
| RESEARCH ARTICLE

The Impact of Arabic Culture on Arab Students in the Acquisition of English at University

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| ABSTRACT

This study examines how Arabic linguistic and cultural structures influence the acquisition of English among Arab university students. Despite years of formal English instruction, many learners remain non-fluent and hesitant to use the language. Beyond teaching methods or syllabus design, this research argues that deeper cultural forces—such as Arabic values, norms, and linguistic patterns—significantly shape learners' attitudes, motivation, and performance. It explores how collectivist values, respect for tradition, and language interference create barriers to learning English and how cultural identity impacts students' willingness to engage with the language. Using a mixed-methods design, the study integrates quantitative survey data with qualitative thematic analysis to investigate how cultural identity, social expectations, and native language habits affect students' psychological and linguistic development in English. Findings will identify cultural facilitators and inhibitors of learning, examine Arabic's structural impact on English grammar and pronunciation, and clarify the link between cultural identity and motivation. The study aims to inform culturally responsive teaching practices suited to Arab university contexts. By integrating cultural awareness into instruction, educators and policymakers can develop more effective and contextually relevant curricula that foster higher proficiency and confidence in English.

| KEYWORDS

Arabic Culture; Arab Students; Acquisition of English; Arabic linguistic; Arabic values

| ARTICLE INFORMATION

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1. Introduction & Background

English, as a global lingua franca, is central to academic success, international communication, and career advancement. Across Arab countries, English is widely taught and endorsed by educators and policymakers. Yet, many Arab university students continue to struggle with fluency and communicative competence. This persistent difficulty suggests that the issue extends beyond pedagogy or curriculum, pointing instead to deeper cultural influences shaping language learning attitudes and behaviors.

Arabic culture, grounded in collectivist values, respect for tradition, and linguistic pride, profoundly shapes students' engagement with English. For some, English represents not merely a foreign language but a marker of Western identity that may conflict with their own cultural values. Such tensions can generate ambivalence or resistance, limiting motivation and confidence despite the recognized benefits of English proficiency.

In addition, significant linguistic differences between Arabic and English, coupled with cultural norms that discourage public error-making, further hinder language practice. Students' reluctance to speak or take risks in class reduces opportunities for meaningful learning and fluency development.

Understanding these cultural and linguistic dynamics is vital to improving English language outcomes among Arab learners. By integrating cultural awareness into pedagogy, educators can design more inclusive, context-sensitive teaching models that bridge the gap between linguistic goals and cultural realities. This study therefore explores how cultural identity and social norms influence

English acquisition in Arab higher education, aiming to inform more effective and culturally responsive language teaching approaches.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Despite decades of English instruction, there are still numerous Arab university students who are non-fluent and self-conscious. Very frequently, the root of this difficulty is blamed on teaching approaches or curriculum design, but cultural forces rarely come into play. Arabic norms, values, and language practices can disrupt or affect learners' processes of learning. English instruction will not be successful with most learners unless these cultural forces are taken into account.

1.2. Significance of the Study

This research will assist in elucidating the impact of culture on the learning of English. It will guide teachers and policymakers in creating more effective, contextualized English language teaching curricula that are tailored to Arab learners' lives and needs.

1.3 Research Objectives

- 1.To examine the influence of Arabic cultural values on students' attitudes and motivation.
- 2.To identify cultural facilitators and English learning barriers.
3. To analyze the impact of Arabic language patterns on English learning.
4. To explore the relationship between cultural identity and English learning motivation.
5. To recommend culture-sensitive teaching approaches for Arab university settings.

1.4 Research Questions

1. In what ways do Arabic cultural values shape Arab students' attitudes toward English language learning?
2. What are the cultural causes of poor or effortless English language learning?
3. How does cultural identity influence students' motivation and attitudes toward learning English?
4. What is the function of Arabic language structure in the learning of English grammar and pronunciation?
5. How can English pedagogical approaches be more appropriately tailored to Arabic cultural contexts?

2. Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

The acquisition of English as a foreign language (EFL) by Arab university students is a multifaceted process influenced by linguistic, cultural, and psychological aspects. English is being taught on a large scale in Arab nations and is considered a passport to educational and professional success, yet many students are still grappling with fluency and confidence. Such issues are not entirely the result of pedagogical approaches or curriculum planning but are fundamentally grounded in Arab culture and their values and language syntax (Alyasery, 2018). It is important to understand the cultural background of Arab students in order to create effective pedagogical approaches that foster English language learning.

2.2 Arabic Cultural Values and Learning Attitudes

Arab culture is predominantly collectivist, emphasizing tradition, family ties, and social harmony as core values. These cultural traits influence students' attitudes toward learning English, often creating an internal conflict between embracing a global language and preserving their cultural identity. (Al-Seghayer, 2014). English is, in most cases, viewed as a symbol of western influence, which may result in resistance or ambivalence toward learning English. McKay and Bokhorst-Heng (2008) argue that the sociolinguistic contexts have a critical function to play in the way learners perceive English, especially where the language is tied to cultural hegemony or ideological tension.

Moreover, Arab students feel nervous or uncomfortable utilizing English resources that contradict the cultural norms of their society. That can impact class participation, willingness to speak, and motivation. Aldawood and Almeshari (2019) found that Saudi EFL learners often experience problems with English learning due to cultural mismatches of teaching style and instructional material. If English instruction is culturally responsive, students are likely to show greater engagement and attain higher learning outcomes.

2.3 Linguistic Interference and Structural Problems

The morphological contrast between English and Arabic causes severe difficulties for Arab learners. Arabic is a Semitic language with root-based morphology, while English relies on a more linear syntactic formation. Such contrasts yield typical errors in grammar, word order, and pronunciation (Brown, 2007). For example, Arabic lacks some of the phonemes found in English, such as /p/ and /v/, which can cause pronunciation issues and fossilized errors.

Nassim and Labidi (2022) emphasize the necessity of integrating intercultural education into English classrooms to address such linguistic issues. They argue that understanding language interference and cultural context can help teachers create more effective teaching strategies. Additionally, Kachru (1992) highlights the concept of "*World Englishes*," where students bring their own language and cultural identity to the learning process that needs to be acknowledged rather than suppressed.

2.4 Cultural Identity and Motivation

Motivation lies at the heart of language learning, closely intertwined with cultural identity. Arab learners can be torn between their educational desire to excel and their need to be culturally real. This can evolve into low intrinsic motivation and feelings of alienation from the learning experience (Kachru, 1992). Al-Seghayer (2014) notes that students who view English as conflicting with their cultural values may reject learning it, despite its practical benefits. However, when English instruction incorporates and values students' cultural backgrounds, their motivation is likely to increase. Alyasery (2018) advocates for culturally responsive pedagogy that validates the identities of students and establishes a sense of belonging. Pedagogies like these are likely to transform English learning from foreign imposition to something meaningful and empowering.

2.5 Culturally Responsive Pedagogy

Culturally responsive pedagogy (CRP) is a pedagogy that values the integration of students' cultural references in all learning. For Arab EFL students, CRP involves responding to styles of teaching, materials, and classroom interaction in accordance with cultural norms and values (Al-Seghayer, 2014). This includes using culturally relevant examples, being mindful of sensitive cultural issues, and promoting collaborative learning that aligns with collectivist values.

Aldawood and Almeshari (2019) found that CRP in Saudi Arabia, for example, significantly influences the Saudi EFL students' degree of participation and performance. McKay and Bokhorst-Heng (2008) also highlight the importance of sociolinguistic awareness in English language teaching, arguing that instruction should be contextualized within learners' cultural settings. By recognizing and valuing students' cultural identities, educators can create a more inclusive and effective learning environment.

Research indicates that there is a significant cultural influence of Arabic language on Arab English learners. Cultural values, linguistic elements, and identity all play important roles in influencing the attitudes, motivation, and performance of learners. In addressing these challenges, teachers should use culturally responsive pedagogical approaches that value and include students' cultures. This approach can facilitate language acquisition, enabling Arab students to enhance their English skills and achieve greater proficiency.

