

**TEACHING CULTURE IN ARABIC: PERSPECTIVES ON THE USE OF BLENDED  
LEARNING AND HYPERMEDIA**

**By**

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**A Dissertation Submitted to the Faculty of the**

**GRADUATE INTERDISCIPLINARY DOCTORAL PROGRAM IN SECOND  
LANGUAGE ACQUISITION AND TEACHING**

**In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements**

**For the Degree of**

**DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY**

**In the Graduate College**

**THE UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA**

**2014**

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entitled Teaching Culture in Arabic: Perspectives on The Use of Blended Learning and Hypermedia and recommend that it be accepted as fulfilling the dissertation requirement for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Doctoral study has shaped my life for the better. I got to meet great people who supported me, stood by me, and applauded for me in every step toward achieving my goals. My journey was full of love, passion, sorrow, joy, frustration and a mixture of all of them. This work would not have been possible without the endless support from many people. First, I would like to acknowledge my committee members, especially my advisor. I would like to express my genuine and sincere gratitude to Professor Robert Ariew who has shown me support, love, and encouragement throughout the dissertation process. Dr. Ariew was a truthful mentor, a great inspirer and a dedicated advisor. I am thankful for him for his professional advice that began right from the beginning of the journey. I had the honor of working for and working with Dr. Ariew in various projects which gave me the chance to observe, learn, and successfully apply many strategies, techniques and methods related to technology, research, and how to –not only be a grad student, but also a researcher. I had the honor of accompanying Dr. Ariew to Washington DC, presenting with him, and eating a very special French meal. Thank you for the many hours and days you invested in me and thank you for putting up with me. I would also like to thank my committee member, Professor Linda Waugh, for her encouragement throughout my entire graduate career in SLAT and for her invaluable guidance in my research. She directed me and helped me to follow the passion and interest in researching language and culture. I am indebted to Professor Waugh for her assistance and determination to bring me to the SLAT program from Palestine and for finding me RA positions. Without you, I would have given up and never pursued my dream. Thank you, Dr. Waugh, for being there for me. I also would like to express my gratitude to my committee member, Professor Sonia Shiri, for her dedication and constant support. My passion in blended learning research started in her office where we spent hours researching the best practices and the ultimate ways to design my research and work on my dissertation. Thank you, Dr. Shiri, for being an awesome boss in teaching and in projects. You always stood by my side and gave me the power to continue and face the challenges. Thank you goes to my brother Professor Akrum Tamimi for his continued support and for his help in figuring out numbers and statistics in my studies. Thank you for my colleague Mahmoud Azaz for his help in conducting the studies. A special thanks go to the Center for English as a Second Language (CESL) and Professor Suzanne Panferov for giving me the chance to teach for two consecutive summers. There, I met great people and outstanding students from all over the world. I would also like to acknowledge the Center for Middle Eastern Studies (CMES) for their continuous support and for allowing me to be their outreach scholar approaching the local community and educating them about Palestine. Thank you also goes to all of my professors at the University of Arizona who provided me with knowledge and guidance. I would also like to acknowledge SLAT wonderful staff, Shaun, Kelley, and Robin, and SLAT Program for the generous financial and academic support I received from them during my journey in this program –thank you for believing in me. My acknowledgement also goes to the School of Middle Eastern and North African Studies (MENAS) for giving me the opportunity to teach Arabic and conduct my studies on their students. This has helped me grow as a teacher, as a researcher, and as a critical thinker. Thank you to the teachers and students at MENAS who participated in my studies and made this work possible. Thanks to my colleagues in the Graduate Writing Circle. Special thanks goes to SLAT Student Association (SLATSA) for giving me the

chance to serve the SLAT community and SLAT students. Also, thank you to each and every SLAT student; you are great colleagues and amazing buddies. Thank you for your awesomeness. Thank you to all my American, international, and Palestinian friends. I am especially appreciative to Khaled, Katie, Fahd, Kristen, Badr, Christine, Samina, Wisam, Mahmoud, and many others.

My sincere gratitude goes to my family for their unconditional love, support and understanding. I am especially thankful to my mother, who passed away in the middle of journey, may Allah bless her soul. Her absence left a deep sorrow in our heart. Thank you to my brother Akrum and his wife, Hana, and his children Ehab, Enas, Abdullah, Abdulrahman, Tesneem, and Eman. Thank you to my brothers Deeb, Najeh, Akrum, Waleed; my sisters Fatima, Muzayyan, Naimah, Samiha, Nora, Jihad, Samar; and all of my nephews and nieces. I would also like to thank my mother-in-law, Nawraz, my brothers-in-law Hamed and Hazem, and my sisters-in-law Areej and Nisreen. My wonderful family: Your calls, messages, posts, thoughts, and prayers have helped us believe that there is a light at the end of the tunnel.

Finally, my deepest gratitude and appreciation goes to my wife, Shatha, and my children, Munia, Tala, Tameem, Ahmed, and Mustafa. Thank you, kids, for your understanding and tolerance and for accepting to skip so many opportunities to have fun because of my absence or busy schedule. You did a great job and I love you all. Shatha, you deserve half of this degree if not more! It is because of your love, tolerance, encouragement, inspiration, your belief in me and your amazing food that I was able to accomplish this goal. Thank you, Om Tameem, for the countless hours taking care of me and the kids. Thank you for the suggestions and advice in every study I conducted and in every chapter I wrote. Thank you for putting up with my frustration and stress, and thank you for sharing the happy moments with me, too.

*May the Peace, Mercy and Blessing of Allah be Upon You All, Amin!*

## DEDICATION

*To the big heart, my mom, who lives in heaven, Insha'allah,*

*And,*

*To my wife, Shatha, and to my children, Munia, Tala, Tameem, Ahmed, and Mustafa.*

*Because of your love and inspiration, I am where I am today.*

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## ABSTRACT

In contemporary foreign language pedagogy, effective teaching of intercultural communicative competence cannot be separated from the use of technology. Web 2.0, social media, mobile devices, online and blended learning, and wearing technology have made it nearly impossible to develop effective courses without basing them on the culture of the target language. Teaching culture, however, is not salient in foreign language teaching; it is the most neglected part (Sercu, 2005) and culture has to defend its legitimacy to be integrated in teaching languages, just as Kramsch (1995) put it "...culture, in order to be legitimate, has always had to justify itself" (p. 85). As a result, teachers devote around 20% of their teaching time to teaching culture (Castro, Sercu & García, 2004). In recent years, nevertheless, there has been a shift in understanding, implementing and integrating teaching culture in foreign language settings (Bayyurt, 2006, Chamberlin-Quinlisk, 2012; Gonen & Aglam, 2012; Castro, et. al., 2004; Byram, 2002), but at a slow pace (Castro et al., 2004; Sercu, García, & Castro, 2005)

The situation of teaching culture using technology in Arabic as a foreign language is not as advanced as for other foreign languages and the attempts to remedy the problems are limited. Although interest in learning Arabic has noticeably increased in the last twenty years, educational institutions are far from ready to absorb the new enrollments. The two main areas that have received little attention in research are the integration of culture and the integration of technology in the Arabic teaching context. This is in evidence in the lack of well-prepared teachers, the scarcity of Web tools that specifically address the particularities of the Arabic language, and the shortage of well-designed and innovative teaching materials and assessment tools.

In an effort to fill the gap in the research and in order to better understand teachers' and learners' views about the integration of culture using technology in foreign language, in general, and in the Arabic context, in particular, this dissertation used three interrelated studies to investigate the following three areas: (1) Teaching culture in Arabic: Teachers' and learners perspectives; (2) Teaching culture in Arabic: learners' perspectives surrounding the use of blended learning setting; and (3) Teaching culture in Arabic: Learners' affect surrounding the use of Arabic Hypermedia as part of the blended Levantine Arabic class.

The results of the three studies showed that the teachers and the learners understand the important role that culture plays, but statistically significant differences exist between teachers' and learners' views of the activities practiced in the classroom and the distribution of language and culture teaching and learning times. The results also show that learners had positive feelings and were highly satisfied with the blended setting and the Arabic Hypermedia tool and lessons. The learners, however, faced some challenges in learning about culture using technology. Finally, in a call for teaching language as culture using technology, the dissertation suggests practical pedagogical implications for teaching foreign language and Arabic language.

## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

### 1.1. Background

Currently, effective teaching of intercultural communicative competence cannot be separated from the use of technology in foreign language (FL) teaching and second language (L2) teaching. Web 2.0, social media, mobile devices, online and blended learning, and wearable technology have made it nearly impossible to develop effective courses without basing them on the culture of the target language.

The definition of culture and how it is viewed comes in various shapes. Chamberlin-Quinlisk (2012) makes a good comparison between how culture was viewed in the past as referring to “art, literature, and customs” of a group of people, and how the view of culture has shifted to "examine deeper values, belief systems, and relational dynamics of all groups"...“culture is something that is continuously recreated and maintained by members of a community, rather than defined and imposed by a social hierarchy” (p. 15). Culture is not a fixed concept, it constantly shifts and changes (Bayyurt, 2006). This shift has not only taken place in the definition and understanding of culture, but it started to spread to teaching culture in foreign language settings (Gonen & Aglam, 2012; Chamberlin-Quinlisk, 2012; Castro et al., 2004; Byram, 2002). Although research has started to shift toward integrating culture in curriculum, this shift is taking place in slow pace (Castro, Sercu & García, 2004; Sercu, García, & Castro, 2005). Studies show (Castro, et. al., 2004) that teachers devote around 20% of their teaching time to teach culture and culture is introduced occasionally and is based on the availability of extra time. Learners deal with it as extra activity to enjoy and they do not take it seriously because it is usually not included in the grading system.

The class time is geared toward achieving linguistic competence and teachers are teaching culture reluctantly and with no clear teaching objectives, intended learning outcomes, or assessment criteria. Studies about teachers' perspectives with regard to promoting and prioritizing teaching linguistic skills over culture have been widely reported in research. In her study on Flemish foreign language teachers, Sercu (2002) found out that foreign language teachers consider linguistic objectives more important than cultural ones. She also showed that this applies to teachers of French, English and German, despite the different circumstances and curricula. Byram and Risager (1999) conducted a study on Danish and British teachers and their results show that very few teachers indicated that cultural dimensions are more important than the linguistic ones.

Many research studies (Byram and Risager, 1999; Sercu, 2002; Castro et al., 2004; Sercu, 2005; Gonen and Aglam, 2012) have looked at teachers' perspectives in regard to teaching culture in foreign language, however, no such studies have addressed learners' perspectives on learning culture in foreign language. This has made it hard to compare studies and examine the validity of the studies conducted with teachers.

As for the use of technology in language teaching and learning, research has shown positive effects of the use of technology tools in foreign language environment (Ducate and Arnold, 2001). However, some teachers and learners are still skeptical about the use of technology due to the limited training they receive on how to use available tools. They are also confused by the instructional design of the foreign language courses, the ambiguity of class assessment, and the discrepancy between what teachers and learners know about technology and how they use this knowledge. As a result, teachers try to avoid integrating technology in their language classes and use it minimally in web-enhanced activities (Smith & Kurthen, 2007).



Activities such as posting the syllabus and course announcements on Course Management Systems (CMS) are typical low-level uses. Furthermore, learners who claim to be computer savvy tend to face challenges in using basic technology tools.

The situation in teaching culture using technology in Arabic as a foreign language is not as advanced as for other foreign languages and the attempts to remedy the problems are limited. Although interest in learning Arabic has noticeably increased in the last twenty years, educational institutions are far from being ready to meet this enrollment. The two main areas that have received little attention in research are the integration of culture and the integration of technology in the Arabic teaching context. This has been visible in the lack of qualified teachers who are able to integrate culture in their teaching of Arabic on a regular basis, the scarcity of Web tools that specifically address the particularities of Arabic language, namely, its diglossic nature and its use of a non-Latin alphabet as well as the shortage of well-designed and innovative teaching materials.

To the best of the researcher knowledge, no studies have looked at the current condition of the teaching and learning of culture in the Arabic context in regard to teachers' and learners' perspectives. Research is lacking in investigating teachers' and learners' views in regard to the role of culture in the teaching and learning of Arabic, their understanding of the objectives of teaching and learning the Arab cultures, the quantity and quality of cultural activities practiced in classrooms, their familiarity with the various cultural aspects, the extent to which they deal with cultural aspects in the classroom, and the relative time devoted to the teaching of language and culture in class.

As for the use of technology in the Arabic context, some attention has been paid to enhancing the role of technology in teaching Arabic and many Web tools have been created to

promote teaching Arabic communicatively. The Language Center at Cornell University (<http://www.lrc.cornell.edu/medialib/ar>) developed video files on their website that provide learners with a series of contextual situations to promote learning Levantine Arabic for beginner and intermediate levels. *Aswaat 'Arabiyya* (Arabic Voices) (<http://www.laits.utexas.edu/aswaat/>) is another website that was developed by the University of Texas at Austin which provides listening materials and accompanying activities that are intended for various levels of proficiency from Novice to Superior. These listening materials have been selected from television stations throughout the Arab world and they treat a wide variety of topics and listening genres. Also, *Arabic Without Walls* (<http://arabicwithoutwalls.ucdavis.edu/aww/>) is a distance-learning Arabic course/website developed by the University of California (UC) Consortium for Language Learning and Teaching, the National Middle East Language Resource Center at Brigham Young University, and Near Eastern Studies Department at UC Berkeley. The website contains three complementary web-based components: Course Content into *Al-Kitaab*, Interviews, and Culture. *Arabic Without Walls* is designed around two textbooks with accompanying DVDs: *Alif Baa: Introduction to Arabic Sounds and Letters* and *Al-Kitaab Fii Ta'allum Al-'arabiyya Part I* both by Kristen Brustad, Mahmoud Al-Batal and Abbas Al-Tonsi. The website is meant to be interactive with *Chat* and *Forum* links, has glossed vocabulary and includes images, audio, and videos. The three websites discussed above are just a few examples among many other websites and software that attempt to promote learning Arabic communicatively and interactively.

Finally, for Arabic language teaching to be considered at the level of teaching of other foreign languages, it is time that Arabic teachers, administrators, material developers, software programmers and decision makers move ahead and take charge of improving Arabic pedagogy

by adopting the principle of teaching ‘language as culture’ (Kramersch, 1995) and utilizing the affordances of many, mostly free, technology tools in this process.

### **1.2. Statement of the Problem**

This dissertation investigates the following problems: (1) the integration of culture in Arabic language context, (2) the use of technology in Arabic language contexts, and (3) teachers’ and learners’ perspectives of the integration of culture using technology in the Arabic context.

### **1.3. Goals of the Dissertation**

This dissertation aims at investigating the current situation surrounding the teaching and learning of culture in foreign language in general and Arabic in particular. It also aims at investigating the learners’ views regarding the integration of technology in foreign language classrooms where culture is fully integrated. The dissertation uses a qualitative research methods approach by utilizing the ideas of Kramersch’s (1995) that call for teaching ‘language as culture’, experimenting with the blended language learning technology environment in face-to-face and online learning settings, and adopting the Dual Coding Approach (Paivio 1986) by using Arabic Hypermedia (Hypertext and multimedia glossing) as springboards to accomplish the following objectives: (1) to investigate the current status of culture pedagogy in the Arabic program at a major public university in the southwest; (2) to examine teachers’ and learners’ perspectives of teaching ‘language as culture’ in the same program; (3); to present learners’ views on integrating two technologies, namely, blended learning and Hypermedia, in classrooms to teach spoken Arabic language and to teach the Arab cultures; (4) to suggest ways and means to teach and learn ‘language as culture’ using technology in foreign language in general, and in the Arabic language, in particular.

#### 1.4. Significance of the Dissertation

This project investigates teachers' and learners' perspectives about teaching and learning culture in Arabic context and how they understand culture and its objectives, practices, activities, as well as its various aspects. This project, then, shifts focus to the learners and uses a blended spoken Arabic class as a case study to better understand learners' views in regard to the integration of blended technology and many other technological tools in the class, the integration of culture in each module of the class, and the introduction of a technology tool, Hypermedia, to teach the Arab cultures. By doing so, learners' views, and teachers' view to some extent, provide us with wide-ranging data to understand the current status of teaching and learning culture and technology in the Arabic context. We hope that the outcome will be to draw implications and suggestions on how to teach language as culture using technology.

Understanding how teachers and learners view and think about teaching and learning culture using technology in the Arabic context is significant and beneficial for the teaching and learning process of Arabic as a foreign language. The results of the study might help educational institutions, material developers, language assessors, course designers, software programmers, decision makers, and teachers and learners to draw short and long-term plans on how to integrate culture and technology in the various aspect of language teaching and learning. Such plans can encompass, but are not limited to, the followings: (1) to create cultural materials that utilize the rich resources available in the Arabic language (Modern Standard Arabic and dialects), Arabic cultures (23 Arabic speaking countries) and speakers of Arabic (natives and non-natives) and to take into account the needs and abilities of the learners and the teachers; (2) to make use of Web 2.0, social media, wearing devices, mobile devices, software, educational websites, and online resources to tailor materials and activities towards interaction and collaborative work among

teachers, learners, and teachers and learners; (3) to create standards that address the integration of culture and technology in teaching and learning Arabic; (4) to develop formative and summative assessment tools as well as alternative assessments tools that emphasize learners' strengths instead of their weaknesses; (5) to design and execute training programs for teachers on how to teach culture within the Arabic context, how to stay connected with the Arab cultures and Arabic speakers through various means such as social media, how to handle challenges emerging from new technology tools, and how to redesign Arabic courses and develop their own materials using technology; and (6) to conduct training for learners periodically and at the beginning of each course on how to use technology for their classes and how to understand and learn the Arab cultures.

Integrating culture in Arabic context is an intrinsic requirement for encouraging and developing an 'intercultural speaker' (Byram, 1997) and integrating technology in this context is also essential for learners in order to be able to keep up with the fast pace of technology advancement. As such, integrating culture using technology in the Arabic context will create learners who possess intercultural competence and are able to communicate with the speakers of the target language with ease and confidence. It will also help them avoid many embarrassments and confusions resulting from misunderstandings with the interlocutor of the target language or in the textbook or story they are reading. The limited culture integration in the Arabic context could widen the gap between the linguistic competence, which can be developed through the focus on language activities, and the cultural competence, which can be developed by exposing learners to the target culture and giving them the chance to explore, reflect, and interact with others under the guidance of their teachers.

