

Teaching Arabic as a Foreign Language in Multicultural Classrooms: A Comparative Study

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Abstract:

The teaching of Arabic as a foreign language (TAFL) in multicultural classrooms presents both opportunities and challenges. Learners from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds bring diverse expectations, which influence motivation, classroom interaction, and learning outcomes. This study explores the comparative effectiveness of teaching strategies in multicultural settings by focusing on how teachers adapt to cultural differences while promoting communicative competence. Using a qualitative comparative approach, data were collected through classroom observations, teacher interviews, and student questionnaires. The findings reveal that effective instruction requires culturally responsive pedagogy, flexible teaching methods, and the integration of multilingual resources. Moreover, intercultural dialogue plays a vital role in overcoming barriers to pronunciation, comprehension, and vocabulary retention. The study concludes that adopting inclusive pedagogical practices enhances not only Arabic language acquisition but also intercultural understanding, offering important implications for teacher training and curriculum development.

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Introduction (مقدمة)

The teaching of Arabic as a foreign language (TAFL) has become increasingly significant in recent decades, reflecting the growing interest in Arabic as both a language of religion and global communication. With over 400 million speakers worldwide, Arabic holds a central role not only in the Arab world but also in multicultural educational contexts where learners come from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds (Versteegh, 2014). This global rise in demand has led to the establishment of numerous Arabic language programs in schools and universities across Asia, Europe, and North America (Ryding, 2013). In these contexts, Arabic is often taught to students with varying levels of prior exposure to Semitic languages. Consequently, teaching approaches must adapt to the complexities of multicultural classrooms. This adaptation requires a balance between linguistic proficiency, cultural sensitivity, and pedagogical innovation.

Understanding the dynamics of multicultural classrooms is therefore crucial to ensuring effective Arabic language instruction.

Multicultural classrooms are characterized by diversity in learners' cultural backgrounds, learning styles, and prior educational experiences. In the context of TAFL, this diversity presents both opportunities and challenges (Byram, 2021). On one hand, multicultural settings encourage intercultural dialogue and foster deeper understanding of Arabic as a living language situated within rich cultural contexts. On the other hand, the heterogeneity of learners' expectations, motivations, and language learning strategies complicates the task of instructors (Al-Saidat, 2019). Teachers must account for different cultural assumptions about teaching and learning, which may influence classroom interaction. Furthermore, differing levels of familiarity with Arabic script and phonology often create disparities in learning pace. This highlights the importance of comparative research to identify effective strategies in teaching Arabic across varied multicultural contexts.

Historically, Arabic has been taught primarily in religious contexts, particularly in Islamic seminaries and institutions where the focus was on Qur'anic studies (Makdisi, 1981). However, the expansion of Arabic teaching to secular and international institutions has shifted its pedagogical orientation toward communicative competence and intercultural communication (Albirini, 2017). In multicultural classrooms, learners may pursue Arabic for professional, academic, or religious reasons, which further diversifies their needs. This diversity challenges the traditional one-size-fits-all teaching methods, requiring educators to rethink curriculum design and classroom practices (Sehlaoui, 2008). Moreover, learners' cultural backgrounds influence their perception of Arabic as either a heritage language, a language of identity, or a foreign language. This complexity necessitates research into how different cultural perspectives intersect in Arabic classrooms. Hence, a historical perspective provides essential insights into how TAFL has transformed over time in response to globalization and multiculturalism.

Pedagogically, teaching Arabic in multicultural contexts requires blending traditional methods with modern approaches. Traditional grammar-translation methods, long used in Arabic instruction, emphasize accuracy and linguistic analysis but often fail to engage diverse learners (Ryding, 2013). In contrast, communicative language teaching (CLT) and task-based approaches prioritize meaningful interaction, which is particularly valuable in multicultural settings (Ellis, 2003). However, implementing CLT in TAFL is not without challenges due to the diglossic nature of Arabic, where Modern Standard Arabic coexists with numerous regional dialects (Ferguson, 1959). This linguistic reality complicates the question of which variety of Arabic should be taught. Furthermore, learners' cultural expectations about teacher authority and classroom interaction may affect the success of communicative methods. These complexities illustrate the need for comparative studies to identify pedagogical models that work across diverse contexts.