3. Methodology

3.1 Method

This study employed a mixed-methods approach to investigate the relationship between Arab cultural identity and English language learning. The quantitative strand involved statistical analysis of data obtained through a closed questionnaire, and the qualitative strand adopted thematic analysis in deciphering open-ended answers. This two-fold approach facilitated both measurable results and detailed understanding of participants' experiences and attitudes.

3.2 Participants

The research sample comprised 23 Omani students, all aged 18, enrolled in the Foundation Program (Levels 1–3) and Year 1 at the University of Technology and Applied Sciences – Suhar, Oman. Their diverse academic backgrounds provided a broad range of perspectives on how cultural identity impacts English language acquisition across different proficiency levels.

3.3 Data Collection

Data was collected through an online questionnaire comprising 20 items, designed to capture both quantitative and qualitative responses. The questionnaire was distributed and completed during Semester 2 (Fall 2025). It covered various topics, including cultural identity, language learning strategies, classroom interaction, and perceived challenges, offering a comprehensive dataset for analysis.

4. Results, Analysis & Discussion

5. SECTION 1: Cultural Influence on Motivation and Attitudes

القسم الأول: تأثير الثقافة على الدوافع والمواقف



In general, all the participants are of the opinion that their Arab identity positively affects their willingness to learn, with 74% of the participants regarding it as very important. These results indicate a general positive self-concept of cultural identity affecting learners' L2 learning.

6. Does your Arab identity affect your motivation to learn English? هل تؤثر هويتك العربية على دافعك لتعلم اللغة الإنجليزية؟



While 73 % of the respondents did not feel that their Arab identity was preventing them from learning English, 26 % of the respondents indicated that their identity influenced their motivation, to a strong and moderate level (4 % and 22% respectively).

This indicates that more than half of the respondents perceive a potential threat to their cultural identity to varying degrees.

7. Do you worry that learning English might make you lose part of your cultural identity?

هل تقلق من أن تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية قد يجعلك تفقد جزءاً من هويتك الثقافية؟



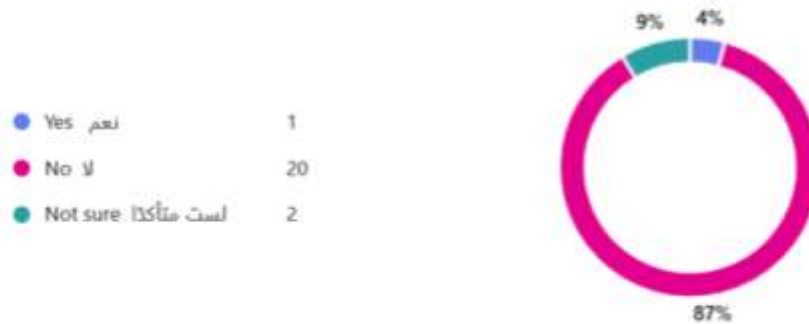
8. What do you think of English in relation to Arabic culture?

ما رأيك في اللغة الإنجليزية بالنسبة للثقافة العربية؟



An overwhelming majority, 83% of the respondents, do not regard English as a cultural loss. In fact, an overwhelming majority, 91% of the respondents viewed English as a positive tool for bridging cultures and enhancing communication, rather than as a source of cultural division.

9. Does your religious background influence how you learn English? هل تؤثر خلفيتك الدينية على كيفية تعلمك للغة الإنجليزية؟



Similarly, an overwhelming majority of 87% of the respondents stated that their religious background has no influence on their English learning process, while 9% were unsure and only 4% believed it does. This suggests that most students perceive their language learning as independent from religious factors.

10. How comfortable are you in discussing or debating in English class? ما مدى راحتك في المشاركة و المناقشة في صف اللغة الإنجليزية؟



A total of 69% of the respondents reported feeling comfortable participating in debates and discussions during their English classes. Nonetheless, 30% of the respondents stated that they feel somewhat or not at all comfortable, suggesting that a considerable number of students may still experience communication barriers that compromise their oral interaction in class.