The Arabic language is part and parcel with the Arab cultures and the Arab cultures are rich, diverse, and interconnected. Integrating culture using technology in an Arabic context opens doorways to learners of Arabic to experience a variety of situational contexts that will enrich and enhance their ability to use Arabic fluently and with no fear.

### **1.5. Research Questions**

The overarching dissertation questions are as follows: Using Arabic context, what are the teachers' and learners' perspectives about teaching culture? What are the learners' affect surrounding the use of blended language learning and Arabic Hypermedia in a spoken Arabic class?

To address the general questions of this dissertation, three interrelated studies have been conducted to investigate the various perspectives on teaching culture using technology in the Arabic context. Each study has its own detailed questions that are presented below. The three studies are:

#### **1.5.1. Study 1: Teaching culture in Arabic: teachers' and students' perspectives (Chapter 2).**

The research questions guiding the study were:

- a. What are the views and responses of the teachers and the learners in regard to the following issues?
  - i. The role of culture in Arabic language teaching and learning
  - ii. Ranking of nine possible culture-teaching and learning objectives in order of importance
  - iii. Practicing cultural activities in Arabic classrooms

- iv. Familiarity with the Arab culture(s)
  - v. The extent to which teachers deal with the Arab cultures
  - vi. The distribution of language teaching/learning and culture teaching/learning
- b. Are there any statistically significant differences between the responses of the teachers and the responses of the learners in the above-mentioned issues?

### **1.5.2. Study 2: Teaching Culture in Arabic: Learners' affect surrounding the use of blended learning (Chapter 3).**

The current study sought to answer the following research questions:

- a. What are the affects surrounding the learners of the blended spoken Levantine Arabic class in regards to the following factors:
  - i. learners' satisfaction with blended setting
  - ii. modality preference
  - iii. the integration of technology tools
  - iv. interaction, resources
  - v. learning about culture
  - vi. class work and reflections?
- b. Are there any statistically significant differences between the learners' responses in the pre- and the post-questionnaires?

### **1.5.3. Study 3: Teaching Culture in Arabic: Learners' affect surrounding the use of Hypermedia (Chapter 4)**

The study aimed at answering the following research questions:

- a. What are the learners' views about the Hypermedia lessons in regard to the following aspects:
  - i. learners' satisfaction with Hypermedia experience
  - ii. technology used
  - iii. learning about Arab cultures
  - iv. learners' affect toward the Hypermedia lessons
- b. Are there any statistically significant differences between the learners' responses in the pre- and the post-questionnaires that asked about the aspects detailed in Question a?

## 1.6. Chapter Overview

This dissertation investigates the perspectives of teachers and learners on teaching and learning culture in Arabic. It also examines the learners' affect surrounding the use of blended language learning and the use of Hypermedia in an Arabic context. To address these issues, three studies have been conducted on teachers and learners of Arabic at a major university in the southwest of the US. This dissertation discusses the three studies and each study, thus, corresponds to a chapters. The three studies use qualitative descriptive and inferential statistical analytic methods to examine and answer the research questions set forth for the studies. The following section will introduce each of the five chapters in the dissertation.

### 1.6.1. Chapter 1: Introduction:

The introduction chapter gives a background about the topic and prepares the reader to the following chapters. It also presents a statement of the problem, the main goals of the dissertation, and the significance of the dissertation. This chapter also addresses the overarching research questions, and the structure of the dissertation, including a chapter overview.



### **1.6.2. Chapter 2: Study 1: Teaching culture in Arabic: Perspectives on the use of blended learning and Hypermedia**

The first study investigates the perspectives of the teachers and the learners of Arabic at a department in which Arabic is taught at a major university in the southwest of the U.S. in regard to teaching and learning the Arab cultures. Using questionnaires, interviews, and class visits as instruments, the study looks closely at the perspectives of 105 teachers and learners (15 teachers and 90 learners) in relation to six areas related to teaching culture in foreign language in general and in Arabic in particular. The areas are: the role of culture in Arabic language teaching, the kinds of activities conducted in the classroom, familiarity with various aspects of the Arab cultures, to what extent the teachers and learners deal with those Arab cultural aspects, and the distribution of language teaching/learning and culture teaching/learning in the classrooms. Using descriptive and inferential statistical analyses, the study analyzes the responses of the teachers and the learners and investigates if there is any statistically significant differences between the responses of the teachers and the learners in the questionnaires. The study also looks deeply in the semi-structured interviews and the class visit notes in an effort to understand what the teachers and learners have in mind regarding the six issues addressed in the questionnaire. This comprehensive survey provides a clear picture of the current situation in teaching culture in Arabic and paves the way to conducting the second study of this dissertation that addresses learners' view about integrating blended language learning in a spoken Arabic classes to teach culture. This study is presented in the third chapter.

### **1.6.3. Chapter 3: Study 2: Teaching culture in Arabic: Learners' affect surrounding the use of blended learning**

With the first study about perspectives in mind, the second study was designed to investigate the learners' affect regarding the use of a blended learning setting –face-to-face and online –to teach the Arabic language and Arabic cultures under the concept of teaching “language as culture” presented by Kramersch (Kramersch, 1995, p. 83). Seventeen Arabic learners enrolled in a spoken Levantine Arabic class participated in the study. With the support of the Arabic section and the Online Education Project (OEP) at the university, the researcher developed twelve cultural modules to teach the class in a blended setting. Using pre- and post-questionnaires with open-ended and closed questions, the closed questions in the questionnaire look at the following areas: learners' satisfaction with the blended setting, their modality preference, the integration of technology tools, teacher-learner and learner-learner interactions, availability of resources, the integration of culture, and class work and reflections. Using descriptive and inferential statistical analyses, the study analyzes the responses of the learners in the pre- and the post-questionnaire and investigates if there is any statistically significant differences between the responses of the learners in both questionnaires. In the open-ended questions, the study also gathers in-depth data about the learners' experiences and the advantages and challenges they face. The third study about Hypermedia is discussed in the fourth chapter below.

### **1.6.4. Chapter 4: Study 3: Teaching culture in Arabic: Learners' affect surrounding the use of Hypermedia**

This study investigates the learners' affect surrounding the use of one of the technology tools, namely, Arabic Hypermedia and associated lessons used in the blended setting class

discussed in chapter 3. Using the same 17 participants in the previous study, two of the twelve modules used in the blended class were designated for Hypermedia and, therefore, two Arabic Hypermedia lessons were developed by the researcher for the study. The study used pre- and post-questionnaires with open-ended and closed questions as the instrument. In the closed section, the study investigates the following areas: learners' satisfaction with Arabic Hypermedia tool and associated lessons, their feelings about the integration of culture in the Hypermedia lessons, their ability to handle the technology tools used in the lessons, and their affect about the Hypermedia tool and the lessons. Using descriptive and inferential statistical analyses, the study analyzes the responses of the learners in the pre- and the post-questionnaire and investigates the existence of any statistically significant differences between the responses of the learners in both questionnaires. In the open-ended questions, the study gathers in-depth data about the learners' experiences and the advantages and challenges they face.

#### **1.6.5. Chapter 5: Conclusion**

The dissertation closes with a summary of the discussion of the findings for the three interrelated studies. It also discusses implications for teaching and learning culture using technology in foreign languages in general and in Arabic in particular. The implications provide a guideline to those interested in advancing the teaching of Arabic and the Arab cultures. Then, the conclusion section addresses the challenges that face the researcher while conducting the three studies and finally addresses areas for further research.

This dissertation provides an in-depth picture of the perspectives surrounding cultural pedagogy and the uses various technology tools to achieve it. The studies aim at revealing how teachers and learners view teaching and learning culture using technology so as to take a further

step and to apply the findings of the studies to gain a more precise understanding of the issues and to encourage more research in this field.

Overall, the dissertation contributes to the literature on foreign language studies, teaching and learning culture research, integration of technology in language teaching / learning, and FL/L2 pedagogy.

## **CHAPTER 2: TEACHING CULTURE IN ARABIC: TEACHERS' AND STUDENTS' PERSPECTIVES**

### **Abstract**

Teaching and learning culture is not salient in foreign language teaching; culture has to defend its legitimacy to be integrated in teaching languages, just as Kramsch (1995) put it “...culture, in order to be legitimate, has always had to justify itself and cloak its laws in the mantle of what is 'right and just' rather than appear in the naked power of its arbitrariness” (p. 85). However, in recent years, there has been a shift in understanding and implementing teaching culture. Culture is not a fixed concept, it constantly shifts and changes (Bayyurt, 2006). This shift has not only taken place in the definition and understanding of culture, but it has started to spread to teaching culture in foreign language settings (Chamberlin-Quinlisk, 2012; Gonen & Aglam, 2012; Castro, Sercu & García, 2004; Byram, 2002).

This study investigates the perspectives of the teachers and the learners of Arabic at the School of Middle Eastern and North African Studies (MENAS) at the University of Arizona in regard to teaching and learning culture. Using questionnaires, interviews, and class visits as instruments, the study looked at the teachers' and the learners' views about the role of culture in Arabic language teaching, activities conducted, familiarity with various aspects of the Arab cultures, to what extent they deal with those Arab cultural aspects, and the distribution of language teaching/learning and culture teaching/learning in their classrooms. The results show that the teachers and the learners understand the important role that culture plays, but statistically significant differences exist between teachers' and learners' views of the activities practiced in the classroom, the way cultural topics are dealt with, and the distribution of language and culture teaching and learning times. The results also show that the teachers and learners are facing challenging issues in teaching/learning culture.

## 2.1 Introduction

Teaching and learning culture is not salient in foreign language teaching. In practice, when teachers integrate culture in their language class, they “teach language and culture, or culture in language, but not language as culture” (Kramersch, 1995, p. 83). In the early 80s, Krashen (1982) claimed that the classroom setting is not an appropriate place to acquire either culture or language. He argues that the classroom is only appropriate for teaching language rules. In support of Krashen, Damen (1987) says that teaching culture in classroom reproduces culture facts and not the dynamic view of culture. Nowadays, some teachers still consider teaching culture as “a special treat, a lesson sweetener, or an appetizer before the main course” (Luk, 2012, p. 8).

Teaching culture in the intercultural approach continues to be its most neglected part (Sercu, Méndez García & Castro (2005) and writing foreign language textbooks has been a controversy among politicians and specialists in literacy (Kramersch, 1995), who called for teaching language, “only language, nor culture nor politics (p. 88), claiming that culture should not be taught in schools, but learners should be sent to countries that speak the foreign language in order to learn culture (Kramersch, 1995). Teaching/learning language as culture or teaching/learning language and culture would facilitate the integration of both and would promote a better understanding of the significant role culture plays in foreign language teaching and learning..

## 2.2 Literature Review

### 2.2.1 Definitions

#### 2.2.1.1 What is Culture?

“The Blind Men and the Elephant” (Moran, 2001, p. 4) is a poem by John Godfrey Saxe (Wikipedia, 2014), which talks about an image of six blind people who were left in a room with an elephant and were asked to touch it. They were, then, asked to describe this animal without knowing what it is. Each of them described the part they touched and none of the descriptions given was even close to an elephant. This metaphor can be used to show that culture is viewed differently depending on the disciplines and the practitioners. Moran (2001) presents many views about culture, culture learning, and teaching culture, depending on the theorists and their disciplines. Culture is viewed as “civilization”, which includes the “big C” and the “small c”; culture is viewed as “communication”, a tool-specific culture; culture as “intercultural communication”, which entails entering other cultures, communicating with its people and developing relationships with them; culture as an area where “groups or communities interact”; and culture as a “dynamic construction between and among people, based on their values and beliefs” (pp. 4-5). According to Kramsch (1995) culture can be defined in reference to two perspectives: 1) a humanities perspective, which “focuses on the way a social group represents itself and others through its material productions, be they works of art, literature, social institutions, or artifacts of everyday life, and the mechanisms for their reproduction and preservation through history,” and 2) a social sciences perspectives which refers to a “ground meaning” such as attitudes, behaviors, ways of thinking, and belief of any given community members (p. 85).

Chamberlin-Quinlisk (2012) makes a good comparison between how culture was viewed in the past as referring to “art, literature, and customs” of a group of people, and how the view of culture has shifted to "examine deeper values, belief systems, and relational dynamics of all groups"...“culture is something that is continuously recreated and maintained by members of a community, rather than defined and imposed by a social hierarchy” (p. 15). Culture is not a fixed concept, it constantly shifts and changes (Bayyurt, 2006). This shift has not only taken place in the definition and understanding of culture, but it started to spread to teaching culture in foreign language settings (Gonen & Aglam, 2012; Chamberlin-Quinlisk, 2012; Castro et al., 2004; Byram, 2002). The National Standards in Foreign Language Education in the United States published its standards for culture teaching based on three interrelated dimensions: products, practices, and perspectives. (The National Standards in Foreign Language Education Project, 1999). Moran (2006) added two other dimensions to the above three dimensions in order to validate the role of the people in such cultures: persons and communities; and thus he defined culture based on the five dimensions as “the evolving way of life of a group of persons, consisting of a shared set of practices associated with a shared set of products, based upon a shared set of perspectives on the world, and set within specific social contexts” (p. 24). The clarity of this definition can help in understanding the concept of culture in general and in teaching foreign languages in particular.

### **2.2.1.2 What is Intercultural Communicative Competence?**

The concept of intercultural communicative competence was first advocated by Michael Byram (Kramsch, 1995). Scholars in the past 30 years have defined intercultural competence differently, and there has not been a consensus about how it should be defined (Deardorff, 2006). A research study by Deardorff (2006) examined nine definitions of intercultural competence



collected from the literature and presented to administrators who participated in the study. The definition that received the highest rate was Byram's (1997) who defines intercultural competence as “Knowledge of others; knowledge of self; skills to interpret and relate; skills to discover and/or to interact; valuing others’ values, beliefs, and behaviors; and relativizing one’s self. Linguistic competence plays a key role” (p. 34).

In an early study, Meyer (1991) defines intercultural competence, as part of a broader foreign speaker competence, as “the ability of a person to behave adequately in a flexible manner when confronted with actions, attitudes and expectations of representatives of a foreign culture” (p. 137). In conjunction with his definition given above of intercultural competence, Byram (1997) states that the success of interaction is not only a successful exchange of information, but also “the ability to decentre and take up the other’s perspective on their own culture, anticipating, and where possible, resolving dysfunctions in communication and behavior” (p. 42). Byram (1997 & 2002) also describes intercultural competence by a number of components, namely “knowledge, skills and attitudes, complemented by the values one holds because of one's belonging to a number of social groups. These values are part of one's social identities” (Byram, 2002, p. 7). Byram (1997) elaborates on those components, which he calls *savoirs*, and defines the first one as *savoir-être*, which is “curiosity and openness, readiness to suspend disbelief about other cultures and belief about one’s own” (p. 57). The second *savoir* is described as “knowledge of social groups and their products and practices in one’s own and in one’s interlocutor’s country, and of the general processes of societal and individual interaction” (p. 58). The third one is *savoir-comprendre*, which is defined as “the ability to interpret a document or event from another culture, to explain it and relate it to documents or events from one’s own” (p. 61). The fourth one, *savoir-apprendre/faire*, which is described as the “skill of discovery and

interaction: ability to acquire new knowledge of a culture and cultural practices and the ability to operate knowledge, attitudes and skills under the constraints of real-time communication and interaction’ (p. 61). The last one is *savoir s’engager*, which is described as ‘critical cultural awareness/political education: an ability to evaluate, critically and on the basis of explicit criteria, perspectives, practices and products in one’s own and other cultures and countries’ (p. 63). As we can see here, Byram (1997) has covered intercultural competence and included a guideline to teachers on how to teach intercultural competence and to learners on how to be competent when it comes to learning a foreign language.

## **2.2.2 Teachers’ and Learners’ Perspectives on Teaching and Learning Culture**

### **2.2.2.1 Teachers’ Perspectives**

Many studies have tackled foreign language teaching and teachers’ views of teaching culture. Castro et al. (2004) conducted a study of 35 Spanish teachers of English who participated in an electronic questionnaire and were asked to rank eight possible objectives of foreign language education in order of importance and to what extent they promote teaching intercultural competence. The results of the study show that the teachers ranked high language teaching objectives in terms of achieving linguistic competence. When teachers were asked to rank cultural objectives, objectives related to teaching the civilization of the country ranked high while objectives related to attitudes of openness and understanding their own culture and identity ranked as far less important. Teachers also ranked the acquisition of language learning skills as more important than promoting teaching culture. When asked about the time they allocated to teaching culture compared to language teaching, 91% indicated that they spend only 20% of their teaching times in teaching culture and 80% in teaching language. When teachers were asked about their understanding of culture teaching, they referred to it in terms of a “traditional

‘landeskunde’ teaching” (p. 99), by providing access to various aspects of the foreign society such as daily life and routine, and less in terms of the acquisition of intercultural competence and skills. After conducting their study, Castro et al. (2004) compared their results with the results of an early work by Byram & Risager (1999), who conducted a study on Danish and British teachers, and demonstrated close and comparable results.

Similar results about teachers’ perspectives with regard to promoting and prioritizing teaching linguistic skills over culture have been widely reported in research. In her study on Flemish foreign language teachers, Sercu (2002) found out that foreign language teachers consider linguistic objectives more important than cultural ones. She also showed that this applies to teachers of French, English and German, despite the different circumstances and curricula. Byram and Risager (1999) conducted a study on Danish and British teachers and their results show that very few teachers indicated that cultural dimensions are more important than the linguistic ones.

In a more comprehensive study, Sercu (2005) researched the extent to which 424 secondary school teachers favored intercultural education. Teachers came from seven countries, namely, Belgium, Bulgaria, Poland, Mexico, Greece, Spain and Sweden. And data were collected by means of web-based questionnaires with both open and closed questions. The study focused on foreign language teachers’ perceptions of intercultural competence teaching and on current culture-and-language teaching practices. The study showed that teachers were progressing in the direction of becoming foreign language and intercultural teachers; however, they did not meet all the expectations of either type of teacher.