Technology has also reshaped the teaching of Arabic in multicultural classrooms. Digital platforms, mobile applications, and social media provide interactive resources that transcend geographical boundaries (Manca & Ranieri, 2016). For students from different cultural backgrounds, technology serves as a unifying tool that supports individualized learning paths. Research shows that digital integration enhances motivation and language exposure, particularly in foreign language classrooms (Junco, 2012). In TAFL, online platforms allow learners to practice listening and speaking with authentic materials, fostering intercultural competence. However, disparities in digital literacy and access may widen the gap between students in multicultural classrooms (Al-Ali, 2014). Teachers must therefore adopt strategies that ensure equitable access while maximizing the benefits of technology. This dual role of opportunity and challenge highlights why pedagogical strategies must be context-sensitive.

The motivation of learners in multicultural TAFL classrooms varies widely and is shaped

by cultural, social, and personal factors. Some students are motivated by religious interests, such as understanding Islamic texts, while others are driven by professional or academic goals (Gardner, 2010). These varying motivations impact learners' persistence, engagement, and ultimate success in mastering Arabic. Instructors, therefore, must tailor their teaching methods to accommodate diverse motivational drivers (Dörnyei, 2001). For instance, integrating authentic cultural content can boost motivation among students interested in Arab societies, while structured grammar instruction may appeal to those focused on academic objectives. Addressing motivation in multicultural contexts requires a nuanced approach that balances universal teaching strategies with individual learner needs. Comparative research can shed light on how motivation differs across classrooms in different cultural settings.

Another key challenge in multicultural classrooms is managing classroom interaction and participation. Students from collectivist cultures may be more comfortable with group learning, while students from individualist cultures may prefer independent tasks (Hofstede, 2001). In Arabic language classrooms, these cultural orientations shape how students engage with peers and instructors. Teachers must navigate these dynamics to foster inclusive participation. Moreover, power distance between teachers and students, which varies across cultures, can influence classroom communication styles (Hofstede, 2001). For example, learners from cultures that value teacher authority may expect a lecture-based style, while others may prefer interactive discussion. Understanding these intercultural differences is critical for effective teaching in TAFL classrooms. Comparative studies can reveal patterns that inform culturally responsive pedagogy.

From a sociolinguistic perspective, multicultural classrooms also highlight issues of identity and language ownership. For heritage learners of Arabic, the classroom may serve as a space to reconnect with cultural or familial roots (Benmamoun, Montrul, & Polinsky, 2013). For non-heritage learners, however, Arabic represents an entirely foreign system that requires different scaffolding. These dual learner identities necessitate differentiated instruction. Teachers must balance between reinforcing heritage learners' cultural identities and supporting non-heritage learners' linguistic acquisition. This balancing act underscores the importance of pedagogy that is sensitive to learners' backgrounds. Comparative research provides insights into how classrooms with different compositions of heritage and non-heritage learners function. Such insights are vital for improving inclusivity and effectiveness in TAFL.

Despite the challenges, multicultural TAFL classrooms offer valuable opportunities for fostering intercultural competence. By engaging with peers from diverse backgrounds, students gain exposure not only to the Arabic language but also to broader cultural perspectives (Byram, 2021). These experiences can enrich learners' global outlook and prepare them for intercultural communication beyond the classroom. Teachers can leverage this diversity as a pedagogical resource, encouraging students to share cultural perspectives in Arabic. This transforms the classroom into a site of mutual learning rather than a unidirectional transfer of knowledge (Kramsch, 1993). However, achieving this requires intentional pedagogical design and intercultural awareness from instructors. Comparative studies are therefore essential to identify how different multicultural contexts foster intercultural competence through Arabic teaching.

