

The Relationship Between Social Engagement and Learning Arabic for Non-Native Speakers in the Sultanate of Oman

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Abstract

The study aims to uncover the relationship between Social Engagement and learning Arabic for non-native Arabic learners in the Sultanate of Oman. It is followed the descriptive method, and the study tool was a (questioner), applied to 100 Arabic learners from various nationalities. After verifying its validity and reliability, the questionnaire was distributed to the study sample (100) participants. The results showed a relationship between Social Engagement and learning Arabic. In addition, there were no statistically significant differences at the level of the significance ($0.05 \geq \alpha$) between the study sample individuals' responses to Social Engagement is attributed to the gender variable, the number of years of studying the Arabic language, the language level, and nationality. Based on the study results, the researcher recommended that institutions specializing in teaching Arabic to non-native speakers in the Sultanate of Oman collaborate to integrate the learners into the target language community and encourage them to participate in various life situations in Omani society. Additionally, the research provides practical, actionable recommendations that help educational institutions in the Sultanate of Oman to design curricula that leverage Social Engagement to enhance Arabic language learning.

Keywords: Social Engagement, Foreign Languages, Study Abroad, The Sultanate of Oman.

Introduction

Social Engagement means to help individuals who have moved from their original community to a new one overcome linguistic and cultural challenges. Social Engagement relies on interaction and cooperation among individuals, respect for others' rights, and acceptance of cultural diversity to give new individuals a sense of belonging, participation, adaptation to the new environment, and harmony with the members of the new community. This research paper includes: The concept of Social Engagement, its dimensions, characteristics, objectives, indicators, and the role of the teacher in integrating the learner into the target language community.

Literature Review

The Concept of Social Engagement

Social Engagement is a multifaceted concept. The researcher, when exploring the appropriate definition of Social Engagement, finds it challenging to pinpoint the suitable concept that serves the current study due to the scarcity of studies related to the Social Engagement of non-native Arabic learners. The concept of Social Engagement is often associated with social issues, such as the challenges of integrating students with special needs into public schools and the difficulties of integrating students from social care homes into public schools. On the other hand, Social Engagement is linked to political issues, such as migration and the integration of immigrants into the new community. Among the concepts of Social Engagement that suit the topic of the current study, (Bouziane,2018) defines Social Engagement as a set of measures aimed at removing barriers between different groups to form a cohesive community that lives and adapts harmoniously and in solidarity, helping a new individual integrate into society. (Abdelkader, 2014) define Social Engagement as a process of agreement among different societal classes in a cohesive unit, combining various social life situations to form a unified and harmonious relationship and eliminating barriers between societal classes. (Fushan ,2017) explain that Social Engagement is the inclusion of an individual into a broader group, where the individual gradually follows the prevailing rules and values in the new group to feel a sense of belonging, leading to social interactions in various fields that result in social harmony. (Hijazi, 2005) indicates that Social Engagement is the individual's ability to follow socially accepted behaviors in a way that satisfies both the individual and the society to which they belong. Integration occurs within the framework of social relationships in which the individual lives, beginning with understanding the dominant social characteristics in the society, such as learning the language and some followed customs, to accepting some commonly agreed-upon beliefs. From the aforementioned concepts, it is evident that Social Engagement is defined in multiple ways. The concept of Social Engagement can be approximated as the learner's feeling of belonging to the target language community, accepting its customs and traditions, and participating in it. Integrating into a new community may require balancing social and psychological aspects and may not be easy for non-native Arabic learners due to the differences in language and societal customs and traditions.

The Dimensions of Social Engagement

Social Engagement is multifaceted and its dimensions extend to include participation in social situations, spreading values of understanding, tolerance, and cooperation in all areas of life to improve positive relationships among individuals. (Fushan ,2017) enumerates the dimensions of Social Engagement, including:

Self-integration dimension: This begins with the learner's participation in various situations in the target language community. This dimension relates to the learner's ability to rely on themselves, feel comfortable in a new community, and overcome anxiety. Social or environmental integration dimension: This reflects the learner's relationship with their peers in the study environment, host family, and community, and their integration into the societal system of laws, customs, and traditions, to achieve personal, academic, and social harmony. Behavioral integration dimension: This includes a set of motives and needs that motivate the individual to participate in a specific social activity. Cognitive integration dimension: This arises from the process of learning, understanding, and being influenced through the learner's interaction with the community. (Al-Deeb, 2000) adds other dimensions

of Social Engagement, including: Cultural integration dimension: This examines the degree of compatibility between the values of a specific culture. Value integration dimension: Based on the learner's adoption of the values of the society to which they belong, which helps them integrate into the target language community. Interactive integration dimension: This is achieved through the learner's participation in the community.

