# The Perceptions of Arabic-Speaking Jordanian EFL Learners about Multiculturalism and Multilingualism

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**Abstract**

This study presents quantitative research on the opinions of Jordanian EFL learners regarding multiculturalism and multilingualism. It evaluates how learning English is linked with the cultural association of these learners. The communicative competence model, which explains multilingualism and multiculturalism as being associated with the different competencies of students in acquiring a language, is applied. It applies a survey methodology to investigate the perceptions of Jordanian EFL students regarding their multilingualism and multiculturalism. A sample of 426 undergraduate students was used in the analysis. The main findings showed that the students prefer collaborative learning strategies. It also showed that the students are more interested in standard English and have a relatively low cultural affiliation with native English-speaking countries such as the United States and Britain. Jordanian students seem to have relatively low levels of multiculturalism, although they consider themselves citizens of the world in seeking to learn English as the language of globalization. Multilingualism for Jordanian EFL students seems to focus mostly on standard English.

**Keywords:** multiculturalism, multilingualism, cultural identity, collaborative learning strategy

## 1. Introduction

Within the context of second language acquisition, there is discussion about the significance of the experiences of SL/EFL learners in learning a second or foreign language. According to McKay & Wong (2000), understanding of the larger social context is instrumental in the capacity of the students to serve language learning. Linguistic and cultural adjustments play a central role in the learning environment as well as the learning outcomes. Multilingualism refers to the capacity of a speaker or community of speakers to converse in three or more languages. Multilingualism covers a wide range of issues, including social and individual routines. Language represents culture, heritage, and social impact among the multilingual community (Otheguy, Gracia, & Raeid, 2015). This is closely related to the degree of amalgamation in society, in line with the situation in question. The presence of different languages may act as a barrier within the monolingual communities in the country (Kim, Weber, Wei, & Oh., 2014). Multiculturalism is associated with melting pot theories that highlight the relevance of distinct and heterogeneous societies to cultural amalgamation, where the pre-existing cultures produce a new form of society.

The sociocultural context has been identified as a significant element in second language acquisition. Dörnyei (2009) indicated that second language acquisition is strongly influenced by how learners organize and reorganize their sense of who they are and their alignment with their social world through language. Among individuals, language can be used to express acceptance in social groups, power relations, and familiarity. This is likely to influence how individuals use language, such as the adoption of standard forms and the use of slang ones.

Mastering written and spoken English in Jordan is a significant feature of socioeconomic development. It is meant to ensure that the learners are adequately prepared for the globalized world. While Arabic is identified as the official language, the relevance of English teaching from early learning means it has a significant role to play in the cultural and social development of the learners. In view of the fact that language and culture are two integral parts that a person is grown up with, learning SL/FL entails that SL/FL learners pick up the language along with the cultural and social norms of its native speakers. Thus, the multilingual skills that learners acquire throughout their learning processes must be in line with the multicultural views and norms of the native speakers (Tufi, 2013).

The focus of this research article is devoted to the opinions of Arabic-speaking learners of English as a foreign

language in Jordan regarding multilingualism and multiculturalism. Article 2 of the Jordanian constitution declares Arabic as the official language of the kingdom, being used in administration, education, and legislation. However, English is highly supported in higher education as well as general education to keep pace with economic development. English education in Jordan was initially introduced as a compulsory course in the 5th grade until 2001, when a new curriculum sought to teach English from the first to the 12th grade (Alhabahba, Pandian, & Mahfoodh, 2016). The ministry of education sought to develop cultured, informed, and useful citizens, emphasizing the relationship between English language and educational development. As a result, it currently plays a significant role in optimizing teaching and learning processes in Jordan. The challenges facing the processes of teaching and learning English can be addressed through adapting clear strategies targeting the sociocultural environment in which teaching and learning the language take place.