In a recent study, Gonen and Aglam (2012) investigated teachers’ perspectives about various aspects of culture teaching and culture integration in their classes. Sixty Turkish English

Language Teaching graduates and non-English language teaching graduates participated in the study using a comprehensive questionnaire and interviews. Results show that there are some differences between teachers from different educational background regarding which aspects of culture to focus on. Results also showed that teachers are all aware of the importance of teaching and integrating culture in their classroom but how they deal with the target culture is mainly determined by curricular considerations.

Many teachers still believe in and practice teaching more of the acquisition of language learning skills and less of promoting cultural learning. When culture is present in the curriculum, the focus is still more on the knowledge of the foreign culture and less on the attitudinal behavior and openness to other cultures and learners' own culture.

#### **2.2.2.2 Learners' Perspectives**

To the best of the researcher's knowledge, there are no studies that address the learners' perspectives in regard to learning culture in foreign language classes/classrooms. The studies that have been presented or referred to in this paper discuss how teachers view teaching culture without any reference to the point of view of the learners. The researcher hopes that the present study will provide original and concrete results to help advance learners', and teachers' for that matter, understanding of learning culture in foreign language classroom.

#### **2.2.3 Challenges in Teaching Culture**

Not teaching enough culture is by no means an indication of teachers' unwillingness to teach culture or their lack of understanding of the significance of integrating intercultural competence in their teaching. Recent research shows that there is a shift in teaching culture from an "information based approach" to an approach that tends to analyze "cultural product[s]" (Byram, 2002, p. 12). This shift is heading towards preparing learners to engage in intercultural

situations (Castro et al., 2004) and to be able to examine values and lively interactions between various cultures (Chamberlin-Quinlisk, 2012). Many studies showed that teachers want to teach culture, but are facing constraints and obstacles which make it hard on them to teach it. Teachers of foreign languages are under pressure to “acculturate” non-native speakers into the new societies (Kramsch, 1995, p. 82), but the problem is to decide which culture should be taught: the global or local, the teachers’ or the students’ (Luk, 2012). In the study by Castro et al. (2004), mentioned earlier, the Spanish teachers of English were aware of the importance of integrating culture in their teaching, but were facing restrictions from the Spanish curriculum and other factors. Teachers were asked, in an open question, about the reasons for not teaching enough culture in their foreign language classroom and they listed “lack of time” (p. 100) as the main reason. The curriculum forces them to focus on grammar to a point that they do not have any time to teach culture. Other reasons included “not having enough teaching periods” to cover language and culture; “lack of suitable material”, textbooks did not have enough cultural activities or information; “lack of preparation” of teachers to teach culture; lack of self-confidence; and lack of “contact with foreign culture” (pp. 100-101). Byram & Risager (1999) reported that their teachers felt exasperated in their endeavor to teach culture due to the pressure on them to focus on linguistic aspects of the language and to show outcomes that can be measured.

#### **2.2.4 Main Characteristics of a Successful Teacher of Culture**

What do teachers need to be aware of when teaching culture? Answering this question is not as simple as one would think. Teaching culture is a complicated process due to the fact that there are many cultures within each culture and people understand and interpret culture(s) in various ways. However, this section will summarize the main factors that help teachers integrate

culture in their teaching in order to achieve intercultural competence. Teachers should be able to exploit teaching strategies that encourage the acquisition of knowledge, skills and attitudes:

*savoirs, savoir-apprendre, savoir-comprendre, savoir-faire and savoir-être* (Sercu, 2006, p. 63).

Teachers should prepare their students for the new world they will be entering and equip them with a more profound understanding of the target culture (Furstenberg, Levet, Katryn, & Maillet, 2001) and encourage them to make comparative analyses within their own culture (Byram, 2002).

Sercu (2002) summarized foreign language teacher requirements in teaching intercultural competence. Teachers need to know the sociocultural aspect of the foreign language community including the pragmatic rules. They need to understand the cultural aspects of the target language and that they change rapidly. They need to know about their students' opinions and attitudes towards the people of the target language. They need to be aware of verbal and non-verbal communication skills which might lead to intercultural misunderstandings and, as such, be able to negotiate meaning when such misunderstandings happen. They need to be able to create an encouraging learning atmosphere, to use appropriate learning materials, and to assess their students appropriately in order for them to acquire intercultural competence. In sum, "[teachers] need to be willing to teach intercultural competence and need to know how to do so" (Sercu, 2002, p. 152).

### **2.2.5 Relationship between Teachers' Beliefs and the Practice of Teaching Culture in Foreign Language Context**

Research on teachers' beliefs has shown that the way teachers were taught affects their teaching practice. This explains why many teachers teach culture using traditional methodologies by focusing on providing their students with limited and fixed information about the target

language without taking into account the relevance of this material to their students' needs and without looking at its effectiveness in advancing them forward in the target language (Sercu et al., 2005). Castro et al. (2004) also believe that the experiences that the teachers go through as students affect their beliefs about teaching. In fact, Castro et al. (2004), argue that this belief is already established by the time they go to the university. Consequently, this affects their understanding of their teaching, and "often, despite their intentions to do otherwise, new teachers teach as they were taught" (p. 94). Teachers often describe "feeling powerless to alter their instructional practices because they had few, if any, alternative images of teachers and teaching to act as a model of action" (Johnson, 1994, p. 449). Stemming from a constructivist view of learning, which considers learning as a process of constructing knowledge based on perception and involvement of learners in the construction of the content, Sercu et al. (2005) conducted a study of 35 secondary school English teachers in Spain, investigating teachers' beliefs regarding their learners' current understanding of foreign cultures when selecting cultural content. Using a questionnaire to collect data, the study results show that teachers view their students as unfamiliar with the foreign culture of the language they are teaching. The author concludes that the selected group's culture teaching doesn't reflect constructivist ideas and that these teachers tend to favor using an "information presentation model" in teaching culture (p. 493). Sercu (2006) summarizes research findings on teachers' beliefs indicating that they affect the way they conceive of teaching conditions and therefore they affect their teaching practice.

As we can see in this literature review, moving towards integrating culture in language classroom is happening slowly. Although teachers are willing to integrate culture in their classroom and are aware of the importance of culture in foreign language teaching and learning, they still teach as they were taught and they still believe that linguistic objectives and skills are

more important than cultural ones. Teachers are hesitant to teach culture due to lack of time, lack of suitable cultural materials, pressure from their administrations to stick to the curricula, and lack of clarity about which culture(s) to teach. The learners' opinions, on the other hand, are not well explored in the literature, which makes it hard to find a common ground between what teachers practice and what learners need. To accomplish the goal of teaching language as culture, educational institutions need to equip their teachers, curricula, and classroom, with necessary tools in order for the learners to acquire and practice the knowledge, skills, and attitudes of the foreign culture.

## **2.3 The Study**

### **2.3.1 Purpose**

The study which is described in this chapter examines teachers' and learners integration of culture in foreign language classrooms. Acquiring intercultural competence requires changes in knowledge, skills, and attitudes of teachers and learners. In order for this to happen, it is crucial to understand how teachers and learners view culture teaching and learning. This study sheds a light on how foreign language teachers and learners of Arabic at the University of Arizona view teaching/learning culture. This study provides a clear identification and diagnosis of the current views of teachers and learners of Arabic with regard to particular areas in teaching and learning culture. Lack of research on learners' perspectives on learning culture adds another layer of significance to this study and this study is expected to lead to future research to investigate in depth what learners think about culture in their classroom. The results of this study are expected to serve as tools to help learners overcome the obstacles and challenges they are faced with in the integration of language and culture as well as to assist them in achieving intercultural competence.



### 2.3.2 Research Questions

The research questions guiding the study were:

- c. What are the views and responses of the teachers and the learners in regard to the following issues?
  - i. The role of culture in Arabic language teaching and learning
  - ii. Ranking of nine possible culture-teaching and learning objectives in order of importance
  - iii. Practicing cultural activities in Arabic classrooms
  - iv. Familiarity with the Arab culture(s)
  - v. The extent to which teachers deal with the Arab cultures
  - vi. The distribution of language teaching/learning and culture teaching/learning
- d. Are there any statistically significant differences between the responses of the teachers and the responses of the learners in the above-mentioned issues?

## 2.4 Methodology

### 2.4.1 Participants

The participants of this study were 105 in number, with 15 Arabic teachers (4 Professors, 3 Lecturers, and 8 Teaching Assistants; teachers hereafter) and 90 learners of Arabic at the University of Arizona. The teachers were 11 males and 4 females, while the learners were 37 males and 53 females. Most of the teachers (80%) were from the Middle East. As for the learners, 48.9% were white, 22.2% Hispanics, 8.9% Asians, and 5.6% African Americans. The vast majority of the learners were undergraduates (95.6). All teachers hold graduate degrees: 73.3% hold Master's degrees, 6.7% are Ph.D. candidates and 20% hold Ph.D. degrees. Teachers

who participated in the study have language teaching experiences ranging from 1 to 25 years with an arithmetic mean of 9.8 years.

## **2.4.2 Instruments**

Three kinds of instruments were used to collect data and each one was used in its own particular setting:

### **2.4.2.1 Questionnaires:**

Two questionnaires were used in this study – one for the teachers and one for the students. The teachers' questionnaire was adopted from Sercu (2005) and from Gonen & Saglam 2012, then it was adapted to meet the study at hand. The learners' questionnaire, on the other hand, was developed using the teachers' questionnaire by asking the same kinds of questions but directing them to the learners.

The researcher sent an email to the teachers introducing the study and asking them to participate. During the weekly departmental meeting, the researcher met with the teachers and gave them the consent form. Those who consented received an explanation of the study procedure and were provided with the questionnaire. Teachers were given one week to fill out the questionnaire and to return it to the researcher. All questionnaires were coded with a unique identifier and the names of participants were saved separately.

As for the learners, the researcher arranged with the Arabic section of MENAS and the Arabic teachers to visit all classes to recruit learners. During this initial recruiting visit, the researcher briefed the learners in each class about the study and distributed the consent form. Participants were informed that participation is voluntary, that their names and the data collected would be kept confidential, and that the data would be used only for research purposes. Learners

who voluntarily agreed to participate filled out and signed the consent form. The researcher then distributed the questionnaire to the consenting learners and asked them to fill it out. Learners were given two days to fill out and return the questionnaires. All questionnaires were coded with a unique identifier and the names of participants were saved separately.

The teachers' questionnaire included 6 sections: teachers' background information; teachers' opinion about the role of culture in teaching a foreign language; teachers' ranking of culture teaching objectives; teachers' practices regarding culture teaching; teachers' familiarity Arab cultures and to what extent they deal with them in their Arabic classroom; and the distribution of classroom time for language teaching and culture teaching.

The learners' questionnaire, on the other hand, also included 6 sections: learners' background information; learners' opinion on the role of culture in learning foreign language; learners' ranking of culture learning objectives; learners' practices regarding culture learning; learners' familiarity with the Arab cultures and to what extent they deal with it in their Arabic classroom; and the distribution of language learning and culture learning.

#### **2.4.2.2 Interviews**

Twenty-minute semi-structured, face-to-face interviews were conducted with 5 teachers and 16 learners. Teachers and learners who completed the questionnaires were contacted by email and were asked to voluntarily participate in the interviews and were provided with a link to a Google doc spreadsheet to sign up for interviews. Those who signed up were contacted and were given time slots to choose from. All the interviews were audio-recorded after getting the participants' permission and extensive notes were also taken by the researcher. The interview questions were taken from the questionnaire questions, but asked for more detailed, in-depth answers related to the teachers' and the learners' views and beliefs about the teaching/learning of

culture in the Arabic classroom. Participants were informed that the conversation was confidential and that their names and identity would not be revealed. The researcher consulted all the extensive notes which were taken during the interviews and when more details were needed, he looked at the transcriptions of the recorded audios that he transcribed.

#### **2.4.2.3 Class visits**

Arabic classes at MENAS are offered five times a week and for 50 minutes. The researcher arranged with the Arabic section to visit two classes for one entire week – one class from the beginning level and one class from the advanced level. Arabic classes follow the same syllabus that is usually prepared by the director of the Arabic program and the teachers for each level. The researcher chose two teachers who have at least five years of experience and who have taught the classes before. The two classes were chosen based on the teachers' criteria mentioned above and based on the researcher's availability during the times that the candidate classes were taught. During the visits, the researcher took notes and audio-recorded the classes. He also observed how much culture is integrated in the classroom activities and compared the types of the types of activities practiced in the classroom with the learners' reflections on such activities.

#### **2.4.3 Data Analysis Procedures**

The data was analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistical analyses. The descriptive analysis provided details about how teachers and learners view, practice, and integrate/learn culture in their classroom, while the inferential analysis helped in making predictions about teaching, learning, and the degree to which culture is integrated in the Arabic classrooms. This was done by analyzing the data of the participants and by comparing the differences between the teachers' and the learners' responses.

To determine if there are statistically significant differences between responses obtained from learners and those obtained from teachers, contingency table analysis were performed using the data analysis software R Language (Kabacoff 2011; Zumel & Mount 2013) for each question asked in the questionnaire. In the statistical significance analysis, the null hypothesis ( $H_0$ ) states that the categorical variables (responses to questions) for both the teachers and the learners come from the same population, i.e. the responses of both teachers and learners are the same. While the research (or alternative) hypothesis ( $H_a$ ) states the opposite: the responses to questions obtained from teachers and learners come from different populations and there are significant statistical differences between the responses obtained from the teachers and those obtained from the learners for the same question.

For each significant test performed on the each question, Pearson's Chi-squared test was performed to test the null hypothesis using a rejection region of  $\alpha = 0.05$ , which represents a Type I Error (Ott and Longnecker 2001). A Type I Error is committed if we reject the null hypothesis when it is true. A *p-value* was obtained from the significance test analysis, and if the *p-value* was less than the 0.05, then the null hypothesis was rejected and the research hypothesis was accepted, which means that there was statistically significant differences between the responses obtained from the teachers and those obtained from the learners. And if the *p-value* was greater than 0.05 then the null hypothesis was accepted and the research hypothesis was rejected which means that there is no statistically significant differences between the responses obtained from the teachers and those obtained from the learners.

## 2.5 Results

This section provides results and discussion about the 6 aspects of culture addressed in the questionnaires for teachers and learners. This section will also include excerpts from the interviews with the teachers and the learners and the researcher's comments on class visits

### 2.5.1 Cultural Aspects

#### 2.5.1.1 Teachers and Learners Opinion on the Role of Culture in Teaching and Learning

##### Foreign Languages

Fifteen questions were asked of the teachers and learners to investigate their opinion about the role that culture plays in their Arabic classrooms. Only one question, question 7, out of the 15 questions had a statistically significant difference between teachers' and learners' opinion about the role of culture in teaching and learning foreign language. The remaining questions showed no statistically significant difference between participants, which indicates a general agreement. Table 1 below shows the 15 questions discussed in this section, the teachers' and learners' responses with the P-Value. The table also highlights question 7 that showed a statistically significant difference.

Table 1: Teachers and Learners Opinion on the Role of Culture in Teaching and Learning Foreign Languages (FL)

The Role of Culture in Foreign Language Classroom												
Items	Participants	Responses										P-Value
		Agree		Undecided		Disagree		No Response		Total		
		Count	% of Total	Count	% of Total	Count	% of Total	Count	% of Total	Count	%	
Q1. In a FL classroom, learning culture is as important as learning the FL.	Teachers	12	80.0	1	6.7	2	13.3	0	0.0	15	100.0	0.780
	Learners	75	83.3	7	7.8	7	7.8	1	1.1	90	100.0	
Q2. It is impossible to learn the foreign language and the foreign culture in an integrated way.	Teachers	2	13.3	0	0.0	13	86.7	0	0.0	15	100.0	0.514
	Learners	13	14.4	7	7.8	69	76.7	1	1.1	90	100.0	
Q3. The more students know about the foreign culture, the more tolerant they are.	Teachers	15	100.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	15	100.0	0.163
	Learners	72	80.0	17	18.9	1	1.1	0	0.0	90	100.0	
Q4. When speakers of different languages meet, misunderstandings arise equally often from linguistic as from cultural differences.	Teachers	11	73.3	2	13.3	2	13.3	0	0.0	15	100.0	0.447
	Learners	55	61.1	26	28.9	9	10.0	0	0.0	90	100.0	
Q5. Foreign language learning should enhance students' understanding of their own cultural identity.	Teachers	11	73.3	3	20.0	1	6.7	0	0.0	15	100.0	0.821
	Learners	69	76.7	18	20.0	3	3.3	0	0.0	90	100.0	
Q6. The cultural dimension in foreign language classes should be expanded.	Teachers	11	73.3	3	20.0	1	6.7	0	0.0	15	100.0	0.585
	Learners	73	81.1	15	16.7	2	2.2	0	0.0	90	100.0	
Q7. American and global identities of the student/ citizen should be fostered in foreign language/ culture classes.	Teachers	6	40.0	5	33.3	4	26.7	0	0.0	15	100.0	0.003
	Learners	51	56.7	35	38.9	3	3.3	1	1.1	90	100.0	

Q8. All the foreign-speaking countries' cultures are equally valid to be represented in foreign language syllabus.	Teachers	10	66.7	2	13.3	3	20.0	0	0.0	15	100.0	0.215
	Learners	58	64.4	25	27.8	7	7.8	0	0.0	90	100.0	
Q9. The study of culture in language classes can hinder progress in linguistic accuracy.	Teachers	3	20.0	0	0.0	12	80.0	0	0.0	15	100.0	0.285
	Learners	17	18.9	13	14.4	60	66.7	0	0.0	90	100.0	
Q10. Learning about a foreign culture can change the student's attitude towards her/his own culture.	Teachers	12	80.0	0	0.0	2	13.3	1	6.7	15	100.0	0.222
	Learners	69	76.7	13	14.4	6	6.7	2	2.2	90	100.0	
Q11. An emphasis on the study of foreign cultures can contribute to the student's loss of cultural identity.	Teachers	0	0.0	2	13.3	13	86.7	0	0.0	15	100.0	0.632
	Learners	5	5.6	13	14.4	72	80.0	0	0.0	90	100.0	
Q12. The most important goal in learning about a foreign culture is to develop a critical attitude towards both target and native cultures.	Teachers	7	46.7	4	26.7	4	26.7	0	0.0	15	100.0	0.730
	Learners	33	36.7	32	35.6	22	24.4	3	3.3	90	100.0	
Q13. The development of cultural awareness should be kept only for the most advanced levels.	Teachers	0	0.0	1	6.7	14	93.3	0	0.0	15	100.0	0.635
	Learners	4	4.4	9	10.0	77	85.6	0	0.0	90	100.0	
Q14. Learning culture motivates students.	Teachers	14	93.3	1	6.7	0	0.0	0	0.0	15	100.0	0.625
	Learners	75	83.3	12	13.3	2	2.2	1	1.1	90	100.0	
Q15. Combining language and culture helps learners to improve their language skills.	Teachers	15	100.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	15	100.0	0.393
	Learners	79	87.8	9	10.0	1	1.1	1	1.1	90	100.0	