11. Do cultural norms affect your willingness to ask questions or talk to the teacher?

هل تؤثر الأعراف الثقافية على استعدادك لطرح الأسئلة أو التحدث مع المدرس؟



Even though the majority of the participants, 66% deny that cultural norms play a role in influencing them to ask questions or talk to the teacher, a high percentage of students were unsure about such influence, which may also mean the influence is subtle or ambiguous.

12. Do gender roles affect your participation in mixed-gender English classes?

هل تؤثر الأدوار الجندرية على مشاركتك في صفوف اللغة الإنجليزية المختلطة؟



Interestingly, none of the respondents indicated that gender roles influenced their participation in mixed-gender English classes. Whereas 70% of the participants disowned any influence in such a manner, 30% remained uncertain, which may be explained by some implicit situational forces.

13. Do you prefer working with classmates of the same gender when learning English?

هل تفضل العمل مع زملاء من نفس الجنس عند تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية؟



Although students reported that gender roles do not affect their overall class participation, there is a noticeable preference for same-gender collaboration, with 39% and 35% indicating they always or often choose to work with classmates of the same

14. Are there any cultural taboos that affect your English learning in class?

هل هناك محظورات ثقافية تؤثر على تعلمك للغة الإنجليزية في الصف؟



gender.

Most respondents, 74%, reported that cultural taboos do not influence their learning, while only 17% indicated that they do. A small portion, 9%, were not sure about the impact. These results suggest that cultural taboos are generally not perceived as a barrier to English learning among this group. Overall, students appear largely confident that cultural norms do not interfere with their classroom participation.

15. What do you do to tackle language barriers in English?

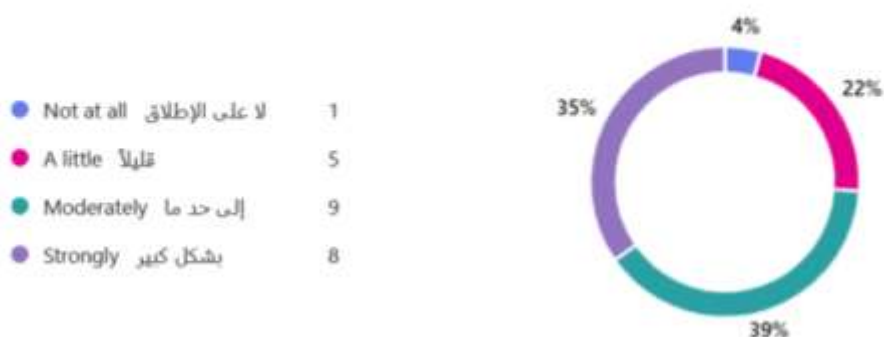
ماذا تفعل للتغلب على حواجز اللغة في الإنجليزية؟



The most common strategy used to overcome the language gap was the use of media and other leisure activities, selected by 35% of the respondents. Second came the use of apps and internet materials as a major strategy selected by 26% of the respondents. Surprisingly, however, memorization received no support from the students.

16. How much do you rely on Arabic to help you learn English?

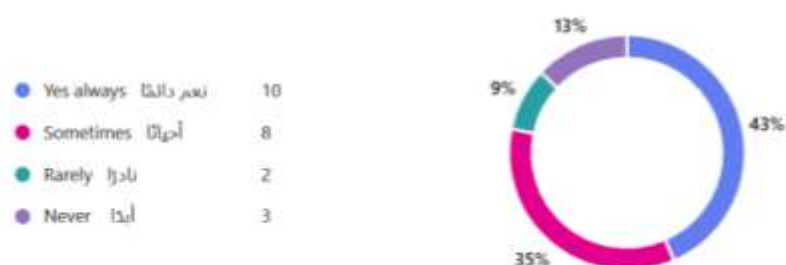
إلى أي مدى تعتمد على اللغة العربية لمساعدتك في تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية؟



The statistics reveal that a high degree of Arabic dependence was experienced in learning English as 35% and 39% of students respectively indicated high and medium levels of dependence. This reflects that most learners still rely on Arabic as an auxiliary learning tool.