In the context of Jordan, native English speakers are few, so the opportunities for multiculturalism may be limited. The situation with English language proficiency in Jordan shows that most learners are not prepared for the level of proficiency required in universities. Calls for reforms have focused on the need for additional training as well as pedagogical practices and the cultural influence of English education. The consideration of culture can play a major role in assessing how English is taught in Jordan, as well as the attitudes of the students. The association between English language learning and the cultural identity of the students may influence the acquisition of English as a second language. There is limited empirical research in the Jordanian context assessing this issue, despite the benefits it can provide in improving learning outcomes for the English language in Jordan (Chatwin, 2017). Therefore, the current study attempts to address this research gap by assessing how multicultural aspects and behaviors of the students may influence their use of the language as well as how they learn.

## 2. Theoretical Framework

Multilingualism has become a globally recognized concept, as several students utilize various languages in academic settings and in their personal lives. This situation necessitates teachers to have key skills to deal with issues that may emerge due to cultural disparaties (Kasmer & Billings, 2017).When people from different cultures are in contact, they need to be able to communicate effectively using a common linguistic code. Today's remarkable spread of English as a global communication language is closely related to globalization phenomena (Graddol, 1997; Pakir, 2001; Kloos, 2000). At a fundamental level, the spread of English contributes to the emergence of global multilingualism since many people are learning and using English as a second language (Kachru, 1996; Cenoz, 2009), while continuing to learn and use their native tongues.

The link between multilingualism and multiculturalism is based on the idea that language has a significant impact on culture, heritage, and social aspects of the community. The sociological aspect of language means that it explains the way society copes with cultural diversity (Otheguy et al., 2015). It contributes to the enrichment of community behavior by peacefully respecting and co-existing with others by preserving and encouraging their respective cultures. According to Hadely & Reiken (1993), cultural awareness must be provided in a variety of ways so that students are better prepared to coexist in the target-language society. Moreover, Eoyang (2003) maintained that culture should complete language. He believes that because English is now a lingua franca, it is necessary to teach students about various dialects of English. He also believes that English language culture should not be underestimated, but rather should be supplemented in an entertaining way in EFL classrooms by a variety of English-speaking cultures.

Multiculturalism is associated with the melting pot theory, which is a metaphor for the development of heterogeneous societies where the individual cultures are processed to yield a final product. According to Tufi (2013), the linguistic landscape is associated with the construction of identity. Multicultural societies, in keeping with this viewpoint, feature people of various races whose identities are associated with their language and how they use it. The communicative competence model can explain the issue of multilingualism and multiculturalism. It was developed in 1980 by Canale and Swain. The model posits that the ability of individuals to speak and communicate is related to the four sub-competencies of grammatical competence, sociolinguistic competence, discourse competence, and strategic competencies (Kyppo & Natri, 2016).

According to the model, the interactive environment of an individual can play a major role in enhancing the multilingual skills of an individual. The scenario provides an environment in which the learner can practice problem-based learning to produce an effective solution to the situation or problem faced (Kyppo et al., 2016). In this respect, individuals from different linguistic backgrounds have interpersonal communication and relationships that are strongly influenced by their first language. They adjust their language use to the specific situations as well as their interpersonal dynamics. This is consistent with the research on maximizing language learning and motivation.

Individual motivation and buy-in to experience the world through a new language are critical components of L2 learning (Gardner, 2010).

*2.1 Previous Related Studies*

Karpava (2022) investigated the attitudes of future English as a foreign language (EFL) teachers in Cyprus regarding multilingualism, multiculturalism, and inclusive education. The participants were asked to complete surveys, participate in semi-structured interviews, and write online blog entries based on class discussions and materials on the concept of multilingualism and multiculturalism in EFL classrooms, as well as express their ideas, opinions, and attitudes regarding multilingualism and the multilingual landscape in Cyprus, as well as teaching methods, approaches, and strategies that may be applied. The data analysis revealed that future EFL teachers had a positive attitude toward multilingualism, multiculturalism, and inclusive education, all of which should be fostered.