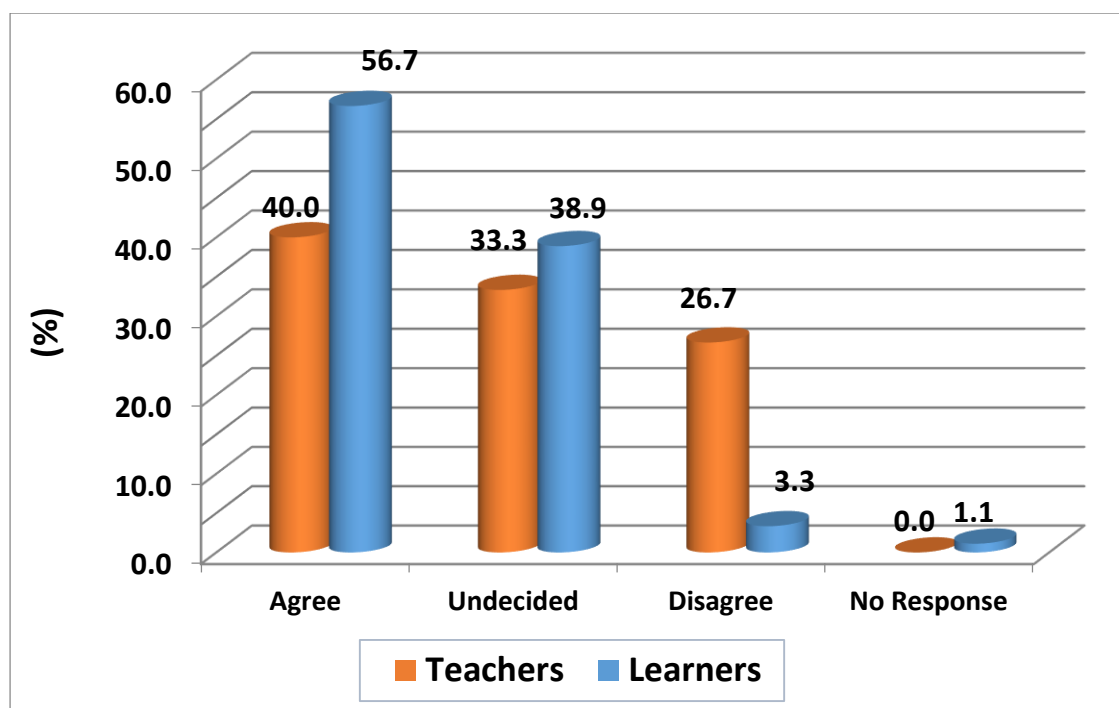
This general agreement on the importance of teaching and learning culture in the classroom gives a strong push to teachers towards integrating culture in the foreign language classroom and a powerful motivation to the learners not only to learn the foreign language but also to learn the culture or cultures of that language.

A close investigation of the results of each item of the questionnaire will follow. In the first question, the teachers and learners were asked if learning culture is as important as learning the FL, 80% of the teachers and 83.3% of the learners agreed that learning culture is as important as learning the language. They also both disagreed, 86.7% for the teachers, 76.7% for the learners, about the statement that it is impossible to learn the foreign language and the foreign culture in an integrated way. This indicates that integrating language and culture is feasible. Both teachers and learners agreed, 73.3% for teachers and 61.1% for learners, that when speakers of different languages meet, misunderstanding might arise equally often from linguistic as from cultural differences.

Interestingly enough, when participants were asked whether learning a foreign language enhances learners' understanding of their own cultural identity, participants generally agreed, teachers 73.3% and learners 76.7%. Also, in another question, participants disagreed, teachers 86.7%, learners 80%, with the claim that the emphasis on the study of foreign cultures can contribute to the student's loss of cultural identity. However, when asked about learners' own identity, whether American or global, should be fostered in foreign language and culture classes, more than 50% of the learners agreed and only 3.3% disagreed compared to 26.7% disagreement on the teachers side.

Figure 1 below shows in percentages the responses of the teachers and the learners of question 7 about the role of culture. The disagreement between teachers and learners in this particular question resulted in a statistically significant difference with a P-Value of 0.0003.

Figure 1: Results of teachers' and learners' opinion about whether their identity should be fostered in foreign language and culture classes.



This disparity could be due to the fact that most of the teachers are Arabs and that the conservative nature of the Arab culture makes it hard and improper, in some cases to, for the teachers to accept the claim that learners' identity should be fostered in classes and, therefore, the teachers' responses varied and showed higher 'disagree' responses than the learners.

Figure 2 below shows a Mosaic Plot which was generated using the R Language. When conducting ANOVA for non-categorical data it is usually helpful to include an arithmetic mean and standard deviation for the observed measurements to reflect the calculated p-value. For

categorical data, the observations are non-numerical data and a p-value is calculated based on responses. To give a representation similar to the arithmetic mean and the standard deviation a Mosaic Plot can be used.

Figure 2: Mosaic Plot including the P-Value of the question about the teachers' and learners' opinion related to fostering identity in foreign language and culture classes.

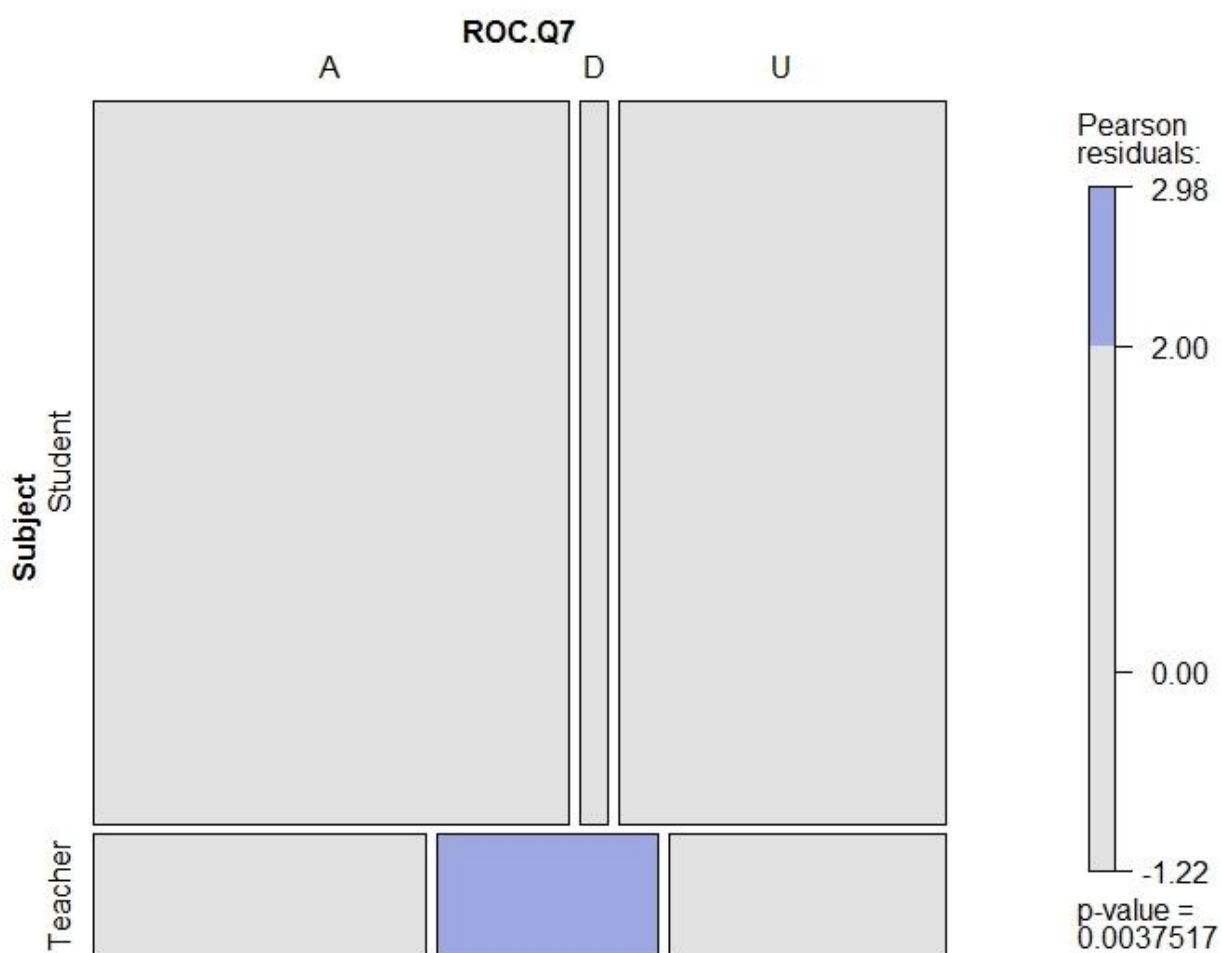


Figure 2 shows proportional areas for Teachers and Learners responses to question 7 of the Role of Culture (ROC) section: A for Agree, D for Disagree and U for Undecided. The vertical length of the “Participant” being Teacher or Learner shows the size of the samples relative to each other and A, D, and U show the size of the relative responses for the questions by the participants. The p-value of 0.0037517 is calculated based on the Pearson chi-square test. Pearson residuals are used to calculate the p-value with the R Language.

In other words, the teachers and learners believe that the Arabic language should enhance the understanding of students’ own cultural identity and that the study of foreign culture doesn’t contribute to the loss of their cultural identity, but around 25% of the teachers disagree with the learners that their identity should be fostered in foreign language and culture classes. When asked whether all the foreign-speaking countries’ cultures are likely to be represented in foreign language syllabi, teachers and learners said yes, teachers 66.7% and learners 64.4%. Nevertheless, 27.8% of the learners were undecided, which could be due to the lack of enough knowledge about the various cultures in the Arab world. Both teachers and learners agree, 80% for the teachers and 66.7% for the learners, that teaching culture in language classes doesn’t hinder progress in linguistic accuracy. This positive view of teaching/learning culture was also reflected in the teachers’ and the learners’ views that combining language and culture helps learners improve their language skills (100% for the teachers and 87.8% for the learners) and that learning culture motivates learners (93.3% for the teachers and 83.3% for the learners).

The teachers and the learners both disagree with the idea that the development of cultural awareness should be kept only for the most advanced levels (93.3% and 85.6% respectively), which means that the teachers and the learners agree with developing the cultural awareness of

beginners, intermediate, and low-advanced level learners as well. The background data collected from the participating learners indicated that 87.6% of them are sophomores, juniors, or seniors . This means that the majority of those learners have completed at least one year of Arabic (10 credit hours) and that they might have preferred to have more integration of culture in their curriculum had they not had adequate cultural development during this year. In the interviews, the teachers and the learners stressed that culture should start right from the beginning of language learning. The following are excerpts from two participants:

T1

“Culture should be introduced to both advanced and low level students. This depends on what they are dealing with. If you are teaching the low level students, you need to look at the functions they are executing and you introduce the culture that goes with that.”

L9 (2<sup>nd</sup> year Arabic)

“I would say yes to introduce both culture and language for first and second year students. Maybe it is harder when you start because there is so much to learn about language itself, but I believe culture enforces language and as long as you keep that in mind, you are less likely to forget words.”

Finally, the teachers and the learners did not agree in their answer to the question that focused on the importance of attitudinal dimension of cultural learning objectives: ‘the most important goal in learning about a foreign culture is to develop a critical attitude towards both

target and native cultures.’ Almost half of the teachers agreed (46.7%) and the rest of the teachers were either undecided (26.7%) or disagreed (26.7%). The percentage of learners who agreed or were undecided was close (36.7%, 35.6% respectively) leaving 24.4% of the learners marking their answer as ‘disagree’. This disagreement between the teachers and the learners as well as within the learners themselves shows that the objectives of teaching culture that the teachers have for their learners are not clear to them.

The agreement between the teachers’ views and the learners’ views about the importance of teaching and learning culture overcomes many obstacles that might hinder the integration of language and culture in the classroom such as the lack of interest in the target culture(s) and neglecting cultural aspects and activities in the classroom by both the teachers and the learners.

The following excerpts from the interviews with the teachers show their belief in the importance of the role of culture in teaching foreign language:

T2

“Language and culture are inseparable. You need to know about culture because knowing the language means knowing what to say and what not to say.... Once the student knows the culture, they know how to communicate and understand why people are doing what they are doing and that would lead to a better understanding. Once students understand the culture they tend to like it more and probably that helps in curing some of the stereotypes about that culture.”

T5

“To me, culture is the fifth skill. Language without culture is like a dead body. Culture is the soul inside your body.”

L2 (3rd year Arabic)

“I think it is important because without culture in the language, there will be a lot of language issues that will make it unclear. For example, the word Allah in Arabic is turning into so many different phases and the entire religion of Islam is part of the entire language and without understanding that aspect of culture, a lot of the language will not make sense.”

L11 (2<sup>nd</sup> year Arabic)

“It is important to understand culture and understand exactly what is acceptable to say, who is acceptable to talk to, and in what situation you can approach somebody.”

### **2.5.1.2 Teachers’ and Learners’ Ranking of Nine Possible Culture-Teaching and Learning Objectives in Order of Importance.**

Participants were asked to rank nine possible objectives of teaching and learning culture in order of importance. The nine objectives stem from the three intercultural dimensions of foreign language learning presented by Sercu (2005); namely, knowledge dimensions, attitudinal dimensions and behavioral dimensions. The responses varied (see Table 2 below).

Table 2: Results of the teachers' and learners ranking of nine objectives of teaching/learning culture in order of importance.

Ranking of 9 objectives of teaching/learning culture in order of importance									
No.	Item	Responses						P-value	
		Teacher		Learner		Total			
		Count	% of Total	Count	% of Total	Count	%		
<b>Knowledge Dimensions</b>									
1.	Provide information about the history, geography and political conditions of the foreign country(s)	1	6.7	12	13.3	13	12.4	<b>0.1821</b>	
2.	Provide information about daily life and routines	2	13.3	10	11.1	12	11.4		
3.	Provide information about shared values and beliefs	2	13.3	9	10	11	10.5		
4.	Provide experiences with a rich variety of cultural expressions (literature, music, theatre, film, etc.)	3	20	13	14.4	16	15.2		
<b>Attitudinal Dimension</b>									
5.	Develop attitudes of openness and tolerance towards other peoples and cultures	3	20	8	8.9	11	10.5		
<b>Behavioral dimension</b>									
6.	Promote reflection on cultural differences	1	6.7	8	8.9	9	8.6		
7.	Promote increased understanding of students' own culture.	0	0	10	11.1	10	9.5		
8.	Promote the ability to empathize with people living in other cultures	2	13.3	5	5.6	7	6.7		
9.	Promote the ability to handle intercultural contact situations	1	6.7	12	13.3	13	12.4		
10.	No response	0	0	3	3.3	3	2.9		
<b>Totals</b>		<b>15</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>90</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>105</b>	<b>100</b>		
<b>P-value</b>		<b>0.9216</b>							

The percentage of teachers and of learners who selected a specific ranking for each item listed in Table 2 were tabulated and ANOVA was conducted to determine if there is a significant



difference between the teachers' and learners' responses, and if there is significant difference in the selection of ranking for both teachers and learners. Using the R Language software, a normality test was conducted on the data shown in Table 2 and it was determined that the data is normally distributed. The data was transformed using an arcsine function to normalize it and the generated transformed data did not show a normal distribution. Therefore, ANOVA was conducted using bootstrapping techniques with 10,000 iterations. It was determined that there is no significant difference in responses given by teachers and learners with a p-value of 0.9216; in addition from the ANOVA results, it was determined that there was no significant difference in ranking the items shown in table 2 with a p-value of 0.1821.

The following discussion will present detailed analyses of the responses. Teachers ranked two dimensions as their first most important objectives; knowledge dimension and attitudinal dimension. Teachers considered providing knowledge and experiences about cultural expressions such as literature, music and theater, which is part of the knowledge dimension, as well as developing attitudes of openness and tolerance towards other cultures, which is part of the attitudinal dimension, as the most important objectives (20% of the teachers chose each of the two objectives as their most important objective). The teachers believe that providing learners with the knowledge of cultural expressions related to literature, music, films, etc. would equip them with good tools to understand and engage in the target culture. The teachers also recognize that the attitudinal dimension prepares learners to accept the other culture and its people with openness and tolerance, which is considered as the pre-condition for successful intercultural interaction and would lead to intercultural competence (Byram, 1997). Providing information about daily life, routines and information about shared values and beliefs, both part of the knowledge dimension, came next in the order of importance for teachers -13.3%. Also,

promoting the ability to empathize with people living in other cultures, one of the behavioral dimensions, came in the same order of importance -13.3%.

Similar to the teachers, the learners chose the knowledge dimension and specifically providing experience with a rich variety of cultural expressions as the most important objective of learning foreign language with 14.4%. The learners' second ranking was given both to the knowledge dimension objective that is related to providing information about the history, geography and political condition of the foreign country(s), and to the behavioral dimension that is related to promoting the ability to handle intercultural contact situations. This behavioral dimension objective was the lowest in ranking for teachers.

The following excerpts from the teachers and the learners show their preference of the most important objective.

Teacher Three

“I would put attitude at the top. It is like the first stage to allow to the rest to actually come in... and allows you to do something positive with what you see.”