In light of these considerations, this study aims to examine teaching Arabic as a foreign language in multicultural classrooms from a comparative perspective. The research explores how historical traditions, pedagogical innovations, technological integration, and cultural diversity shape teaching practices. By comparing different multicultural classroom contexts, this study seeks to identify best practices and challenges that influence the effectiveness of TAFL. Such research contributes to both theoretical discussions of language pedagogy and practical strategies for educators. It also highlights the need to integrate historical awareness with contemporary methods in Arabic instruction (Albirini, 2017). Ultimately, this study underscores the importance of adapting TAFL to the realities of globalization and multicultural education. Through this

comparative analysis, the research aspires to provide insights that benefit educators, policymakers, and learners alike.

Method (منهج)

This study employed a comparative qualitative research design with supplementary quantitative data to analyze how Arabic as a foreign language is taught in multicultural classrooms. The comparative approach was selected to identify similarities and differences in pedagogical strategies, student engagement, and learning outcomes across diverse cultural contexts (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

The research sites consisted of two institutions offering Arabic as a foreign language: one located in a predominantly Arab cultural setting and the other in a non-Arab, highly multicultural environment. These sites were chosen purposively to reflect different classroom dynamics, sociolinguistic environments, and cultural influences on teaching and learning (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

The participants included Arabic language instructors and students enrolled in beginner to intermediate courses. A total of 40 participants (20 from each institution) were involved, with varied cultural and linguistic backgrounds. This diversity enabled the researcher to capture comparative insights into how culture influences Arabic language acquisition (Dörnyei, 2007).

Data collection methods combined classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, and student surveys. Observations focused on instructional strategies, teacher-student interactions, and use of cultural references in teaching. Interviews with instructors explored teaching philosophies, challenges, and adaptation strategies, while surveys gathered student perspectives on motivation, challenges, and classroom experiences (Yin, 2014).

To ensure reliability and validity, triangulation was applied by comparing data from different sources and methods. Observation field notes, interview transcripts, and survey results were cross-checked to establish consistency and credibility. Member checking was also conducted by allowing participants to review interview transcripts for accuracy (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Data analysis followed thematic coding for qualitative data and descriptive statistics for survey responses. NVivo software was used to organize and code interview and observation data, while SPSS was employed to analyze survey results. The integration of qualitative and quantitative findings provided a comprehensive view of the pedagogical dynamics in multicultural Arabic classrooms (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014).

Ethical considerations were prioritized throughout the study. All participants provided informed consent, and anonymity was preserved by assigning pseudonyms. The research protocol was reviewed and approved by the ethics committee of the researcher's institution to ensure compliance with academic standards of integrity and respect for participants (BERA, 2018).

Finally, the limitations of this study were acknowledged. Since the research focused on only two institutions, findings may not be generalizable to all multicultural Arabic classrooms. However, the comparative design allows for valuable insights that can inform both pedagogical theory and practice in teaching Arabic as a foreign language across diverse cultural setting.

Result (نتائج)

Arabic literature is one of the cultural heritages of the Islamic world, rich in history and deeply meaningful in its language. It reflects the intellectual, social, and cultural evolution of Arab society from the pre-Islamic era to the modern age. Literature is not merely a form of artistic expression, but also a portrayal of the historical development, philosophy, and way of life of a society that has continually changed over time. This long journey is fundamentally divided into two major periods: pre-Islamic and post-Islamic Arabic literature, along with the modern transformations seen in contemporary Arabic literature. The beauty and complexity of Arabic literature lie in its ability to remain relevant across the ages, responding to the challenges of the times while preserving its rich traditional legacy. (Khotimah, 2025)

The findings of this study revealed that teaching Arabic as a foreign language in multicultural classrooms presents both opportunities and challenges. Students from diverse cultural backgrounds showed varying levels of motivation and engagement depending on how their cultural identities were acknowledged in the learning process. Many participants expressed that when teachers incorporated elements of their native culture into lessons, they felt more respected and motivated. This suggests that cultural sensitivity is a critical factor in fostering effective learning environments. Moreover, the comparative analysis indicated that classrooms with inclusive pedagogy achieved higher participation rates. Teachers who valued multicultural perspectives were able to bridge linguistic gaps more effectively. These results highlight the importance of cultural integration in Arabic language pedagogy.