Benzehaf (2021) explored how Moroccan university students learning English as a Foreign Language view themselves as multilingual agents, how they acquire their languages, and how this influences their identity. The results demonstrated that multilingual learners appreciate multilingualism and take advantage of it by employing all of their languages in different contexts. They also claimed to experience identity shifts as a result of the languages they speak, allowing them to maintain and develop different identities in a flexible way. These findings suggest that, as a result of multilingualism, multilingual students are establishing and redefining their cultural identities as modern, global, open, and multicultural citizens.

Moe (2017) evaluated how a small group of Spanish-speaking English-language learners from Mexico, Central America, and South America viewed multicultural identity, classroom collaboration, nonstandard language, and any relationships between these variables. The survey's findings revealed that, while participants' levels of affiliation with American culture varied, they all had a moderate sense of belonging to their native countries. When it came to learning about culture, participants favored collaborative strategies, but they preferred individual strategies when it came to learning language. Furthermore, there appeared to be a negative correlation between multicultural affiliation and the perceived importance of knowing nonstandard English.

*2.2 Questions of the Study*

According to the melting pot hypothesis and the communicative competence model, communication in a new language is expected to be associated with sociolinguistic, grammatical, discourse, and strategic competencies (Schneider, 2020). The overarching question in this study is what level of competence that Jordanian EFL students have in these domains and how they influence their learning of English language. This question is addressed by answering the following sub-questions:

1. How do Jordanian English-learners feel about their cultural identity?

2. Which learning strategies (specifically, collaborative or individual) do Jordanian EFL learners utilize to learn about the English culture and use of standard English?

3. Do students' perceptions about multiculturality and learning strategies influence their interest in non-standard English?

*2.3 Significance of the Study*

The significance of this study is to evaluate how efforts to acquire English as a foreign language align with the multicultural nature and aspects of Jordanian students. The findings will highlight how learning EFL is associated with the perceptions of the students about multiculturalism. This can be beneficial in explaining the cultural elements of English language learning in Jordan.

## 3. Methodology

*3.1 Sample*

The study sample was selected from students at Mutah University in Jordan. The focus was to get a sample of students undertaking English as a foreign language at the university level. The targeted sample was 426, which constituted 2.35 % of the population of study. This would provide an effective way of undertaking the study in order to provide generalizable data (Queirós, Faria, & Almeida, 2017). The sampling approach was purposive since it involved face-to-face recruitment of students in English classes at the university. The descriptive statistics for the sample are presented below.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics for the sample.

| Gender | Male | 210 | 49.30% |
|---|---|---|---|
| | Female | 216 | 50.70% |
| Faculty | Humanitarian faculties | 262 | 61.50% |
| | Scientific faculties | 164 | 38.50% |

The sample was relatively balanced in terms of gender, with the respondents being relatively equally split between males and females. The male respondents accounted for 49.30% of the sample, while 50.70% were female. The respondents were ongoing university students with a focus on different specializations in their education. 61.50% of respondents were pursuing degrees in humanitarian faculties, while 38.50% were pursuing degrees in scientific faculties. An important aspect of the sampling is that it focused on respondents in undergraduate studies, who were the main target group. They were notified of the objectives of the study as well as how the data would be used. Individuals who agreed to participate received an information sheet outlining all aspects of the study.

*3.2 Instrument*

The research design adopted in this study is a structured survey undertaken using an online questionnaire. The focus on representative data is based on the positivist philosophy, which posits that a research issue can be understood by collecting objective data from the respondents. This philosophy also involves the idea that knowledge is distinct from the investigator and can be understood and developed separately from the researcher (Baškarada & Koronios, 2018). The structured questionnaire was developed with the aim of answering the set research questions. The survey design was beneficial in answering the research questions by posing relevant questions to the respondents and seeking their responses on the critical issues.