One of the learners pointed out that the behavioral dimension objective that calls for promoting the ability to handle intercultural contact situations, which ranked the second among the learners, is the most important objective for him for the following reason:

Learner Twelve (3<sup>rd</sup> year Arabic)

“I chose that one because the others, at least most of the others, seem to be about what you can know and this one is what you can do. Behavioral dimension focuses on ‘promote reflection’, ‘promote increased understanding’, ‘promote the ability to

emphasize’, and that is actually something that you do. To me, that is more important ... is being able to respond on the right situation rather than knowing what the right situations should be.”

### **2.5.1.3 Practicing Cultural Activities in Arabic classrooms**

Teachers and learners were presented with 15 items asking them about how often they practice specific cultural activities in their classrooms. Participants were given three choices: ‘often’, ‘once in a while’, and ‘never’. Results show statistically significant differences between the teachers’ and the learners’ responses in 8 of the 15 questions. Teachers’ responses leaned towards ‘often’ or ‘once in a while,’ while learners responses were more in the ‘once in a while’ or ‘never’ side (see Table 3 below). Table 3 below illustrates the 15 questions and the responses of the teachers and the learners about practicing specific cultural activities in their classrooms. The P-Value of each question is also shown.

Table 3: Results of the teachers' and learners views about practicing cultural activities in classroom

Items	Participants	Responses										P-Value
		Often		Once in a While		Never		No Response		Total		
		Count	% of Total	Count	% of Total	Count	% of Total	Count	% of Total	Count	%	
Q1. I ask my students to think about the image that the media promote of the Arab countries.	Teachers	4	26.7	8	53.3	3	20.0	0	0.0	15	100.0	0.0001
Q1. Our Arabic teacher asks us to think about the image that the media promote of the Arab countries.	Learners	4	4.4	32	35.6	54	60.0	0	0.0	90	100.0	
Q2. I tell my students what I heard (or read) about the Arab countries or Arab cultures.	Teachers	5	33.3	9	60.0	1	6.7	0	0.0	15	100.0	0.166
Q2. Our teacher tells us what s/he heard (or read) about the Arab countries or Arab cultures.	Learners	23	25.6	40	44.4	27	30.0	0	0.0	90	100.0	
Q3. I tell my students why I find something fascinating or strange about the Arab cultures.	Teachers	8	53.3	5	33.3	2	13.3	0	0.0	15	100.0	0.417
Q3. Our teacher tells us why s/he finds something fascinating or strange about the Arab cultures.	Learners	33	36.7	33	36.7	23	25.6	1	1.1	90	100.0	
Q4. I ask my students to independently explore an aspect of the Arab cultures.	Teachers	6	40.0	8	53.3	1	6.7	0	0.0	15	100.0	0.156
Q4. Our teacher asks us to independently explore an aspect of the Arab cultures.	Learners	24	26.7	39	43.3	27	30.0	0	0.0	90	100.0	
Q5. I use videos, CD-ROMs or the Internet to illustrate an aspect of the Arab cultures.	Teachers	3	20.0	11	73.3	1	6.7	0	0.0	15	100.0	0.699
Q5. Our teacher uses videos, CD-ROMs or the Internet to illustrate an aspect of the Arab cultures.	Learners	56	62.2	24	26.7	10	11.1	0	0.0	90	100.0	
Q6. I ask my students to think about what it would be like to live in the Arab cultures	Teachers	5	33.3	8	53.3	2	13.3	0	0.0	15	100.0	0.108
Q6. Our teacher asks us to think about what it would be like to live in the Arab cultures	Learners	16	17.8	38	42.2	36	40.0	0	0.0	90	100.0	
Q7. I talk to my students about my own experiences in the Arab countries.	Teachers	9	60.0	6	40.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	15	100.0	0.469
Q7. Our teacher talks to us about his own experiences in the Arab countries.	Learners	52	57.8	30	33.3	8	8.9	0	0.0	90	100.0	

Q8. If I have the chance, I invite a person originating from the Arab countries to my classroom.	Teachers	3	20.0	9	60.0	3	20.0	0	0.0	15	100.0	0.148
Q8. Whenever our teacher has the chance, s/he invites a person originating from the Arab countries to my classroom.	Learners	22	24.4	31	34.4	37	41.1	0	0.0	90	100.0	
Q9. I ask my pupils to describe an aspect of their own culture in Arabic.	Teachers	11	73.3	3	20.0	1	6.7	0	0.0	15	100.0	0.0006
Q9. Our teacher asks us to describe an aspect of our own culture in Arabic.	Learners	22	24.4	32	35.6	36	40.0	0	0.0	90	100.0	
Q10. I bring objects originating from the Arab cultures to my classroom.	Teachers	3	18.8	8	50.0	4	25.0	1	6.3	16	100.0	0.0006
Q10. Our teacher brings objects originating from the Arab cultures to our classroom.	Learners	4	4.4	18	19.8	67	73.6	2	2.2	91	100.0	
Q11. I decorate my classroom with posters illustrating particular aspects of the Arab culture.	Teachers	1	6.7	6	40.0	8	53.3	0	0.0	15	100.0	1.0706 e-05
Q11. Our teacher decorates our classroom with posters illustrating particular aspects of the Arab cultures.	Learners	3	3.3	3	3.3	84	93.3	0	0.0	90	100.0	
Q12. I comment on the way in which the Arab cultures are represented in the classroom materials.	Teachers	7	46.7	3	20.0	5	33.3	0	0.0	15	100.0	0.032
Q12. Our comments on the way in which the Arab cultures are represented in the classroom materials.	Learners	16	17.8	42	46.7	29	32.2	3	3.3	90	100.0	
Q13. I ask my students to compare an aspect of their own culture with that aspect in the Arab cultures.	Teachers	7	46.7	6	40.0	1	6.7	1	6.7	15	100.0	0.015
Q13. Our teacher asks us to compare an aspect of our own culture with that aspect in the Arab cultures.	Learners	18	20.0	34	37.8	37	41.1	1	1.1	90	100.0	
Q14. I touch upon an aspect of the Arab cultures regarding which I feel negatively disposed.	Teachers	2	13.3	10	66.7	3	20.0	0	0.0	15	100.0	0.0001
Q14. Our teacher touches upon an aspect of the Arab cultures regarding which he feels negatively disposed.	Learners	4	4.4	18	20.0	65	72.2	3	3.3	90	100.0	
Q15. I talk with my students about stereotypes regarding particular Arab cultures and countries or regarding the inhabitants of particular countries.	Teachers	8	53.3	6	40.0	1	6.7	0	0.0	15	100.0	3.9686 e-06
Q15. Our teacher talks to us about stereotypes regarding particular Arab cultures and countries or regarding the inhabitants of particular Arab countries.	Learners	7	7.8	32	35.6	50	55.6	1	1.1	90	100.0	

An in-depth analysis of this section is provided now. When teachers were asked how often they ask their learners to think about the image that the media promote of the Arab countries, 80% said either 'often' or 'once in a while'. When learners were asked the same question, however, only 40% said either 'often' or 'once in a while' and 60% said 'never'. This question showed a statistically significant difference between the answers of the teachers and the learners with a P-Value of 0.001. One possible explanation for this difference is that the question does not specify which media it addresses and which Arab countries it refers to. In another question, 93.3% of the teachers said that they tell their students what they hear or read about Arab countries or Arab cultures (33.3% 'often' and 60% 'once in a while'), while 70% of the learners responded positively (25.6% 'often', 44.4% 'once in a while') and 30% responded with 'never'. No statistically significant difference was shown between the responses of the teachers and the learners. When participants were queried as to whether they ask their students to independently explore an aspect of the Arab cultures, 40% of the teachers answered with 'often' and 53% with 'once in a while'. As for the learners, 26.7% said 'often', 43.3 said 'once in a while', and 30% said 'never'. No statistically significant difference was shown between the responses of the teachers and the learners.

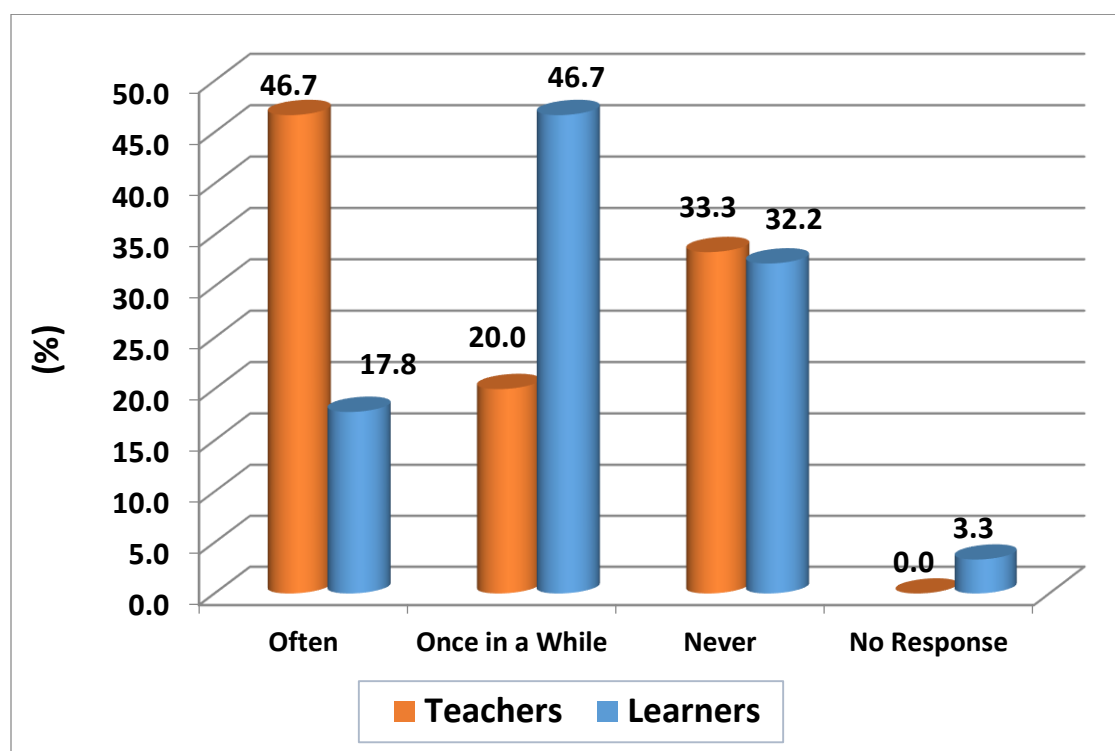
In regard to the use of technology in the classroom, 73.3% of the teachers said that they 'often' use videos, CD ROMs, or the internet to illustrate an aspect of Arab cultures and 62.2% of the learners said 'often' as well. Interviews with the teachers and learners as well as class visits have also shown the use of various technology tools and software, which aligns with the responses of the participants. When teachers were asked about how often they ask their learners to think about what it would be like to live in Arab culture, 86.6% responded with either 'often' or 'once in a while'. Learners responded with 60% for either 'often' or 'once in a while' and

40% answered with 'never'. No statistically significant difference between participants was shown in this question. When teachers were asked about how often they talk to their students about their own experiences in Arab countries, 100% of the teachers said that they do either 'often' or 'once in a while' and the learners also agreed with them with 90.1%. No statistically significant difference was shown here. This agreement could be attributed to the fact that most teachers originate from the Middle East. This particular activity, namely "I talk to my students about my own experiences in the foreign country" has also received the highest percentage of responses in this section. The results of this question conform to the study conducted by Sercu et al. (2005) in which teachers choose this activity as the first most practiced activity among 17 activities.

In regard to the learners' culture, teachers were queried as to whether they ask their students to describe an aspect of their own culture in Arabic. Seventy three percent of the teachers said 'often', while only 24.4% of the learners said 'often'. Also, 40% of the learners said 'never' compared to 6.7% for the teachers. This question showed a statistically significant difference between the responses of the teachers and the learners with a *P*-Value of 0.0006. The questionnaire asked whether teachers bring objects originating from Arab culture to the classroom. As for teachers, 68.8% said either 'often' or 'once in a while', while 73.6% of the learners said 'never'. This question showed a statistically significant difference between the responses of the teachers and the learners with a *P*-Value of 0.0006. In another related question, the teachers and the learners were asked if the teacher decorates the classroom with posters illustrating particular aspects of Arab cultures. The responses showed a statistically significant difference with a *P*-Value of 1.0706e-05. Almost half of the teachers said either 'often' or 'once in a while' while the majority of the learners said 'never'. The teachers and the

learners were asked about the classroom materials and how often the teacher comments on the way Arab cultures are represented in this material. Almost 50% of the teachers said that they ‘often’ comment and 20% said ‘once in a while’. The answers of the learners conflicted with those of the teachers; 17.8% said ‘often’ and almost 50% of them said ‘once in a while’. About 30% of both the teachers and the learners said ‘never’. The following figure (Figure 3) illustrates the percentages of the teachers’ and learners’ responses on the question that asked about how Arab cultures are represented in the classroom materials and how often teachers comment on them.

Figure 3: Results of the teachers’ and learners views about how often the teacher comment on the way in which the Arab cultures are represented in the classroom materials.



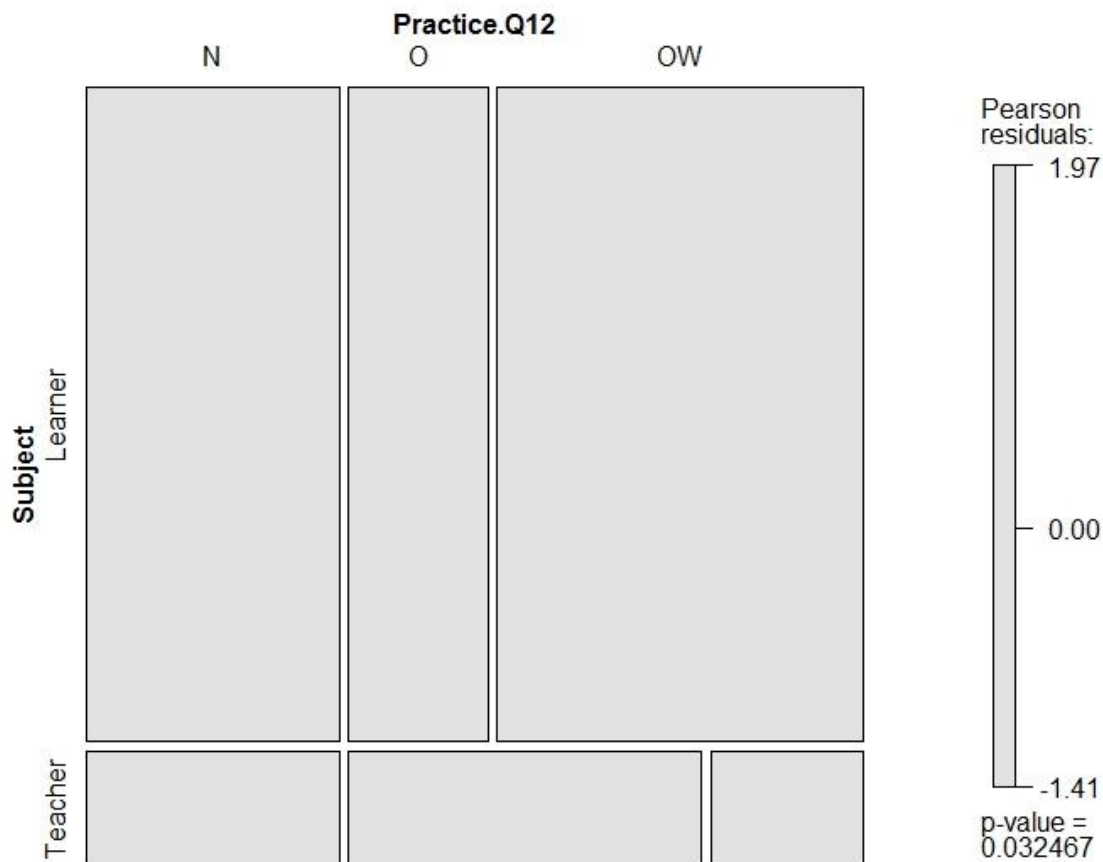
It should be noted here that although this question showed a statistically significant difference between the responses of the teachers and the learners with a P-Value of 0.03 (see



Figure 4 below), the main textbook used in teaching Arabic at MENAS, the textbook entitled Al-Kitaab, marginally addresses Arab cultures and therefore, teachers' options to comment on culture and how it is represented are very limited, let alone the representations of only two Arab cultures, namely, Egypt and the Levant. However, teachers at MENAS are required to use other supplementary materials that tackle many Arab cultural aspects and they have some room to comment on the representation of the Arab cultures in those materials.

Figure 4 below shows a Mosaic Plot which was generated using the R Language. When conducting ANOVA for non-categorical data it is usually helpful to include an arithmetic mean and standard deviation for the observed measurements to reflect the calculated p-value. For categorical data, the observations are non-numerical data and a p-value is calculated based on responses. To give a representation similar to the arithmetic mean and the standard deviation a Mosaic Plot can be used.

Figure 4: Mosaic Plot including the P-Value of the question about how often the teacher comments on the way in which the Arab cultures are represented in the classroom materials.



So figure 4 shows proportional areas for Teachers and Learners responses to question 12 of the Practice section which are N for Never, O for Often and OW for Once in a While. The vertical length of the “Participant” being Teacher or Learner shows the size of the samples relative to each other and N, O, OW show the size of the relative responses for the questions by

the participants. The p-value of 0.032467 is calculated based on the Pearson chi-square test. Pearson residuals are used to calculate the p-value by the R Language.

In regard to comparing the learners' culture and the target culture, the majority of the teachers responded with either 'often' or 'once in a while' to the question about whether they give the learners the opportunity to compare an aspect of the learner's own culture with that aspect in Arab cultures. Fifty percent of the learners responded with either 'often' or 'once in a while', and 41.1% said 'never' compared to only 6.7% of the teachers. This question also showed a statistically significant difference between the responses of the teachers and the learners with a P-Value of 0.015. In a question asking whether teachers touch upon an aspect of the Arab cultures regarding which the teacher feels negatively disposed, 80% reported either 'often' or 'once in a while', while 72.2% of the learners reported 'never'. Again, this question showed a statistically significant difference between both groups of participants with a P-Value of 0.00001. The final question in this section addressed stereotypes about Arab cultures and asked whether teachers talk about stereotypes regarding particular Arab cultures and countries or regarding the inhabitants of particular Arab countries. The responses showed a discrepancy between the responses of the teachers and learners indicating a high statistically significant difference with a P-Value of 3.9868e-06. More than half of the teachers responded with 'often', whereas only 7.6% of the learners said 'often'. Of the other choices, 6.7% of the teachers responded with 'never', whereas more than 50% of the learners indicated that their teachers have 'never' addressed stereotypes about the Arab cultures or its people.