The study also found that the use of Arabic textbooks designed for monolingual learners posed limitations in multicultural settings. Students often struggled to relate to examples, contexts, or cultural references embedded in the materials. For instance, learners from Southeast Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa indicated that some cultural narratives were unfamiliar and less engaging. In contrast, when supplementary materials from digital resources or social media were introduced, students demonstrated improved comprehension. The comparative findings suggest that a blended approach, combining traditional textbooks with culturally diverse content, yields better outcomes. This indicates the need for curriculum developers to create more inclusive Arabic learning resources.

Technology integration emerged as a strong enabler of Arabic language learning in multicultural classrooms. Participants reported that mobile applications, online dictionaries, and social media platforms provided flexible access to learning resources. Many students expressed that they relied on platforms such as YouTube and Duolingo to supplement classroom instruction. This external learning supported classroom activities and enhanced vocabulary acquisition. Teachers who encouraged digital learning observed higher levels of independent study among their students. In comparative classrooms, where technology was systematically integrated, student achievement scores were significantly higher. These results underline the role of digital literacy in successful Arabic language acquisition.

The results further indicated that peer collaboration was a powerful strategy for enhancing language competence. Multicultural classrooms allowed students to exchange linguistic knowledge, especially when learners from similar linguistic families collaborated. For example, learners from Turkic backgrounds often supported each other in understanding certain Arabic morphological structures. On the other hand, learners from distant linguistic backgrounds, such as East Asian students, benefited from group discussions that clarified grammatical complexities. Peer-to-peer learning fostered a sense of community and reduced feelings of isolation. Teachers who facilitated structured group work reported more active classroom dynamics. Thus, peer learning emerged as a vital pedagogical tool in multicultural settings.

An important finding was the role of teacher identity and intercultural competence in shaping learning outcomes. Teachers who demonstrated flexibility, empathy, and cultural awareness were more successful in engaging students. In classrooms where teachers lacked intercultural training, students often reported feelings of exclusion or misunderstanding. Several participants highlighted that culturally insensitive remarks or rigid teaching approaches reduced their motivation. Conversely, teachers who acknowledged cultural diversity promoted more inclusive and supportive learning atmospheres. Comparative analysis showed that classrooms led by culturally responsive teachers produced higher retention rates. These results stress the importance of teacher professional development in multicultural education.

The study also revealed differences in learning strategies adopted by students from distinct cultural backgrounds. Learners from collectivist cultures preferred collaborative and discussion-based approaches, while learners from individualist cultures often relied on independent study methods. This variation influenced how students engaged with classroom activities and responded to assessments. For example, Middle Eastern students tended to value oral communication and memorization, whereas Western students leaned toward analytical and written exercises. Teachers who adapted instructional methods to accommodate these preferences achieved more balanced participation. These findings demonstrate that cultural orientation directly shapes learning behaviors. Adapting strategies to these differences enhances pedagogical effectiveness.

Language anxiety emerged as a critical challenge across multicultural classrooms. Many students reported feeling intimidated when asked to speak Arabic in front of peers, especially when their pronunciation or grammar differed. This was particularly evident among students from non-Semitic language backgrounds, who often lacked confidence in handling complex Arabic phonology. Comparative results showed that classrooms that fostered supportive and non-judgmental atmospheres had lower levels of anxiety. Teachers who provided constructive feedback without emphasizing mistakes created safer learning environments. Furthermore, integrating role-play and interactive activities helped reduce students' anxiety. This suggests that emotional and psychological factors play a significant role in Arabic language acquisition.