The structured survey design is applicable to self-administered questionnaires that are distributed physically. The questionnaire consisted of 35 questions based on Andersen (2009), involving both multiple choice responses and Likert scale responses that were used to assess the views of the respondents regarding the different aspects of multiculturalism and multilingualism in relation to English language learning. The 35 items incorporated into the questionnaire were modeled after research examples addressing the same issue, such as Zea, Anser-Self, Birman, & Buki (2003) and Andersen (2009). While it is not a published instrument, the included items have been applied in related studies, including a masters dissertation by Cailey Moe in 2017. The questionnaire used for the current study was adapted from Andersen (2009) and Moe (2017) to fit into the Jordanian context.

The reliability of the instrument was assessed using the test-retest method in a pilot study consisting of 25 students (male and female). The responses from the pilot questions were integrated into the final instrument to ensure that it effectively responded to the Jordanian students. The results of the reliability analysis involved an inter-rate reliability ratio of 0.91.

*3.3 Data Analysis*

The collected data was analyzed using the statistical program for social sciences (SPSS) because of its quantitative nature. Statistical analysis for the study involved categorical and group data analyzed using frequency analysis. Descriptive statistics were used in the study to describe the sample and highlight its characteristics. Inferential statistics and answering the research questions involved rank correlation analysis. The aim was to assess how the different aspects of multilingualism are associated with the respondents' perceptions regarding multiculturalism. The data is presented in tables and charts for descriptive analysis and discussion in line with the research questions.

**4. Results and Discussion**

Data for the study was collected using the questionnaire, which was self-administered to the respondents. The questionnaires were administered to the respondents face-to-face with the aim of giving them an opportunity to understand their aspects before answering. The target sample of 426 was achieved after engaging the students in 10 classrooms.

*4.1 Cultural Identity*

One of the questionnaire questions was **"Are you interested in learning about or participating in American or British culture?"**. The focus of the questions was to assess the interest of the students in learning about and accommodating the cultural identities of native English speakers. 62% of the respondents reported that they were interested in learning about English culture and participating in activities associated with that community. This percentage is considered relatively low. The respondents were asked to indicate their main reasons for learning English. The results are illustrated in Table 2.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics of the most common selected reasons for learning English

| Reason for learning English | Mean | Std.Deviation | Percentage | Level |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| I think learning English will help me get better job prospects after university. | 4.222 | 0.95642 | 84.4 | high |
| I think learning English will help me continue my education. | 3.8892 | 1.03174 | 77.8 | high |
| I think learning English will help me improve my competencies. | 3.6447 | 1.09553 | 72.9 | moderate |
| I think learning English will help me make new friends. | 2.2927 | 1.21859 | 45.9 | low |
| I think learning English will help me learn the culture of native English speakers**.** | 2.1293 | 1.27728 | 42.9 | low |

As shown in Table 2, the most common selected reasons identified for learning English were "to get better job prospects after university" (84.4%), "to continue my education" (77.8%) and "to improve my competencies" (72.9%). The element of learning about English culture was only cited as an important objective by 42.9% of the sample.

The study found that participants were more likely to favor instrumental reasons for learning the English language, such as utilitarian and academic reasons. This finding supports the findings of other studies by Migdadi (2008), Bani-Khaled (2014), and (Al-Khasawneh & Al-Omari, 2015). This result additionally substantiates that of (Hamdan & Hatab, 2009), who claimed that in Jordan, the labor market needs job applicants to have an excellent command of the English language, which makes communication with clients and companies easier. Being able to communicate well in English can assist a job seeker in obtaining a better position.

The relevance of social goals such as learning the culture of native English speakers and making new friends was not heavily considered as significant objectives. This is most likely associated with the fact that the English community in Jordan is very small, hence the relevance of the culture is relatively small to Jordanians as a tool for improving social cohesion. This finding supports the findings of (Tahaineh & Danna, 2013), who found that learning English as part of its people's culture had the lowest effect on Jordanian EFL students' English language motivation. The respondents were also asked to indicate their views on their desire to belong to more than one culture. The results are reported in Table 3.