It is hard to give concrete explanations to the reasons behind the gaps between the responses of the teachers and their students due to the lack of other comparable studies that address learners' views. In the interviews, the teachers and the learners were asked a general

question about the kinds of cultural activities that are practiced in their classes and the excerpts by the teachers and the learners below give an idea of how culture is practiced in their classes.

#### Teacher Two

“I show my students video clips and I bring guests to class. We discuss a topic and then I ask them to act out some scenarios.”

#### Teacher Three

“The main activities are crossed over between language and cultural songs. So definitely I make a point of having a song every Friday. An example would be the Arabic song "Saydali" (the pharmacist). I work on the linguistic and the cultural aspects. On the linguistic, my point would be sticking difficult vocabulary in their mind so they have them forever. On the cultural level, we look at how ‘love’ in this song is perceived and how it is portrayed over sickness and the different meanings of the word ‘love’ in the Arabic culture. Once they are aware of the cultural aspect, I bring other similar songs. At that point, they realize that many Arabic songs are about love. Stories are also another venue where I do activities about culture.”

#### Learner Eight (third year Arabic)

“The way our book is structured doesn't allow us to study a lot of culture. It doesn't allow us to study a lot of culture because the book is divided into units and topics so if one topic is about environment, that's the whole unit. It would be more learning vocabulary versus learning cultural aspects. But I think that our teacher does a good job in bringing culture by bringing anecdotes and things like that. He does introduce culture in other ways.”

Learner Six (1<sup>st</sup> year Arabic)

“We haven't done very much. We talked about food and universities in Arabic speaking countries. There haven't been specific cultural classes.”

#### **2.5.1.4 Familiarity with Arab Culture(s)**

The aim of this section of the questionnaire is to assess the familiarity of the teachers and the learners with the Arab cultures. We will consider it as an introduction to the following section that addresses how extensively teachers deal with various cultural topics. Participants in this section were presented with 10 cultural topics and were asked to indicate their degree of familiarity with each topic. Participants were instructed to choose ‘very familiar’ if it would be very easy for them to talk about that cultural topic, ‘sufficiently familiar’ if they are familiar enough with it, and ‘not sufficiently familiar’ if they do not have enough knowledge to talk about that topic. The topics are (1) history, geography, political system; (2) different ethnic and social groups; (3) daily life and routines, living conditions, food and drink etc.; (4) youth culture; (5) education, professional life; (6) traditions, folklore, tourist attractions; (7) literature; (8) other cultural expressions (music, drama, art); (9) values and beliefs; and (10) International relations, with students' own country and other countries. These topics are usually addressed in foreign language textbooks (Sercu, 2000a). Some of these topics such as ‘values and beliefs’ and ‘international relations’ are proposed by the Council of Europe’s Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (Council of Europe, 2001, p. 102-103). In general, results show that teachers were either ‘very familiar’ with these topics with a mean of 61.7%, or ‘sufficiently familiar’ with a mean of 35%. This makes sense since 80% of the teachers in this study are originally from the Middle East and the remaining 20% have spent some time in one or more of the Arab countries. As for learners, their familiarity covered all the three choices; ‘very familiar’

with a mean of 24.0%, 'sufficiently familiar' with a mean of 40.4%, or 'not sufficiently familiar' with a mean of 34.3% (see Table 4 below).

Table 4: Results of the teachers' and learners familiarity with the Arab culture(s)

Familiarity with Arab Cultures												
Items	Participants	Responses										P-Value
		Very Familiar		Sufficiently Familiar		Not Sufficiently Familiar		No Response		Total		
		Count	% of Total	Count	% of Total	Count	% of Total	Count	% of Total	Count	%	
Q1. History, geography, political system	Teachers	14	93.3	1	6.7	0	0.0	0	0.0	15	100.0	2.2693e-05
	Learners	27	30.0	43	47.8	19	21.1	1	1.1	90	100.0	
Q2. Different ethnic and social groups	Teachers	9	60.0	5	33.3	1	6.7	0	0.0	15	100.0	0.051
	Learners	27	30.0	36	40.0	26	28.9	1	1.1	90	100.0	
Q3. Daily life and routines, living conditions, food and drink etc.	Teachers	11	73.3	4	26.7	0	0.0	0	0.0	15	100.0	0.006
	Learners	29	32.2	37	41.1	23	25.6	1	1.1	90	100.0	
Q4. Youth culture	Teachers	9	60.0	5	33.3	1	6.7	0	0.0	15	100.0	0.0002
	Learners	14	15.6	29	32.2	45	50.0	2	2.2	90	100.0	
Q5. Education, professional life	Teachers	6	40.0	9	60.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	15	100.0	0.0002
	Learners	8	8.9	41	45.6	40	44.4	1	1.1	90	100.0	
Q6. Traditions, folklore, tourist attractions	Teachers	7	46.7	8	53.3	0	0.0	0	0.0	15	100.0	0.007
	Learners	23	25.6	29	32.2	37	41.1	1	1.1	90	100.0	
Q7. Literature	Teachers	9	60.0	6	40.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	15	100.0	1.2095e-08
	Learners	5	5.6	35	38.9	49	54.4	1	1.1	90	100.0	
Q8. Other cultural expressions (music, drama, art)	Teachers	9	60.0	5	33.3	1	6.7	0	0.0	15	100.0	0.0009
	Learners	16	17.8	36	40.0	37	41.1	1	1.1	90	100.0	
Q9. Values and beliefs	Teachers	12	80.0	3	20.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	15	100.0	0.023
	Learners	38	42.2	40	44.4	11	12.2	1	1.1	90	100.0	
Q10. International relations, with students' own country and other countries	Teachers	7	43.8	7	43.8	1	6.3	1	6.3	16	100.0	0.262
	Learners	29	32.2	38	42.2	22	24.4	1	1.1	90	100.0	

The variation in the learners' familiarity could be attributed, among other reasons, to the variation in their ethnicity background; 48.9% whites, 22.2% Hispanics/Latinos, 11.1% Middle Easterns, 8.9% Asians, and 5.6% African Americans and to the fact that 37.8% of them are either freshmen or sophomores who haven't been exposed enough to Arabic classes and Arabic culture. A close look at the results demonstrates that 8 of the topics showed statistically significant differences (1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, and 9) while two topics showed no statistically significant differences (2 & 10).

In the interviews teachers were asked about their familiarity with the Arab cultures. Below is an excerpt taken from one of non-native Arabic teachers.

Teacher Four

“I am not a native speaker of Arabic but I teach Arabic and my job is to teach about Arabic culture. I think I have enough knowledge about the Arab cultures, but when I am not sure, I check with my colleagues.”

Learner Seven (1<sup>st</sup> year Arabic)

“I am familiar with those aspects from a different class. Our teacher doesn't refer to them at all. He is trying to teach the language.”

Learner Nine (2<sup>nd</sup> year Arabic)

“I would say that I still have a lot to learn. I'm barely touching it.”

Learner Eight (3<sup>rd</sup> year Arabic)

“My other classes have taught me a lot, but I feel that a lot of my knowledge has been stuff that I have from my own investigation.”

### 2.5.1.5 Dealing with Arab Culture(s)

After gathering the needed data about the teachers' and the learners' familiarity with Arab culture in the previous section, this section investigates the extent to which teachers deal with Arab cultural topics in their Arabic classroom. Participants were presented with 10 cultural topics highlighted in the previous section and were asked to choose to what extent they 'deal with it extensively', 'touch upon it once in a while', or 'never touch upon it'. Generally, the overall results show that the percentage of teachers who say they deal 'extensively' and 'once in a while' is higher than what their learners say they do. Table 5 below shows that 43.3% of the teachers deal 'extensively' with the cultural topics, 50.6% 'once in a while', and only 5.3% reported that they 'never' deal with them. Learners, on the other hand, reported that 21.2% of their teachers deal 'extensively' with cultural topics, 47.7 % 'once in a while', and 30.5% reported that their teachers 'never' deal with them. In comparing the responses of the teachers and learners, results show statistically significant differences in 5 of the 10 topics; 'youth culture' with a P-Value of 0.007, 'traditions, folklore, tourist attractions' with a P-Value of 0.001, 'literature' with a P-Value of 0.004, 'Other cultural expressions (music, drama, art)' with a P-Value of 0.01, and 'values and beliefs' with a P-Value of 0.009. The other 5 topics; 'history, geography, political system', 'different ethnic and social groups', 'daily life and routines, living conditions, food and drink, etc.', 'education, professional life', and 'international relations', have shown no statistically significant differences.



**Table 5: Results of the teachers' and learners views about the extent to which teachers deal with the Arab cultures**

To what extent teachers deal with Arab Cultures												
Items	Participants	Responses										P-Value
		I/My Teacher Deals with it Extensively		I/My Teacher Touches upon IT Once in a While		I/My Teacher Never Touches upon It		No Response		Total		
		Count	% of Total	Count	% of Total	Count	% of Total	Count	% of Total	Count	%	
Q1. History, geography, political system	Teachers	8	53.3	6	40.0	1	6.7	0	0.0	15	100.0	<b>0.08</b>
	Learners	25	27.8	40	44.4	25	27.8	0	0.0	90	100.0	
Q2. Different ethnic and social groups	Teachers	5	33.3	10	66.7	0	0.0	0	0.0	15	100.0	<b>0.053</b>
	Learners	19	21.1	45	50.0	26	28.9	0	0.0	90	100.0	
Q3. Daily life and routines, living conditions, food and drink etc.	Teachers	10	66.7	5	33.3	0	0.0	0	0.0	15	100.0	<b>0.1</b>
	Learners	35	38.9	47	52.2	7	7.8	1	1.1	90	100.0	
Q4. Youth culture	Teachers	3	20.0	11	73.3	1	6.7	0	0.0	15	100.0	<b>0.007</b>
	Learners	7	7.8	38	42.2	43	47.8	2	2.2	90	100.0	
Q5. Education, professional life	Teachers	3	20.0	11	73.3	1	6.7	0	0.0	15	100.0	<b>0.1</b>
	Learners	16	17.8	47	52.2	26	28.9	1	1.1	90	100.0	
Q6. Traditions, folklore, tourist attractions	Teachers	7	46.7	8	53.3	0	0.0	0	0.0	15	100.0	<b>0.001</b>
	Learners	13	14.4	44	48.9	33	36.7	0	0.0	90	100.0	
Q7. Literature	Teachers	6	40.0	8	53.3	1	6.7	0	0.0	15	100.0	<b>0.004</b>
	Learners	13	14.4	34	37.8	43	47.8	0	0.0	90	100.0	
Q8. Other cultural expressions (music, drama, art)	Teachers	8	53.3	7	46.7	0	0.0	0	0.0	15	100.0	<b>0.01</b>
	Learners	20	22.2	52	57.8	18	20.0	0	0.0	90	100.0	
Q9. Values and beliefs	Teachers	10	66.7	3	20.0	2	13.3	0	0.0	15	100.0	<b>0.009</b>
	Learners	25	27.8	52	57.8	13	14.4	0	0.0	90	100.0	
Q10. International relations, with students' own country and other countries	Teachers	5	33.3	7	46.7	2	13.3	1	6.7	15	100.0	<b>0.08</b>
	Learners	18	20.0	31	34.4	41	45.6	0	0.0	90	100.0	

The Interviews basically reflected the results of the questionnaires. Teachers said:

Teacher Five

“I do my best to refer to my Arabic culture daily. I correct their behavior when it contradicts with my culture.”

Teacher Four

“I use a lot of cultural aspects. I refer to different aspects during one class.”

Learners also said:

Learner Six (1<sup>st</sup> year Arabic)

“He doesn't refer to cultural aspects very often. The teacher refers to the different parts of his country and to the differences in dialects between his country and other dialects. But in terms of history and other cultural aspects, not frequently.”

Learner Ten (2<sup>nd</sup> year Arabic)

“He refers to them every day. It shows his passion for Arabic.”

Learner Sixteen (2<sup>nd</sup> year Arabic)

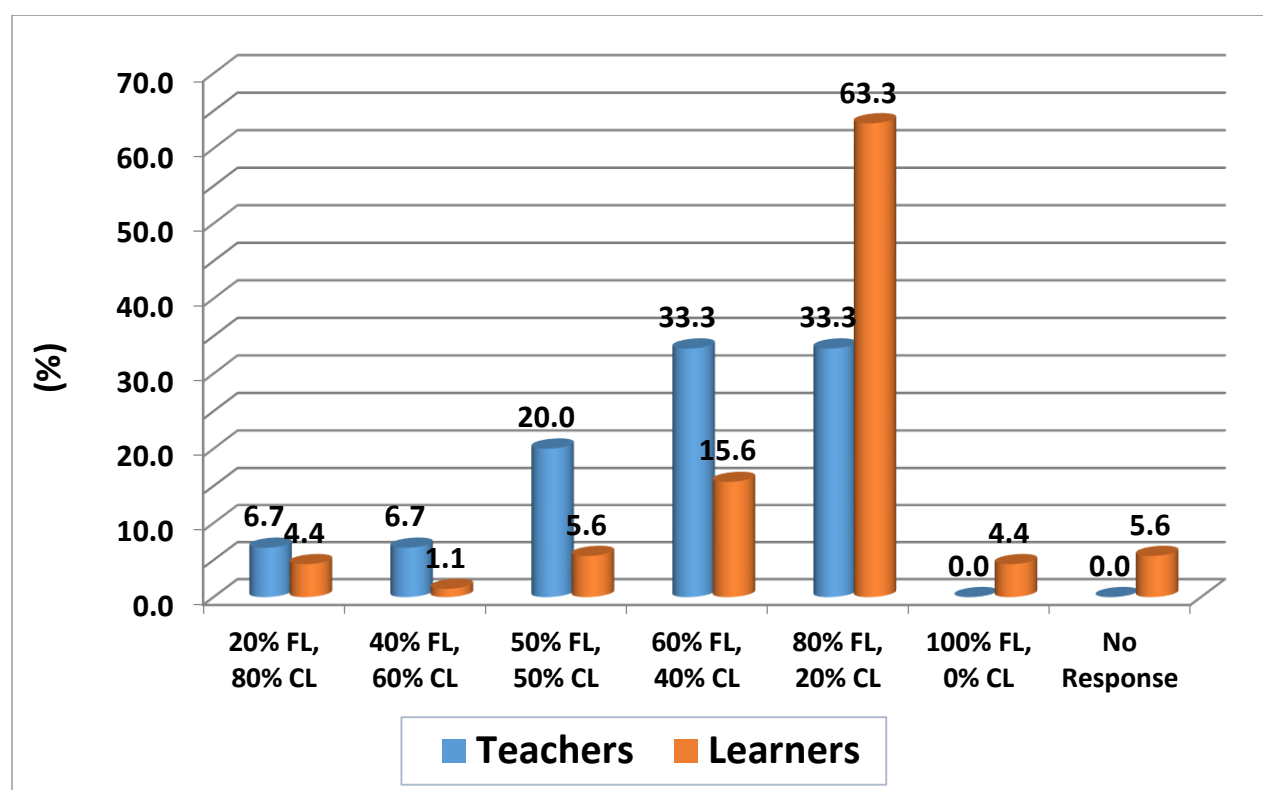
“Not that much; we mainly do grammar!”

#### **2.5.1.6 Distribution of Language Teaching/Learning and Culture Teaching/Learning**

The aim of this section is investigate the teachers' and the learners' view about the percentage of the class time spent in teaching/learning language as opposed to teaching/learning culture. Although it would be hard to find a dividing line between language and culture activities, participants were asked to give an overall estimation based on their opinion.

Participants were given the following choices: 20% language teaching–80% culture teaching; 40% language teaching–60% culture teaching; 50% language teaching–50% culture teaching; 60% language teaching–40% culture teaching; 80% language teaching–20% culture teaching; and 100% language teaching–0% culture teaching. Table 6 below shows the teachers' and learners' responses on those choices:

Figure 5: Results of the teachers' and learners' views about the distribution of language teaching/learning and culture teaching/learning



The results show that 53.3% of the teachers believe that they teach culture 40%-50% of the class time while only 21.2% of the learners believe the same. Conversely, 63.3% of the learners think that their teachers invest only 20% of the class time in teaching culture and only 33.3% of the teachers believe the same.

The outcome responses for both teachers and learners were tested for normality, outliers, and homogeneity of variance. The tests indicated the data were not normally distributed, outliers were present in the datasets, and the datasets have closely similar variances. The datasets were transformed using the arcsine trigonometric function to attain normality to fulfill the requirements for conducting a classical Analysis of Variance (ANOVA). However, even after transformation, the same tests showed the normality requirement was not met.

Alternatively, we applied bootstrapping techniques for conducting the ANOVA (Mooney & Duval, 1993) with at least 5000 iterations, where response in percent was the dependent variable and subjects (Teachers and Learners) were the independent variables. Table 6 below shows the P-value for each of the bootstrapping ANOVA tests with the region for rejecting the null hypothesis set at 5%. The null hypothesis stated there is no significance difference between the means of responses for the teachers and the learners for the language and culture responses.

Statistic	Language		Culture	
	Teachers	Learners	Teachers	Learners
No. of Observations	15	85	15	85
Arithmetic Mean (%)	60.67	72.59	39.33	27.41
Standard Deviations (%)	17.51	16.56	17.51	16.56
<b>p-value</b>	<b>0.01234</b>		<b>0.01234</b>	

However, since the P-Value of 0.0123 is less than 0.05, we reject the null hypothesis and we conclude that there is a statistically significant difference between the responses of the teachers and the responses of the learners for both language and culture.

The gap between the responses of the participants is remarkable. The teachers believe that they invest more time in teaching culture, but the majority of the learners indicated that their teachers spend much less time in teaching culture. The textbooks used in class do not give much guidance on how to integrate culture and the enriching cultural materials that the teachers bring to class are personal preferences and are dealt with on an ad hoc basis.