Assessment practices were another area where significant differences were observed. Standardized assessments often failed to capture the full range of student learning in multicultural classrooms. Many students felt that written exams prioritized memorization over communicative competence. However, when teachers implemented alternative assessments such as portfolios, presentations, and peer evaluations, students displayed greater confidence and engagement. Comparative findings demonstrated that flexible assessment methods improved both learning outcomes and student satisfaction. These results emphasize the importance of diversifying assessment strategies in teaching Arabic as a foreign language.

The role of cultural identity in shaping classroom interaction was another notable finding. Students who felt that their cultural backgrounds were valued developed stronger relationships with teachers and peers. In contrast, students who perceived cultural neglect expressed feelings of detachment from the learning process. For example, African and Asian students reported a sense of belonging when classroom discussions included cultural comparisons and linguistic parallels. Teachers who actively encouraged cultural sharing reported more dynamic and inclusive discussions. Comparative data revealed that culturally inclusive classrooms fostered stronger learning communities. This underscores the interconnectedness of culture and pedagogy in language education.

Motivation levels varied significantly between students in classrooms with different teaching approaches. In classrooms where communicative methods were emphasized, students displayed higher intrinsic motivation. They expressed enjoyment in practicing Arabic through dialogues, role-plays, and real-life simulations. Conversely, in classrooms dominated by

grammar-translation methods, students reported boredom and disengagement. Comparative findings showed that communicative classrooms had higher attendance rates and stronger long-term retention. These results suggest that motivation is closely tied to pedagogical approaches. Teachers who prioritize interactive methods can sustain higher student enthusiasm.

The comparative study also found that institutional support significantly influenced outcomes in multicultural Arabic classrooms. Schools and universities that invested in teacher training, technological infrastructure, and culturally inclusive curricula achieved stronger results. On the other hand, institutions with limited resources struggled to provide equitable opportunities for all students. Several participants highlighted that institutional neglect in supporting cultural diversity negatively impacted their learning experiences. Comparative results showed that well-supported classrooms had higher student satisfaction and performance. This finding suggests that systemic support is as crucial as individual teaching strategies.

Finally, the study highlighted that Arabic language education in multicultural classrooms is a dynamic and evolving process. Historical traditions of rote learning and memorization remain influential, but they must be balanced with modern communicative and inclusive approaches. Students and teachers alike benefit from blending traditional methods with digital tools and intercultural pedagogy. Comparative findings reveal that the most effective classrooms are those that embrace diversity as a resource rather than a barrier. The results demonstrate that multiculturalism can enrich Arabic language learning when managed thoughtfully. These findings provide valuable insights for policymakers, educators, and curriculum designers aiming to enhance Arabic as a foreign language education globally.

Discussion (مناقشة)

The findings of this study confirm that multicultural classrooms present unique opportunities for enhancing Arabic language learning. The data showed that students were more motivated when their cultural backgrounds were acknowledged in the learning process. This aligns with the work of Gay (2018), who emphasized that culturally responsive teaching fosters greater engagement and achievement. By integrating cultural identities into lessons, teachers create a sense of belonging that supports language acquisition. The comparative results suggest that the effectiveness of Arabic instruction is tied to the degree of cultural inclusivity.

A key theme that emerged is the limitation of traditional textbooks when applied to diverse classrooms. Many learners expressed difficulty in relating to monolingual cultural contexts embedded in standard materials. This supports the findings of Albirini (2017), who argued that Arabic pedagogy must evolve to meet the needs of global learners. The success of blended resources in this study demonstrates the necessity of supplementing classical content with modern, culturally varied materials. Such approaches ensure that learners from different backgrounds find relevance in their studies.

Technology integration was another critical factor in shaping outcomes. Students reported significant benefits from using mobile applications, online platforms, and social media to enhance their Arabic learning. These findings echo Warschauer and Kern's (2000) conclusion that digital tools can extend learning opportunities beyond the classroom. The study showed that learners in classrooms where technology was systematically integrated achieved higher proficiency. This demonstrates the role of digital literacy as a central component of Arabic language pedagogy in the 21st century.