Table 3. Descriptive statistics of the participants' views on their desire to belong to more than one culture

| Item | Mean | Std. Deviation | Percentage | Level |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| The desire to belong to more than one culture. | 3.2723 | 1.10013 | 65.4 | moderate |

The overall mean score of the subjects' desire to belong to more than one culture was 3.2723, with a standard deviation of 1.10013 and a percentage of 65.4 percent, as shown in Table 3. This result means that most of the respondents were indifferent about this issue. The findings revealed that the Jordanian students are more affiliated with their home country, and most were generally indifferent about their desire to belong to more than one culture. Since these students were more interested in learning English for professional purposes, their focus on cultural learning was relatively low. This is in keeping with the views of (Awwad, Stap, & Maasum, 2019) that Jordanian EFLs prefer to maintain their cultural identity. They are also concerned about losing their cultural values and inherited traditions as a result of assimilating into foreign English communities.

*4.2 Learning Strategies*

The focus of this question was to assess the effectiveness of the respondents in applying particular strategies to learn about English culture and Standard English in their classwork. The questions involved the use of collaborative versus individual learning strategies.

Table 4. Descriptive statistics of culture learning strategies

| Culture Learning Strategies | Frequency | Percentage |
|---|---|---|
| Collaborative strategies | 233 | 54.7% |
| Individual strategies | 72 | 16.9% |
| Mixture of individual strategies and collaborative strategies | 113 | 26.5% |
| Not interested | 8 | 1.9% |

The percentages of subjects' responses to cultural learning strategies ranged from 54.7% to 1.90%, as shown in Table 4. Collaborative strategies came in the first position at 54.7%, while a mixture of individual strategies and collaborative strategies ranked second at 26.5%, and individual strategies ranked last at 16.9%. The findings demonstrated that most selected learning strategies were collaborative strategies or a mixture of the two as opposed to solely individual ones.

Table 5. Descriptive statistics of standard English learning strategies

| Standard English Learning Strategies | Frequency | Percentage |
|---|---|---|
| Collaborative strategies | 215 | 50.4% |
| Individual strategies | 64 | 15.1% |
| Mixture of individual strategies and collaborative strategies | 147 | 34.5% |

The percentages of participants' responses to standard English learning strategies ranged from 50.4 percent to 15.1 percent, as shown in Table 5. The students are shown to have a higher preference for collaborative learning strategies for standard English (50.4). Additionally, (34.5%) of the respondents indicated that they adopted collaborative and individual strategies in a balanced manner. It is clear that the preferred learning strategies and resources for standard English in this sample were mostly collaborative. This is significant because learning Standard English was a key aspect of the learning considerations for Jordanian students whose focus on the language was for professional reasons. This finding is consistent with that of (Alahdal, et al,2019), who revealed that EFL teachers and learners perceived collaborative learning positively and they considered it the most effective approach for the learning of a foreign language.

*4.3 Language and Multicultural Affiliation*

The aim of the study was to assess the perceptions of the students regarding their multicultural affiliation and language learning strategies. The study sought to find out whether these factors contributed significantly to the students' practices. This was assessed using the derived multicultural affiliation scores for the students coupled with their preferences. Spearman's rank correlation analysis was used to assess whether the preferences of the students in terms of the learning strategies they adopted were significantly affected by their perceptions of their multicultural affiliation and their use of non-standard English in their social interactions.

One of the key questions in the study was the distinction between the use of standard and nonstandard English. The respondents were asked to indicate how much they used standard and nonstandard English as well as their preference for the two types of English. The questions were answered on a scale of 1–5, indicating how much they considered non-standard English to be significant to their cultural and social interactions.

