect the real content of Arab culture without alteration.
2. The different cultural elements should illustrate an honest picture of daily life in the Arab countries.
3. The material taught should meet the cultural and intellectual interests of all students.
4. The cultural content should be varied to cover diverse cultural fields and categories within the framework of Arab culture.
5. The curriculum content should not ignore the common aspects and the connection between the source culture and the target culture.
6. The description of the Arabs' daily lives should mirror the actual events and concerns of the average Arab people.
7. The cultural content needs to be appealing to the learners and motivate them to continue learning Arabic.
8. Every element in the curriculum should be at the appropriate level, age and experiences of targeted learners.
9. The content representing the Arab culture should help resolve the issue of stereotypes and prejudices toward Arabs and the Arab civilization.
10. The content must be respectful to all cultures including the source and target cultures.

Conclusion

The elements that make up the Arab culture, as seen in the analyzed textbooks, are more deep and complicated than being isolated and sorted to the extent that they lose all their meaning and effectiveness because they are well-established, continuous and expanding in time and space. The Arab region is the cradle of many human civilizations, as Pharaonic, Babylonian and Assyrian are among the oldest civilizations, and this region is the birthplace of the Abrahamic religions, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. These two elements merged with other elements in the process of creating the social history of the Arab world, and it can only be understood in their presence.

Arabic, as a Semitic language, came to reinforce the elements of Arabic cultural uniformity, and this activity established that Arabic is related to the holy book for the majority of Arab peoples, which is the Quran. Indeed, Arab Christians translated the Gospels into Arabic and worshiped in this language in their churches. It is not enough for one language and one land to create a nation; culture is still needed as a "complex whole" that includes knowledge, beliefs, arts, law, ethics, customs and any other abilities that a person acquires for being a member of a group, along with the prevailing attitudes and values in a particular society, as expressed by the linguistic symbols, legends, rituals, lifestyles, educational, religious and political institutions.

Based on this inclusive definition of "culture", we can say that there are several paths that have contributed to the single Arab cultural tributary, which can be mentioned as follows:

The unity of the jurisprudence: The majority of Arab Muslims draw from almost one juristic source, distributed among the four famous schools of thought, namely the Hanafi, Maliki, Shafi'i and Hanbali. This matter made the forms of acts of worship and some rituals where religion is involved in forming, such as marriage contracts, funerals and religious and

social parties, similar within Arabs. For example, we find that the Hanafis in Egypt do what the followers of this doctrine in Iraq do, and the followers of Shafi'i in Yemen are closely identical to their counterparts in Egypt. The Sufi orders, with their rituals, came to complement this process, as they moved from Morocco to Egypt and Iraq, up and down, and built cross-border social and religious institutions.

When the movement to renew Islamic jurisprudence began at the end of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, this mutual influence persisted in the Arab world. Of course, the different ideas produced by the Arab left or Arab liberals at a later stage spread into various Arab countries, but they did not penetrate with the quantity and the same way in which cultures stemming from jurisprudence and religious thought penetrated. The ideas of left-wing and Arab liberals are mostly still restricted to political and intellectual elites.

The unity of the literary heritage: When you ask any Arab intellectual from the ocean to the Gulf about his best ancient poets, the answers will come to a large extent similar: Imru Al-Qais, Jarir, Al-Farazdaq, Al-Mutanabi, Al-Bahtari, and Abu Nawas are remarkably recurrent. Also, we will find names mentioned by Abu Al-Faraj Al-Isfahani featured in contemporary books, critical articles, and cultural programs in various Arab countries. If you ask specialists about the beginnings of the Arabic story or novel, they will immediately remember the Maqamat of Badi Al-Zaman Al-Hamdhani and Al-Hariri, and the name Ibn Khaldun will be proposed in sociology, and Ibn Rushd in philosophy, etc.

If we trace the influence of ancient Arabic literature, which was clarified by German orientalist Carl Brockelmann (1980) in his encyclopedia in this matter, we will find that this literature has left fingerprints on the current literary works, in language, structure, aesthetic formation and drawing human and social worlds.

The Arabism of Folklore: There is a great similarity in the vocabulary of folklore carried by the Arab segments, in all its colors. The myths, proverbs, songs, popular poetry, etc., contain identical values, similar narratives, and perform the same function, despite the differentiation in verbal pronunciation within the local dialects in every Arab country. Therefore, the role of folklore in maintaining the general Arab feeling of closeness and harmony is extremely strong and influential, and it may be what forms an important part of the broad background that makes some Arabs feel harmonious while they are in Arab countries other than their own, and they emphasize the unity of values, the similarities of habits, and their consciences settle in a firm belief in the unity of the Arab destiny, no matter how the differences between the Arab countries' politics are.

The continuous interaction between nomadism and urbanism in Arab social life. Over the time, the Arab world was formed through mixing between the inhabitants who were settled around rivers in Egypt, Iraq, the Levant, Morocco, and the bedouins who crawled towards what is called in history "Islamic Amasar" with the conquests that built a strong empire on its way.

In conclusion, every educator and learner should consider these factors while teaching and learning Arab culture while keeping in mind the three elements of the goal area of culture: products, practices, and perspectives. This is crucial as we see learners reaching the advanced level, though, they lack the understanding of the concepts and patterns of Arab culture, and some of them still have questions and issues indicating that there is a cultural disparity between these them and the Arab culture which confirms that the linguistic aspect prevailed over the cultural aspect. Although some books designed for teaching Arabic to speakers of other languages include concepts and cultural elements, it is still challenging to find the best way to transfer these elements from the scope of linguistic structures to the range of cultural concepts.

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