In the interviews, teachers were asked about their distribution of their teaching time between culture and language. The excerpts below show some of their views:

#### Teacher One

“Classroom is objective oriented. You do not really say that today I will do 38% culture and 62% language. Usually it doesn't go this way. I do culture wherever I find it appropriate, and wherever I find it fit in the context that I am teaching. Roughly 30% culture and 70% language.”

#### Teacher Two

“About 40% culture and 60% language.”

#### Teacher Three

“I kind of roughly estimated between 30% culture and 70% language.”

As for the learners' interviews, I asked them about their distribution of culture and language and whether they would like to see more culture in their classes. The following excerpts demonstrate some of their views:

#### Learner Nine (2<sup>nd</sup> year Arabic)

“Twenty percent culture and 80% language. I would always love to see more but it is a question of practicality especially knowing the fact that we only have 50 minutes each class.”

Learner Eleven (2<sup>nd</sup> year Arabic)

“Only 5-10 % culture. It is usually not in the structured time period. I would prefer more but I understand the time limitation. Having longer than 50 minute classes would make it easier to have more culture.”

Learner Twelve (2<sup>nd</sup> year Arabic)

“It’s more than 10% but definitely less than 20%. I would want to have more, but I feel that's a different class. “

Learner Fifteen (1<sup>st</sup> year Arabic)

“30 percent culture and 70 % language which is a good balance for class time.”

Teaching language as culture requires a full integration of culture in the classroom. When culture is introduced occasionally based on the availability of extra time to teach it, learners will deal with it as extra activity to enjoy the remaining time of the class or they will not take it seriously because it will not be included in the grading system. The shift to integrating culture in the classroom encompasses incorporating culture in all language skills as well as the discussion, activities, assignments, and assessment.

## 2.5.2 Challenges in teaching/learning culture

In the interviews and in the class visits conducted in this study, it was also obvious that the teachers were eager to integrate culture whenever they had the chance and that the learners

were enthusiastic to learn more about Arabs and their cultures. The shift in teaching culture from information to a more tangible product (Byram, 2002) was present in the interviews and in their classrooms. However, it was also obvious that the teachers and the learners faced many challenges in understanding, interpreting, practicing and integrating culture in their classrooms. In the interviews, the teachers and the learners were asked about the challenges that face them in integrating culture in their classes. Participants pointed to the lack of time as the main obstacle facing integrating culture in their classroom. The teachers and the learners also agreed that there are restrictions from the curriculum in which they are obliged to finish a number of chapters by the end of the semester and, therefore, integrating language and culture would be difficult. Lack of time and curriculum restrictions challenges conform to the challenges that were highlighted in Castro et al. (2004) study discussed in the literature review of this study.

The teachers reported deficiency in their knowledge of how to use technology and how to integrate culture in their classroom. Teacher also found it challenging to teach varying levels of learners in the same class. Some of the learners, on the other hand, reported their lack of interest in learning culture because Arabic is a hard language and they would rather focus on language than on culture and because culture doesn't count in their overall grade in the class. The challenges presented above were also noticeable in the class visits. The teachers had difficulty in finding the time to execute cultural activities and focused more on language and the textbook. The learners also wanted to spend more time on cultural activities, but they wanted more language so they can be ready for their tests. In addition, the lack of suitable resources forced the teachers to come up with unplanned activities at the end of the class as a "treat" (Luk, 2012, p. 8) or a reward to the learners. In general, the challenges that the teachers and the learners reported in the interviews were similar to the ones that the researcher reported in the class visits.

Below are excerpts taken from the interviews with the teachers and the learners.

Teacher Two summarized the challenges that face Arabic teachers in particular:

“Textbooks do not deal with culture and there are not enough websites and books that focus a lot on culture. Also, there are not enough financial resources to take your students to a café or on an excursion or invite them to the community of the language you are teaching. Teaching culture is not that easy; being a native speaker doesn’t mean that you know how to teach it. There is also lack of teacher training in culture. Sometimes you want to teach it, but do not know how to.”

Teacher Three brought up technology as a potential challenge:

“There is a lot of things that you can do with technology but you as a teacher need to learn how to use it and you have to be ready to have a backup plan because technology might fail on you.”

Teacher One believes that time is the major problem in integrating culture:

“Time is a problem to integrate as much as you want to in your lessons because the culture activities are usually open-ended and they take more time than you intend.”

As for learners, they also reported other challenges that hinder them from learning Arab cultures.

Learner Thirteen (2nd year Arabic)

“It is a challenge to learn five chapters and add more culture to it. Also, being exposed to the culture in general for 10-15 minutes in the class and then go out outside the class and you are surrounded by college life which is not typical Arab life.”



Learner Ten (3<sup>rd</sup> year Arabic) pointed out that openness is the main challenge that face Arabic learners:

“It is important to allow our minds to be more open. For example, marrying cousin in the Arab culture is something that could happen every day. But because it is a different belief we do not accept it and that makes learning the other culture hard and challenging.”

Learner Eight addressed the issue of assessing cultural competence as opposed to activities that are graded in class.

“It is very difficult to quantitatively assess how much knowledge a person has. It is not like you can be tested on these things. Students might not find it useful to spend time learning culture because they need to get a good grade, you know. They focus more on the actual grading and testing and reading and all of that stuff.”

Learner Seven

“Arabic is hard, more time should be given to language.”

Integrating culture in Arabic classes requires strategic planning that takes into consideration overcoming the obstacles described by the teachers and the learners. It requires many changes in the curricula that prioritize teaching language as culture. It requires developing or adopting suitable textbook and enriching materials. It also requires providing the teachers and the learners with access to computers, the Internet, software, and training sessions for the use of technology. Finally, teaching language as culture requires extensive training for teachers on how to be a successful interculturally competent teacher.

### 2.5.3 Notes on Class visits

The researcher visited two of the Arabic courses representing two different levels; beginner first-year Arabic and advanced third-year Arabic. The visits were for 5 days for 50 minutes each. Class visits took place later in the semester during the 9<sup>th</sup> week of classes in the fall semester of the academic year 2013-2014, which gave the first year learners some time to get used to the teacher, the Arabic language, and Arab cultures. The first four days were dedicated to Modern Standard Arabic and the fifth day was for the Levantine dialect for the first year learners and Egyptian Arabic for the third year learners. Many of the first-year Arabic class learners were only exposed to Arabic for those 9 weeks. Others were either heritage learners who might have visited an Arab country or have taken Arabic in different universities and colleges. During the visits, the classes were audio-recorded and extensive notes were taken by the researcher. In general, both classes were oriented around the textbook. In the visit to the first year Arabic class, the unit was titled 'how to memorize all the names'. The unit was divided into dialect, culture, listening, grammar, and dialogue. The culture section was about food in the Arab world. In this section, the teacher used the Internet to show some of the meals, recipes, and other websites on how to make such food. After that, the teacher divided the class into pairs then asked them to look at a restaurant menu in the book and choose three favorite dishes and discuss them. Learners were asked to prepare themselves to present their work to the class. The other sections mainly dealt with the linguistic aspect and discussed grammar and vocabulary. The teacher talked about his experience in his Arab county. He also tried to engage the learners in the discussion about the various meals and food traditions in the Arab world compared to America.

The classroom atmosphere was very comfortable for the learners and the learners were engaged in the activities. On dialect day, the teachers and the learners talked about the various

topics discussed in the last two months in preparation for group presentations. The topics were culture-knowledge oriented and included family, hobbies, directions, daily schedule, etc.

During the visits to the third year Arabic class, the unit was titled ‘the Arabic language’. The topic was interesting to the students and culture was present in many of the activities. The teacher used supplementary material related to the importance of the Arabic language in the Arab world and in the world in general. He also designed activities that required pair work and group work. The teacher talked about his experience during his stay in his Arab country. He used comparison to discuss Arab culture as opposed to American culture. The learners asked cultural questions related to history, life in the Arab world, the dialects, etc. The class had students at various levels and, therefore, the discussions varied. Dialect day presented more culture including songs and video clips.

The two experienced teachers tried to integrate culture as much as they could. The learners also were receptive to the cultural activities and pair and group work. They were engaged and they seemed to enjoy discussing culture. The times that the teachers used culture were limited, however. The teaching process focused more on the textbook linguistics skills. In the first-year Arabic class, the textbook activities were the guide for work in class and homework assignments. In the third-year Arabic class, the teacher supplemented the textbook with many handouts and activities from outside the class. The supplementary material, however, was partly related to culture and focused more on language. In general, the in-class activities and discussions conform to what the teachers and learners reported in the interviews.

## 2.6 Discussion

This study answered the research questions in that it first showed the teachers’ and the learners’ perspectives about teaching and learning culture in foreign language in regard to the

following 6 sections of the study: the role of culture in Arabic language teaching and learning, ranking of nine possible culture-teaching and learning objectives in order of importance, practicing cultural activities in Arabic classrooms, familiarity with Arab culture(s), the extent to which teachers deal with Arab cultures, and the distribution of language teaching/learning and culture teaching/learning. This study also answered the second question by showing the statistically significance difference between the responses of the teachers and the learners. Researchers in this topic used various instruments to understand how teachers, not learners, view teaching culture in foreign language. This study investigates how teachers view teaching culture and includes language learners as the most important partner in language teaching and learning process. Looking at the teachers' and the learners' perspectives guarantees that we are viewing the whole picture and that we are fair in judging and claiming generalizations and results.

The results of the first section of the study that discussed the participants' opinion about the role of culture in teaching and learning a foreign language show that the teachers and the learners are fully aware of the importance of integrating culture. Fourteen out of the 15 questions in the first section showed no statistically significant differences between participants' responses. It is very encouraging that the participants believe that learning culture is as important as learning language and that language and culture can be integrated since culture doesn't hinder linguistic progress. It is also positive that the participants agree that more cultural dimension in classroom should be expanded and that knowing more culture would enhance students' understanding of their own cultural identity. Moreover, the participants' affirmative belief that culture should be introduced to all levels of language learning because it develops their cultural awareness and because it motivates the learners to learn shows that the shift from focusing on language only to focusing on language-and-culture is taking place. This positive view of the

important role of culture in learning foreign language skills contradicts with the view of Krashen (1982), who claims that learning culture should not be addressed and taught inside the classroom. On the contrary, the results of this section conforms to various studies that address the role of culture, specifically, Gonen & Saglam (2012); Sercu (2006); Sercu (2005); Sercu et al. (2005); Byram, (1997); and Kramersch (1995).

In regard to the teachers' and learners' ranking of culture teaching and learning objectives, results showed no statistically significant difference between the participants' responses. Hence, the teachers ranked attitudes of openness and tolerance to other cultures in the attitudinal dimension higher than the learners did, which shows the awareness of the teachers of the importance of this particular dimension in achieving intercultural competence (Byram, 2005). While the attitudinal dimension ranked first for teachers in this study, the attitudinal dimension ranked fourth in other studies (Sercu, 2005; Gonen & Saglam, 2012). This shows the teachers' awareness and understanding of the importance of equipping learners with attitudes of openness and tolerance of other cultures. Teacher One expressed this awareness in the interview as follows:

“...so this kind of openness makes you realize that there are other ways of doing things that you might not necessarily agree with but they are there anyways. This kind of openness will definitely help in understanding people around you especially people of different background.”

However, teacher's ranking of the most important cultural teaching objectives in this study contradicts with the results of the studies by Gonen & Saglam (2012) and Sercu (2005) in which providing information about daily life and routines in the knowledge dimension were ranked as the most important cultural objective.

Although teachers chose the knowledge and the attitudinal dimension objectives as their most important objectives on the one hand and learners chose the knowledge dimension objectives as their most important objectives, on the other hand, we can clearly notice that learners did not favor the attitudinal dimension which is related to promoting attitudes of openness and tolerance to other cultures and peoples –this objective ranked seventh for the learners.

More than half of the questions, 8 out of 15, in the section about practicing cultural activities in the Arabic classrooms showed statistically significant differences. The questions that showed discrepancy between the responses of the teachers and the learners are related to representing Arab cultures in the classroom and in the media, stereotypes of Arabs, and asking learners to talk about their own culture in Arabic. These kinds of activities are important topics to be addressed and practiced in the classroom for the understanding of culture to take place. Lack of agreement between the responses of the teachers and the learners and practicing such issues less frequently in the classroom could lead to misunderstanding and misinterpreting the peculiarity, depth and diversity of Arab cultures. However, teachers and learners agreed on a number of issues addressed in this section. Teachers and learners agreed that the teachers tell their learners what they hear about the Arab countries, they tell them what they find fascinating or strange about the Arab cultures, that the teachers ask their learners to independently explore an aspect of the Arab cultures, and that they ask them to think about what it would be like to live in the Arab cultures. Teachers and learners also agreed, and this was also clear during the interviews with the teachers and learners as well as during class visits, that various technological tools are used in the classroom to illustrate many aspects of Arab cultures.

In regard to the participants' familiarity with the Arab cultural aspects addressed in this study, the teachers are generally familiar with the cultural aspects because most of them (80%) are Arabs. The learners, however, were either fairly familiar or not familiar with these aspects. The natural learning process in this case is that the teachers embody their familiarity with their own culture in their classes by designing activities that showcase their familiarity. The Arabic language and Arabic cultures were very new to many of the learners in the study since 35% of the learners were taking Arabic for the first time and only 12% of the learners were heritage learners. It should be noted here that this disparity is natural and was expected in the study. Dealing with cultural aspects inside the class did, however, show a gap between the opinions of the teachers and those of the learners. In some of the aspects, the teachers and the learners agreed that the class deals with some basic cultural aspects: history, geography, and political systems; social groups; daily life, routines, and food; education and professional life; and international relations. However, the majority of the teachers claimed that they deal with the cultural aspects either 'extensively' or 'once in a while', while the majority of the learners claim that their teachers deal with the cultural aspects either 'once in a while' or 'never'. Five out of the 10 cultural aspects presented to the participants in the questionnaire showed statistically significant differences. The five cultural aspects mainly address youth culture; traditions, folklore and tourist attractions; literature; cultural expressions; and values and beliefs. This imbalance between both opinions raises concerns, as one would think that the teachers' familiarity with aspects of culture would be an asset for them to utilize in designing and conducting stimulating activities for their learners.

In regard to the time spent in class in teaching language as opposed to teaching culture, more than half of the teachers claimed that they use 50%-60% of the class time for teaching

culture. Nonetheless, more than 60% of the learners claimed that their teachers only spend 20% of class time in teaching culture. Again, the imbalance in the participants' responses requires more open communication between the teachers and their learners on their understanding of teaching/learning culture and how to establish a common ground that leads to language and culture integration. One explanation of the ambivalence here is that the teachers and the learners face many challenges such as lack of time, technology, resources, etc., which could be the reason behind some of the differences in the teachers' and learners' views.

The study has revealed ambivalences between the views of the teachers and the learners which lead to statistically significant differences between the responses of the teachers and the learners. The question that arises here is why such a gap exists. Some of the reasons would be that the way teachers view and define culture is different from the way learners see it. For the teachers, discussing a grammatical point and linking it with a specific cultural aspect might be considered as teaching culture. For the learners, on the other hand, if it doesn't say culture on the top of the page or if the teacher doesn't explicitly say that this lesson is about culture, then it might not be considered as teaching culture. The lack of transparency and clarity in addressing culture might have caused this difference in their views. In addition, the study shows that teachers and learners rank cultural objectives differently. For the teachers, openness and tolerance to the people from the Arab cultures was an important objective in teaching culture. As for the learners, basic knowledge and behavioral skills were more important to them than openness. The difference in prioritizing cultural objectives might have contributed in widening the gap between the responses of the teachers and the learners. Also, 40% of the teachers have five years of experience or less and their responses, therefore, might have been affected by their limited experiences. A final explanation to the existence of a gap between the responses of the



teachers and the learners is that the teachers might have answered what they thought they should do and not what they actually do in their classes. Whatever the reasons behind these discrepancies, we as researchers and teachers should benefit from the results of this study and build on it when we teach our next class or design our next study.

This study has provided the results of an investigation of how teachers and learners view teaching and learning culture in Arabic classes. Many implications for teaching Arabic can be postulated here.

Teaching Arabic should adopt the concept of “teaching language as culture” (Kramersch, 1995, p. 83) in which culture is the doorway to understand, interpret, reflect on, and practice language. Teachers, and administrators, need to strategically plan the curriculum within which culture is at the core of the teaching process. The shift to teaching language as culture has started and Arabic teachers should take advantage of this trend, as well as use the results of this study, to catch up.

Understanding the role of culture by the teachers and the learners is not a guarantee that culture learning will take place. Arabic teachers and learners need to understand the role of culture and put this understanding into practice; Arabic teachers should integrate culture in each and every segment of their teaching and Arabic learners should be open and tolerant to the new culture(s). A further step by the teachers can be taken in which they not only highlight the role of culture in learning Arabic, but they also explicitly explain to their learners how culture will be integrated in their classes. This can be written in the syllabus and discussed in class or it can be highlighted in the objectives of each unit or chapter and discussed at the beginning of that unit or chapter.

As this study shows, teachers and learners don't see or understand the meaning of culture the same way. To come to a consensus on this issue, teachers and learners need to agree on what culture is. Teachers can define culture in the way they understand it and based on the vision and policies of the educational institution they are part of. Teachers, then, should consult with their learners about their understanding and definition of culture. As a result, teachers and learners would be able to understand each other's perspectives and views.

Teachers need to be very clear in their explanation of the cultural objectives for their classes. As this study showed, teachers believe that attitudinal and knowledge dimensions rank high in the cultural objectives, while learners' priorities are knowledge and behavioral dimensions. Understanding where teachers and learners come from in regard to objectives helps material designers and decision makers, including teachers, take into account the needs and preferences of the learners. The lack of transparency in addressing the objectives of teaching cultural aspects might lead to failure in achieving those objectives.

Teachers' familiarity with Arab cultural aspects is something and dealing with such aspects is something else. Teachers should take advantage of their knowledge about the Arab literature, daily life, social norms, youth culture, education, etc. and design activities and assignments based on this familiarity.