Table 6. The mean, standard deviation, and percentage of students' responses to the significance of non-standard English to their cultural and social interactions

| Item | Mean | Std. Deviation | Percentage | Level |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| The significance of non-standard English as a tool for cultural adaptation | 3.6925 | 1.0124 | 73.85% | high |

This shows there is a relatively high agreement on the importance of non-standard English as a tool for cultural adaptation since (73.85%) of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed that it was significant. This result additionally substantiates that of Eoyang (2003), who maintained that culture should be used to complete language. He believes that because English is now a lingua franca, it is necessary to teach students about various dialects of English.

Spearman's rank correlation analysis was used to assess whether the preferences of the students in terms of the learning strategies they adopted were significantly affected by their perceptions about their multicultural affiliation and their use of non-standard English in their social interactions.

Table 7. Spearman's rank correlation

| Variables | R | R2 | t-value | t-significance | Type of correlation |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| The correlation between multicultural affiliation and collaborative language learning | 0.428 | 0.183 | *10.726 | 0.000 | positive |
| The correlation between multicultural affiliation and collaborative language learning | 0.143- | 0.020 | **-1.065 | 0.280 | Negative and not statistically significant |

*Significant at α =0.05

** Not significant at α=0.05

The correlation between multicultural affiliation and collaborative language learning showed a weak positive association. The correlation coefficient was 0.428, with a t-value of 10.762. In this case, it was apparent that having a multicultural affiliation was associated with the preference of collaborative learning strategies. This is in line with most related studies, such as( Kyppo & Natri, 2016); (Paquet-Gauthier & Beaulieu, 2016), which indicate that

students prefer collaborative strategies for learning foreign languages.

The second aspect of the correlation focused on the alignment between the derived nonstandard language value scores and multicultural affiliation. The correlation indicated a weak negative association with a coefficient of -0.143. The t-value of -1.065, which indicates that the correlation is not statistically significant, indicates that the multicultural affiliation of the Arabic EFL students in Jordan is not associated with their perceptions about the significance of non-standard English. These findings differ considerably from those of English language learners from other countries. For example, in Moe (2017), the Spanish EFL learners in the United States were found to have a higher affiliation with US culture. However, this may be associated with their being immigrants in the US; hence, they make more efforts to assimilate in the US, unlike Jordanians learning English in Jordan.

## 5. Conclusion

This research sought to elicit the views of Jordanian students learning English as a foreign language. It was interested in their cultural affiliations with their home culture and that of the English speakers. One of the key issues raised by these findings was that Jordanian students learn English for professional and academic purposes as opposed to social ones. The results indicated a relatively low interest in learning about or participating in American or English culture among the respondents. The Jordanian students were more affiliated with their home country, and most were generally indifferent about their desire to belong to more than one culture. It was also apparent that the students were strongly interested in and motivated by collaborative learning strategies .

The study's specific focus was on the association between cultural affiliation and multilingualism. The multicultural affiliation scores indicated a more important consideration of standard English. The use of non-standard forms of English was an important aspect of the considerations that the students made in improving their cultural affiliation and social interactions. The link between collaborative language learning and their scores for multicultural language affiliation indicated the importance of collaborative strategies in enabling an individual to enhance their multilingualism and multiculturalism at the same time. The preference of collaborative learning strategies was a major aspect of the strategies adopted by Jordanian students learning English as a foreign language and seeking to improve their cultural affiliation and knowledge. Although the need to identify with the different cultures is relatively weak in this sample, the need to become effective citizens of the global community requires multicultural learning and adaptation.

The respondents indicated their knowledge of standard English and non-standard formats of the language that can be adopted in different settings. It is clear that most English students in Jordan seek to learn the language for professional purposes although they are also interested in the value it provides for their cultural adaptation. They acknowledge that English is important for their cultural and social adaptation. The findings indicate that teachers and policymakers should strive to increase the adoption of collaborative learning strategies. Integrating more social activities into language learning can play a major role in improving the learning outcomes for Jordanian EFL learners. The main limitation of the study is the small size of the sample and its selection using a purposive strategy. Future research should focus on larger samples of randomly selected EFL students to improve their generalizability and applicability.

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