The Characteristics of Social Engagement

Social Engagement is characterized by several traits, including respect and appreciation for cultural and racial differences to create an environment of understanding among individuals. Communication and interaction contribute to building social relationships and bonds. Social Engagement depends on an individual's choice, their desire to communicate with society, and their ability to participate in different fields. (Al-Sultan ,2014) and (Farouq ,2007) explain the characteristics of Social Engagement, which include: Social Engagement is a continuous process: As individuals believe they are integrated, they encounter new, sometimes unexpected challenges in daily life. This explains the evolution of life-while human needs were once simple, related to food and clothing, today's needs have evolved to include education and transportation, reflecting attempts to integrate with new societal conditions. Social Engagement is relative: Farouq attributes this to the fact that human moods are not constant but change from day to day depending on nature, mood, and pressures faced, affecting behavior and reactions. The changing circumstances of life require individuals to adapt, even relatively, to new situations. Social Engagement involves variability: One person may be fully integrated into society, while another's integration may be limited, especially in contemporary times characterized by rapid change. (Al-Habit, 2003) adds more characteristics of Social Engagement, including: Flexibility: Reflects an individual's adaptation to new circumstances. Continuous sequence: The daily life of a learner in the target language community involves various situations requiring overcoming and integration. Dynamism: Integration among people continuously develops, with individuals integrating according to their changing needs in life. Social diversity: Individuals are not identical within their communities but have cultural differences reflected in their lifestyles and thinking, whether from rural or urban areas.

The Objectives of Social Engagement

Social Engagement aims to achieve a set of objectives that contribute to building a society that is understanding and tolerant. Among these objectives are enhancing understanding and coexistence by reducing cultural and social gaps between individuals, promoting community participation by encouraging individuals to engage in social activities, thereby enhancing the sense of belonging, and building trust by reducing social tensions and fostering a culture of cooperation. The objectives of Social Engagement are varied and numerous, some of which are summarized in the current study. (Abdelkader,2014) outline the objectives of Social Engagement as follows: effecting change in the educational environment, achieving integration within the surrounding community, addressing the cultural needs of the learner, assisting in self-reliance, forming social relationships, and increasing the learner's experience within the community. (Nasser ,2005) connects the objectives of Social Engagement to a psychological aspect, which is motivation. He explains that motivation is the psychological force that plays a role in the process of education and learning. He lists types of motivation, such as instrumental or utilitarian motivation and integrative or assimilative motivation. (Khawli ,2002) adds a third type, which is affiliative

motivation . Instrumental or utilitarian motivation involves learning Arabic for personal reasons, such as fulfilling a university requirement, obtaining an academic degree, or performing religious rituals that require learning Arabic. Integrative or assimilative motivation involves learning Arabic to communicate and interact with Arabs, and to understand their culture and customs. Affiliative motivation involves learning Arabic to become part of the Arab community and integrate into it. An example of affiliative motivation, as mentioned by Khawli, is foreign wives who marry Arabs and live in their countries, as well as foreigners who choose to work and live in Arab countries. The objectives pursued by affiliative motivation include achieving social cohesion and continuity. For non-native Arabic speakers, Social Engagement can help correct misconceptions about the Islamic and Arab world and improve psychological and linguistic aspects.

The Indicators of Social Engagement

Indicators of Social Engagement for non-native Arabic learners include distinguishing between right and wrong based on respecting the customs and traditions of the society, learning social skills that enable them to interact with others politely and respectfully, eliminating aggression towards society, and demonstrating good manners with members of the community, the host family, and the institute where they study. (Baalbaki ,2014) outlines indicators of Social Engagement, such as adaptation, the individual's integration into society, and their continuous participation in the customs, opinions, and stances on various economic, social, and political aspects.(Rakab ,2013) and (Al-Sultani ,2014) add an indicator of Social Engagement, which is the learner dedicating part of their day to learning about the environment of the target language community and the unexpected life situations it entails. In the same context, (Fushan ,2017) adds that the learner engaging in social roles, acting as a link between the learner and the community, is an indicator of integration. Their continuous participation in social life situations and volunteering in some activities to serve the community without financial compensation contributes to achieving societal interests. (Jabal ,2001) indicates that the learner's desire to benefit from questions arising in social situations they are not used to and their good social relationships with others are indicators of Social Engagement. On the other hand, (Al-Qadi, 2012) mentions indicators of avoiding Social Engagement, such as the learner's absence without a convincing reason and avoiding communication with others. (Al-Khalidi, 2009) explains that mental health affects Social Engagement; depression, anxiety, and frustration drive an individual to isolate themselves from society, while an integrated individual possesses the ability to overcome psychological challenges they may face in daily life.