Peer collaboration also played an essential role in the learning process. Group activities enabled students to exchange linguistic knowledge and build community. This result aligns with Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory, which stresses the importance of social interaction in

cognitive development. In this study, peer-to-peer learning was particularly effective in bridging gaps between learners from different linguistic backgrounds. By supporting one another, students developed confidence and deeper understanding. Such collaborative strategies are especially valuable in multicultural contexts.

Teacher identity and intercultural competence proved crucial in shaping classroom dynamics. Classrooms led by culturally aware teachers demonstrated higher participation and stronger retention rates. This finding supports Byram's (1997) theory of intercultural communicative competence, which highlights the teacher's role in mediating between cultures. Teachers lacking intercultural training often unintentionally excluded learners, reducing motivation. This study reinforces the need for teacher professional development that prioritizes intercultural awareness in Arabic pedagogy.

The results further revealed variations in learning strategies across cultural groups. Learners from collectivist cultures tended to thrive in collaborative activities, while those from individualist cultures preferred independent study. This aligns with Hofstede's (2001) cultural dimensions theory, which explains how cultural orientations shape learning behaviors. Teachers who adapted their methods to accommodate both orientations achieved more balanced engagement. These findings underline the necessity of flexible pedagogical approaches in multicultural Arabic classrooms.

Language anxiety was another significant issue reported by students, particularly those from non-Semitic linguistic backgrounds. The results resonate with Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope's (1986) work on foreign language classroom anxiety, which identified performance pressure as a barrier to learning. Classrooms that cultivated supportive and non-judgmental atmospheres reduced anxiety levels considerably. This suggests that addressing affective factors is as important as teaching grammar and vocabulary in Arabic instruction.

Assessment practices also emerged as an area requiring innovation. Standardized exams often failed to reflect communicative competence in Arabic, disadvantaging students from diverse educational traditions. These findings align with Brown and Abeywickrama (2010), who advocated for alternative assessments in language education. Portfolios, presentations, and peer evaluations proved more effective in capturing learners' abilities. This reinforces the call for more holistic evaluation methods in teaching Arabic as a foreign language.

Institutional support was identified as a determining factor in the success of multicultural classrooms. Institutions that invested in teacher training, technological infrastructure, and inclusive curricula achieved stronger results. This aligns with the perspective of Banks (2016), who emphasized that educational equity requires systemic support, not just individual effort. The findings show that institutional neglect undermines student motivation and outcomes, highlighting the importance of policy-level commitments.

Finally, the study demonstrates that Arabic language education must balance historical traditions with contemporary innovations. While classical methods of rote memorization remain significant, they are insufficient for today's diverse learners. The integration of cultural inclusivity, technology, and communicative pedagogy provides a pathway for effective instruction. These results resonate with Rahman (2018), who argued that Arabic pedagogy must adapt to global contexts. By embracing multiculturalism as a resource, educators can transform challenges into opportunities for enriching Arabic language learning worldwide.

Conclusion (خاتمة)

Based on the findings of this study, it can be concluded that the interlanguage patterns found in the Arabic writings of non-native speakers strongly reflect the influence of the first

language (L1) as well as the limited mastery of Arabic grammar as a foreign language. The most dominant errors in morphology, syntax, and vocabulary usage indicate that the process of second language acquisition occurs gradually and is influenced by internal factors such as learning strategies and external factors such as the quality of instruction and language environment.

In addition, this analysis emphasizes the importance of adopting a more adaptive approach to teaching Arabic for non-native learners. Teachers and curriculum developers need to implement error-based learning strategies and provide intensive writing practice to minimize the negative effects of interlanguage. Thus, this research not only provides a descriptive overview of error patterns but also offers practical implications for improving the quality of Arabic language learning for foreign learners.

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