17. When you struggle with English grammar or vocabulary, do you ask for help?

عندما تواجه صعوبة في القواعد أو المفردات الإنجليزية، هل تطلب المساعدة؟



Most of the students, representing 78% of all respondents, reported seeking assistance when encountering language difficulties.

However, 13% and 9% indicated that they never or rarely asked for help, which may reflect limited self-advocacy or low confidence in seeking support. This pattern suggests that while help-seeking behavior is generally common, a minority of students might still struggle with autonomy and effective communication in addressing their learning needs.

18. Do traditional learning methods from your culture affect how you learn English?

هل تؤثر أساليب التعلم التقليدية في ثقافتك على كيفية تعلمك للغة الإنجليزية؟



Students' attitudes toward the influence of conventional learning approaches were divided. Slightly more than half of the respondents (52%) reported that such approaches have no impact on their English learning, while the remaining 48% either agreed that these approaches do have an influence (26%) or were unsure (22%). This division suggests that nearly half of the students still recognize some influence of traditional learning methods rooted in their societies.

19. What's the biggest challenge you face in learning English because of cultural factors?

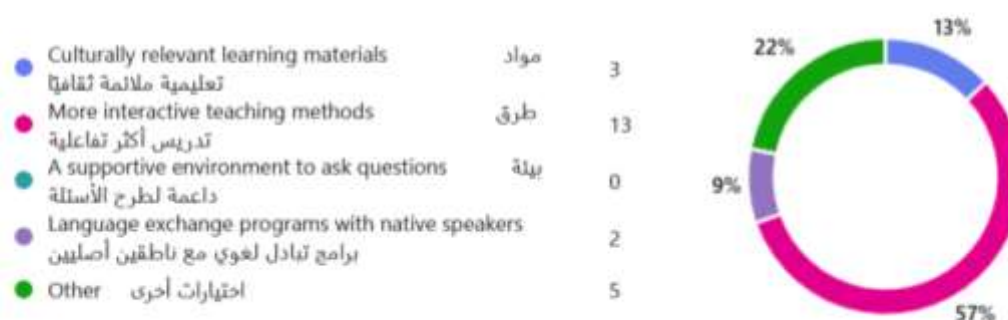
ما هو أكبر تحدٍ تواجهه في تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية بسبب العوامل الثقافية؟



Differences in language structure were selected by 57% of the participants as the largest cultural challenge. Other challenges include classroom participation rules (9%), and loss of cultural identity (9%). The failure to mention anything under gender expectations means that they are less significant.

20. What support would help you feel better about learning English as an Arabic student?

ما الدعم الذي يمكن أن يساعدك على الشعور بتحسين أثناء تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية كطالب عربي؟



A reading of student preference for support reveals a high degree of pedagogic innovation focus. Over half of the respondents, 57%, desired increased interactive methods. Interestingly, none of the students expressed a need for a more supportive environment for asking questions, indicating that the existing interactional dynamics appear to meet their expectations.

5. Conclusion

The results reveal that Arab identity largely serves as a motivating factor in students' English learning, with the majority of students expressing a positive perception of this relationship. Although a small minority reported experiencing cultural tension, most students regard English not as a threat to their cultural identity but as a valuable bridge fostering cross-cultural understanding and communication.

Religious background and gender roles do not appear to have a direct impact on learning, though same-gender collaboration preferences reflect indirect effects. Most students are comfortable speaking in English classes, but quite a large percentage still face communication problems.

Students prefer modern and interactive methods, such as media and apps, more than traditional ones, and many utilize Arabic as a support tool. While most request help when they need it, some struggle with self-advocacy. Language challenge remains the biggest cultural barrier.

Overall, the findings call for culturally responsive and creative pedagogy that maintains identity while fostering engagement and language growth.

6. Recommendations

To enhance learning English among Arabic-speaking students, we suggest:

1. The use of culturally relevant content in lessons to enable learning to be relatable.
2. Facilitate group learning activities that acknowledge and respect cultural attitudes toward authority and gender dynamics.
3. Help learners by highlighting and addressing specific differences between Arabic and English.
4. Create opportunities for open discussion on cultural identity and learning a new language while enabling students to navigate and reconcile their own culture with the process of learning a new language.

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