The Role of the Teacher in Integrating the Learner into the Target Language Community

The teacher plays a crucial role in integrating the learner into the target language community. The teacher can facilitate the process of language learning and cultural interaction by providing an educational environment that encourages participation, using teaching methods suitable for learners' needs, and sharing information about customs and traditions to enhance cultural understanding. Teachers should provide continuous feedback to improve the learner's linguistic and cultural skills. There are academic institutions that specialize in educational programs for learning language and culture, such as the World Learning Program, the Fulbright Program, and the CLS Program, which send learners to the target language community. These programs are based on the idea that academic programs connected to the target language community are most effective because they rely on both

academic and socio-cultural aspects. Members of the target language community contribute to the learner's linguistic and cultural advancement, helping them overcome negative feelings such as anxiety and fear. In this context, (Hammerly, 1994) emphasizes the importance of considering the learner's emotions due to their impact on learning. Language learning is an experience filled with emotions and feelings, and the teacher is a refuge for learners. However, this alone is insufficient without interaction with the external community. A learner who is proficient in the target language skills but unfamiliar with the community's culture may face difficulties in using the target language. The cultural aspect is as important as the academic aspect to avoid the learner being misinterpreted due to a lack of knowledge about societal customs and traditions. In this context, (Khawli, 2002) introduces the term "Fluent Fool," referring to a learner who is fluent in the target language due to their knowledge of vocabulary and linguistic structures but lacks understanding of cultural nuances. To avoid such issues, understanding the customs and traditions of the community becomes essential. There are social rules that are as significant as linguistic rules, and it is inappropriate to speak the target language fluently without understanding the manners of dealing with the external community. The cultural environment surrounding the learner involves not only linguistic behaviors but also non-linguistic behaviors. Non-linguistic behaviors include head gestures, hand and eyebrow movements, maintaining distance when sitting, and the etiquette of handshakes. These behaviors have social determinants such as gender and age and are not used randomly but are a system in the society connected to the culture. Based on the above, learners should learn part of the culture of the target language community. Some learners tend to learn cultures alongside the language, becoming familiar with the civilization, history, customs, and nature of the society. It is beneficial to invest in this cultural inclination to complete the picture the learner has drawn about the community's culture. Cultural understanding has a positive impact on the learner's linguistic and psychological aspects, benefiting from others' experiences and enhancing their ability to integrate and get closer to the community to achieve understanding in various social situations. (Al-Boushihi, 2009) indicates that integrating into a new community is not easy, but understanding the culture represents an opportunity for the learner to integrate better into the society, helping to develop the learner's sense of belonging and boosting their self-confidence.

The Study

Aims and Research Questions

The study aims to uncover the relationship between Social Engagement and learning Arabic in the Sultanate of Oman, and to provide recommendations on how to help non-native Arabic learners integrate into the community to learn Arabic. Consequently, the study posed the following question:

- What is the relationship between Social Engagement and learning Arabic in the Sultanate of Oman?
- Is there a statistically significant differences at the level of the significance ($0.05 \geq \alpha$) between the arithmetic means and Social Engagement of the study sample individuals' responses is attributed to the gender variable, the number of years of studying the Arabic language, the language level, and nationality?

Participants

The study involved 100 non-native Arabic learners in the Sultanate of Oman, representing in: The gender (Male or Female) , The year of studying Arabic (less the a year,

between a year and two years, more than two years),The language level (beginner, Intermediate and Advance), and the nationalities which consist of twenty-five: South Africa, Australia, the USA, France, the UK, the Czech Republic, South Korea, Vietnam, Hungary, Russia, Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Turkey, Iran, Kazakhstan, Japan, Italy, Belarus, Brunei Darussalam, Romania, Hungary, Colombia, and Poland.

Table1

Distribution of Study Sample Based on Gender Variable

Variable	Categories	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	39	40
	Female	59	60
Total		98	100

The results of Table (1) showed that the gender variable of the study sample, which consists of 100 learners, included 59 females, representing 60% of the total sample, making it the highest category for the gender variable. Meanwhile, males numbered 39, representing 40%.

Table 2

Distribution of Study Sample Based on Years of Studying Arabic

Variable	Categories	Frequency	Percentage
Years of Studying Arabic	Less than a year	17	17
	A year to two years	37	38
	More than two years	44	45
Total		98	100

The results of Table (2) show the distribution of the study sample for the variable of years of studying Arabic into three categories. The highest percentage (45%) was for those who studied for more than two years, followed by 38% for those who studied for one to two years, and the lowest percentage (17%) for those who studied for less than a year.

Table 3

Distribution of Study Sample Based on Language Level

Variable	Categories	Frequency	Percentage
Level	<i>Beginner</i>	19	19
	Intermediate	51	52
	Advanced	28	29
Total		98	100

The results of Table (3) show the distribution of the language variable into three categories: Beginner, Intermediate, and Advanced, for a sample of 100 individuals. The highest percentage (52%) is for the Intermediate level, followed by 29% for the Advanced level, and the lowest percentage (19%) is for the Beginner level.

Table 4

Distribution of Study Sample Based on Nationality Variable

Variable	Categories	Frequency	Percentage
Nationality	American	23	24
	British	14	14
	Other	61	62
Total		98	100

Table (4) shows the distribution of the study sample according to the nationality variable. The highest percentage (62%) was for other nationalities, including individuals from South Africa, Australia, the USA, France, the UK, the Czech Republic, South Korea, Vietnam, Hungary, Russia, Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Turkey, Iran, Kazakhstan, Japan, Italy, Belarus, Brunei Darussalam, Romania, Hungary, Colombia, and Poland, followed by 24% for American nationality, and the lowest percentage (14%) for British nationality.

Data Collection

The data of the study was collected through distribution of a questionnaire to the learners from a different gender, years of studying Arabic, language level and nationalities in the Sultanate of Oman. After collecting the learners' responses and opinions on the relationship between Social Engagement and learning Arabic, the data was analyzed using the statistical software SPSS version 23. The researcher utilized frequencies and percentages, means, standard deviations, and Pearson correlation coefficients to derive the results.

Findings

The study results showed that there is a positive relationship between Social Engagement and learning Arabic for non-native speakers in the Sultanate of Oman. Learners indicated that active participation in the Omani community significantly contributed to improving their language skills and increasing their confidence in using Arabic in daily life. The results also showed that integration into social, cultural, and economic activities enhanced cultural understanding and effective communication with members of the Omani community. In addition, the results showed that there were no statistically significant differences at the level of the significance ($0.05 \geq \alpha$) between the arithmetic means of the study sample individuals' responses to Social Engagement is attributed to the gender variable, the number of years of studying the Arabic language, the language level, and nationality.

Results and Discussions

Based on these finding, there is a clear indicator of Social Engagement that helped in language learning include, Participation in local activities: Such as attending social events and interacting with local residents. Cultural exchange by learning about and engaging with local customs and traditions. Academic and social support: From educational institutions and the surrounding community, providing an encouraging and motivating environment for language learning. Which need to enhance Social Engagement programs in institutions teaching Arabic to non-native speakers and to encourage learners to actively participate in the community to enhance their educational experience and achieve progress in their linguistic and cultural skills.

Conclusion

Social Engagement plays a crucial role in enhancing the learning of Arabic for non-native speakers in the Sultanate of Oman. Interaction with the local community provides learners with valuable opportunities to practice the language in real-life contexts, improving their language skills and expanding their cultural understanding. Through participation in social activities, gaining cultural insights, and overcoming psychological barriers, learners can build strong relationships with community members, enhancing their sense of belonging and self-confidence. Additionally, a supportive and encouraging environment provided by educational institutions and the surrounding community significantly contributes to making the learning experience more comprehensive and effective. Investing in these opportunities and guiding learners towards enhancing Social Engagement is an important step towards achieving sustainable success in learning Arabic and developing the cultural understanding of learners. Therefore, it can be said that integration into the Omani community is not just a facilitating factor but an essential element for achieving a fruitful and successful educational experience for non-native Arabic speakers.

Recommendations

To enhance the learning of Arabic for non-native speakers in the Sultanate of Oman, it is essential to focus on various factors that contribute to improving this educational experience. Achieving effective Social Engagement requires providing an encouraging environment that allows learners to interact with the local community in ways that enhance their linguistic and cultural skills. These recommendations outline several strategies that can help achieve this goal. And the recommendations for Improving Arabic Language Learning for Non-Native Speakers:

- **Enhancing Interactive Programs:** Develop interactive educational programs that integrate social and cultural activities to enhance learners' interaction with the local community. These programs can include field visits, cultural workshops, and discussion sessions with native speakers.
- **Providing Volunteer Opportunities:** Offer opportunities for learners to participate in volunteer and community activities, helping them use the language in real-life situations and develop their social and cultural skills.
- **Providing Psychological Support:** Provide psychological support to learners through counseling and support programs to help them overcome feelings of alienation and integrate better into the community.
- **Continuous Assessment:** Conduct continuous assessments of learners to measure their progress in learning the language and Social Engagement, and use the results to adjust educational programs to better meet their needs.
- **Teacher Training:** Offer training courses for teachers to enhance their skills in managing multicultural classrooms and providing a supportive and inclusive educational environment.
- **Encouraging Extracurricular Learning:** Encourage learners to participate in extracurricular activities, such as student clubs, sports activities, and cultural events, to enhance their Social Engagement and apply what they have learned in real-life situations.

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