Another implication for Arabic teachers is that although it would be hard to distinguish or draw a line between the class time designated for language and for culture, teachers should aim at fully integrating culture in language classes (50% language and 50% culture) and teach language as culture.

In order to guarantee that teaching language as culture takes place, educational institutions need to prepare their teachers for this phase. Tailored training program for teachers ought to be conducted so teachers know how to integrate culture in their language teaching. Training teachers would help learners clearly understand the cultural aspects and activities they are practicing.

This study diagnosed many challenges that are facing the teachers and the learners. The educational institutions that provide Arabic teaching should work hard collaboratively with stakeholders to meet those challenges. In this context three ideas can be worked on: integrating culture in language curricula, providing teacher training in teaching culture, and developing culturally-oriented materials based on the 'teaching language as culture' concept. The lack of culturally-oriented textbooks is not an excuse to exclude culture from our Arabic classes. Arabic teachers can, and should be, creative in choosing the right external material, and the assigned textbooks, for the right context. If educational institutions do not provide enough training, Arabic teachers should take charge and keep trying to integrate culture in their classes as much as they can. The learners in this study claimed that in learning Arabic, they do not get the chance to reflect on their own culture. Arabic teachers should take advantage of the results of this study and work on activating their learners' schemata about the topics presented in class so they can relate and, therefore, reflect on the target language and culture with ease and passion, which will bring a new perspective to the learners' own culture.

Lack of studies on learners' perspectives was a challenge for this study, as it was not possible to compare and contrast the results of this study with other studies. Also, many of the 15 teachers who participated in this study were Teaching Assistants (TAs) who might have not had enough teaching experience and, therefore, might have not been able to give precise answers to

the questions in the questionnaires. A third challenge in this study is that the questionnaires were adopted from two other studies, which were not designed for teaching Arabic. Although changes were made on the questionnaires to fit the Arabic context, it would have been more suitable to design the questionnaires that tackle the particularities of Arabic language and its cultures.

Further research can address similar topics investigated in this study so results can be compared and implications can be drawn. Other future research can investigate in-depth the reasons behind the disparity in the participants' responses in the sections that discussed culture including: dealing with cultural aspects and practicing cultural activities in the classroom, culture teaching objectives, and distribution of class time between language teaching/learning and culture teaching/learning, if such disparities arose in similar studies.

## **2.7 Conclusion**

This study reports the results of the investigation of the perspectives of 15 teachers and 90 learners of teaching and learning culture in the Arabic environment. The findings showed that teachers and learners are aware of the significant role that culture plays in foreign language teaching and learning. The study, however, reveals ambivalence about the teachers' and the learners' familiarity with culture and the extent to which they deal with various cultural aspects; practice cultural activities in the classroom; ranking of culture teaching/learning objectives; and distributing the time spent in teaching/learning language vs. culture. The study also presents the challenges that are facing learners in integrating culture in their classes and the implications of the research for teaching Arabic.

## CHAPTER 3: TEACHING CULTURE IN ARABIC: LEARNERS' AFFECT SURROUNDING THE USE OF BLENDED LEARNING

### 3.1 Abstract

Blended learning –combining face-to-face (F2F) and online learning/teaching environments– is viewed to be the most important recent advancement in education (Thorne, 2003). This study investigated the perspectives of 17 learners of Arabic at the School of Middle Eastern and North African Studies (MENAS) at the University of Arizona about the effectiveness of their Spoken Levantine Arabic class that was offered in a blended setting–face-to-face and online setting. Using a pre- and a post-questionnaires with open and closed ended questions, the study looked at the learners' satisfaction of the setting, modality preference, the integration of technology, interaction, resources, learning about culture, and class work and reflections.

Results show that the learners were highly satisfied, had enjoyed doing online activities and had more interaction with their teacher and peers. They also indicated that technology tools were helpful and gave them access to resources and information. Also, the learners posited that the blended learning had helped them learn more about the Arab and the Levantine cultures. In running ANOVA on the responses of the learners, the interaction factor was the only one to show statistically significant differences in the pre-and the post-questionnaire.

### 3.2 Introduction

E-learning has expanded rapidly and gained popularity in higher education in the last twenty years (Rovai & Jordan, 2004; Thorne, 2003; Aycock, Garnham & Kaleta, 2002).

According to Rovai and Jordan (2004), e-learning provides learning opportunities for those who work full time or those who live in an area without access to education like other areas.

However, e-learning alone or the traditional way of learning alone might not be the most effective learning environment for many learners and teachers in language pedagogy. Therefore, combining two learning approaches –what is known as blended learning –might provide more options and lead to better understanding of the learning process.

This study aims at investigating the effectiveness of blended language setting in teaching spoken Arabic course as a case study. The particularity of this study comes from the fact that it investigated the spoken language, which is believed to be the hardest skill to assess, in a blended setting, which is new to the department that offered the course and to many of the learners in the study.

### **3.3 Literature Review:**

#### **3.3.1 What is ‘Blended’?**

In education, blended learning came out of a need for educators to find a ‘middle ground’ between face-to-face classrooms and distance learning (Welker & Berardino, 2005). Blended Learning refers to a combination of F2F (physical) and online (virtual) learning environments (Stacey & Gerbic, 2009) or “face-to-face instructions with computer-mediated instruction” (Graham, 2006, p. 5). Mortera-Gutierrez (2006) defines blended learning as “a combination with computer technology and internet components with traditional F2F teaching forms and e-learning formats” (p. 314). Wikipedia (2012) defines blended learning as combining different learning approaches. Such approaches can be combining face-to face interaction with computer-mediated interactions. Garrison and Vaughan (2008) view blended learning as “the thoughtful fusion of face-to-face oral communication and online learning experiences” (p.5). They also look at blended learning as a tool to change the process of teaching and learning: “a fundamental redesign that transforms the structure of, and approach to, teaching and learning” (p. 5).

The concept ‘blended’ has other terms that are associated with it such as ‘hybrid’, ‘mixed’, and ‘web-enhanced.’ Some researchers set definitions to the terms based on the percentage of the use of online technology. Smith & Kurthen (2007) proposed a taxonomy of terms classifies blended learning as follows:

<b>Term</b>	<b>Definition</b>
Web-enhanced	Subjects that make use of a minimal amount of online materials, such as posting a syllabus and course announcements
Blended	Subjects that utilize some significant online activities in otherwise F2F learning, but less than 45%
Hybrid	Subjects in which online activities replace 45% to 80% of F2F class meetings
Fully online	Subjects in which 80% or more of learning materials is conducted online

Graham and Dziuban (2008), however, believe that enforcing the set percentage of the use of online technologies was unhelpful and suggest the use of the terms ‘hybrid’ and ‘blended’ as synonyms. The Sloan Consortium (see Allen, Seaman & Garrett, 2007) uses the set percentage and refers to blended education as a course that blends F2F and on-line delivery where 30–79% of content is delivered on-line. Goertler (2011) states that the online portion of the course should be between 30%-90%.

### 3.3.2 The Advantages

This section discusses research in teachers' and students' perceptions of Blended Learning and Blended Language Learning, showing the advantages of integrating technology and online teaching and learning with the traditional F2F setting.

A growing research in blended learning shows that teachers who taught blended courses indicated that their experience was very positive (Aycock et al., 2002; Dziuban & Moskal, 2001). Aycock et al. (2002) conducted a study at five campuses of the University of Wisconsin where seventeen teachers representing various disciplines participated in transforming their traditional, F2F courses into blended courses. Feedback from the teachers in this study showed their readiness to teach the course again. They also recommended the blended setting to other teachers. Aycock et al. (2002) summarize the lessons learned from this study and provide teachers' explanation of why they were satisfied with this teaching approach. Although teachers initially showed concerns that blended teaching would make them less connected with their students because of the less F2F meetings, Aycock et al.'s (2002) study reflected that blended learning assisted in providing a dialogic learning and teaching environment, which facilitated relationship building, trust, and reciprocity in the classroom space.

A study by Dziuban & Moskal (2001) at the University of Central Florida supported these comments and teachers indicated that there were more frequent interaction with their students in blended courses. They also pointed out that the nature of the interaction was of a higher quality than the interaction that usually takes place in the F2F classes. Blended courses encourage teachers and students to try to develop new online methods of engagement, which then transfer to the F2F session and increase interaction (Aycock et al., 2002). Blended teaching also created an engaging environment to the degree that teachers who were involved in blended



teaching observed that their students did better work in writing, learning course material, understanding various concepts and applying those concepts compared to their peers in the traditional classes (Aycock et al., 2002). Teachers were also better able to accomplish course objectives in the blended teaching than in the traditional class due to the flexibility of the blended teaching. Blended teaching encourages teachers' continuous improvement because they are exposed to new learning/teaching approaches and new tools of educational technology. At the University of Central Florida, using technology was one of the outcomes that teachers liked most about blended teaching (Dziuban & Moskal, 2001).

In their study, Ellis, Steed and Applebee (2006) also examined the relationships between teachers' conceptions of blended learning, blended teaching and association with methods to design, and particularly the integration of online and F2F environments to produce quality learning. In their interviews with 22 teachers from an Australian research university, they asked the following question: 'What is blended teaching?' They were able to identify four conceptions of blended teaching, which were categorized from the most consistent conceptions of blended learning to the most fragmented, teacher-dominant perspectives: "Helping students to develop and apply new concepts, developing students' understanding through aligning media to the learning outcomes, providing students with information, and replacing part of the teacher's responsibility" (2006, p. 324-26). The first two conceptions were well integrated. They represent teachers' beliefs on the benefit of using technology and blended teaching as a way to help learners understand and apply learning outcomes in contextualized settings. The second two conceptions were fragmented. They detached the experience of blended setting and the use of technology from the intended learning outcomes of the blended course. This study shows how different teachers perceive blended teaching and that those who understand the role it plays value

its benefits and connect it with real life situations. On the other hand, the fragmented perceptions of teachers of this tool show how important it is to conduct more research and more studies in order to understand teachers' perceptions and beliefs about blended teaching. Moreover this discrepancy in teachers' perceptions pinpoints the role of program directors in bridging the gap and in creating more cohesive idea of blended learning and its status in the institution.

Gallini and Barron (2002) conducted a survey about instructors' and students' perceptions of web infused courses looking at various themes such as computer competency, pedagogical beliefs, perceived degree of student/instructor interaction among others and found that the 10 first-time teachers became more student-centered online and their relations with students changed as they gave them more control and adopted more facilitative roles. Similarly, students identified increased chances to interact with their instructors and colleagues compared to their other F2F courses that lack online technology. Most of the students thought that online learning was beneficial in meeting course objectives and that it was worth the effort, especially when instructions are clear.

Research in blended language learning, on the other hand, has started in 1997 when Adair-Hauck, Willingham-Mclain, & Young (2000) conducted a study to test the effectiveness of Technology-Enhanced Language Learning (TELL) into a French course at a college level (Young, 2008). In their study, Adair-Hauck et al (2000) had 33 students and were divided into a treatment group and a control group. The treatment group met with the instructor four days a week and one of the days was designed to use TELL activities outside the classroom. The control group met with the same instructor four days a week. Both groups had the same textbook and the same supplementary materials. The study investigated the students' performance in listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills as well as their cultural knowledge. Results show that both

groups had the equal results in listening and speaking, but the treatment group outperformed the control group in reading and writing.

Other studies have shown substantial improvement in using blended language learning. Jia, Chen, Ding & Ruan (2012) conducted a study assessing 47 Chinese middle-school-junior students' vocabulary performance in an English class using a customized vocabulary assessment system in addition to student interview and student survey. A web-based system was integrated in the experiment class one hour a week for one semester using Moodle web-based Course Management System. The results of the experiment showed that this class had improved gradually in vocabulary acquisition and ordinary tests. The class also placed first in the semester final examination among sixteen English classes after being in the eighth place in a previous semester without the integration of technology.

Research also shows good results in blended modes that integrate media –such as videos and YouTube –and Web 2.0 –such as Facebook, Wiki, and Blog –in teaching languages. Alm (2008) describes a case study of 17 German intermediate language class at a New Zealand university in which the following were integrated: A German television soap opera, where students watched the soap opera on YouTube and practiced some activities; a Blog, where students were able to discuss the soap opera; a Wiki, where students collaboratively developed a script of a similar soap opera; and finally a production, publishing and sharing of a YouTube soap opera. In answering questions about their experience in the class, students responded positively to two surveys showing interest, motivation, enjoyment, positive group experience, and a “feeling of autonomy and achievement” (p. 50). Although the study didn't point out any linguistic improvement, the students' affective variables were positively influenced and the students liked the activities.

Using what he calls 'Facebook-integrated blended learning model' with 23 college students majoring in English at a Taiwanese university, Shih (2011, p. 833) investigated the effect of using Facebook and peer evaluation in English writing class in a blended setting. Shih used pre-tests and post-tests, survey questionnaire, in-depth student interview, and instructor's self-reflection as research instruments to test his model. Results showed that students made significant advancement in their English writing post-tests and that the peer assessment enhanced students' ability to observe, review and give feedback to their peers about their writing and look in-depth into their own writing. The survey questionnaire showed that students were able to develop their English writing skills including grammar, content, and spelling. The results of the interview indicated that the students favored and were very satisfied with the blended learning that included using Facebook and peer assessment.

As we can see from the above studies, blended language learning can be effective and provides instruction that is the best of both the F2F and online worlds.

### **3.3.3 The Challenges**

This promising success carries with it many challenges that face teachers in blended teaching such as time commitment, absence of support for course design, difficulty of new teaching and technology skills, and many other risks related to blended teaching (Voos, 2003; Dziuban & Moskal, 2001; Graham & Kaleta, 2002). The main challenge to teachers in blended teaching is the time commitment needed to design and deliver the blended course. Johnson (2002) taught a blended business and professional communication course at the University of Wisconsin with a large enrollment and stated that designing such a course required two to three times the amount of times required to develop a F2F, traditional course. Graham & Kaleta (2002) consider re-designing a course a challenge “primarily because of time and effort required to

redesign the course, learn new teaching techniques, and acquire new technology skills.” Teachers who redesigned courses in blended format at the University of Wisconsin indicated that to guarantee successful design and delivery of blended teaching, teachers need support in redesigning the course and in developing teaching and technology skills. The kind of support needed was related to course objectives in online teaching as opposed to F2F course. Other teachers highlighted other kinds of needed support related to fostering online environment, helping in online discussions and forums, and handling students’ online problems (Aycock et al., 2002). Some of the risk factors of blended teaching included teachers’ fears of losing control of their students, evaluation of students, and how such courses will fit in the culture of the university (Voos, 2003; Dziuban & Moskal, 2001). According to Huang & Zhou (2006), an important challenge that faces students in blended learning is getting them to get used to new learning strategies different from the strategies they are used to in the F2F environment such as coping with the technology-enhanced settings, finding the motivation to study, participating in discussion boards, and submitting assignments on time.

Although Gallini and Barron’s (2002) study –mentioned above –showed advantages of using blended settings including the various use of tools and resources and that teachers and students felt more engaged with their blended course, the study also found that teachers’ use of online teaching was supplemental rather than actual blending and integration. Thus, “designing an effective Hybrid [blended] course and learning to teach in new ways involves significant pedagogical changes that require instructors to gain new skills and assume multiple roles” (Kaleta, Skibba & Joosten, 2006, p.114). This shows that although the integration of the two settings can be done, many skills and preparations need to be available to ensure that the design

and delivery of the course is pedagogically sound and achieves the course intended learning outcomes.

Another important challenge that has not been discussed much in blended language learning research is the role and nature of assessment in blended contexts. In general, designing the right assessment tools is crucial and integral for the success of any teaching/learning environment. However, designing assessment activities and executing them in blended language learning is more challenging due to the demanding nature of the blended mode. Assessment can and should be used as a central tool for learning (Amoraga-Piqueras, Comas-Quinn & Southgate, 2011) by showing the learner how preparing for the assessment, conducting the assessment, and benefiting from the feedback can help them develop their language skills (Duensing & Harper, 2011). In discussing the assessment challenge in blended language learning, the following key elements will be discussed briefly: summative and formative assessment, and validity and reliability.

Summative assessment is meant to test achievement at the end of a section or a module with a grade given to the student. Formative assessment, however, is a continuous process that diagnoses what has been successfully learned and what needs to be revised. Grades in the formative assessment are not dealt with rigidly and usually count for a small portion of the total grade. Designing assessment for blended language learning is challenging since the designer/teacher has to take into account the F2F mode and the online mode. This challenge can be met by first designing clear, well-made activities by using both types of assessments and, second, by providing good-quality feedback and “feed-forward,” guidance on how to reduce future gaps in students’ knowledge, understanding or skills, which both –feedback and feed-

forward –help students to identify and understand what works and reinforce it and how to address what does not work. (Amoraga-Piqueras, et al. 2011, p. 76).

When designing an assessment or transferring an existing one from traditional setting to blended, validity and reliability have to be achieved and the assessment should be clearly presented to the learners. Reece and Walker (2007, p. 331) describe reliability and validity in simple words: “While validity is concerned with getting the right assessment, reliability is concerned with getting the assessment right.” A test with validity succeeds in assessing what it is supposed to assess. For a test to be valid, it should assess what has been taught, should assess the material that students are aware of, should assess the skills that meet learner’s needs, and should take into account the blended setting (Duensing & Harper, 2011). A reliable assessment, on the other hand, “will be a consistent measure irrespective of when, where, and by whom it is applied” (Duensing & Harper, 2011, p. 65). Reliability also means that results of any test given to comparable students, in different locations and graded by different teachers at different times should give similar results (Duensing & Harper, 2011).

Available research in blended learning and blended language learning has left us with few important gaps that need to be addressed. The first gap is the lack of research in the assessment of blended language learning, especially in courses that teach the oral/spoken language. The second gap is the lack of research in culture learning in blended setting. The last gap is more specific to the Arabic language. Research in blended learning for Arabic barely exists which leaves Arabic out of the research mainstream. However, the situation opens a doorway for researchers to investigate the effectiveness of blended language learning in the Arabic context.

### 3.4 The Study

#### 3.4.1 Background

This case study investigated learners' affect regarding the use of blended learning setting to teach the Arabic language and Arabic cultures under the concept of teaching "language as culture" presented by Kramersch (Kramersch, 1995, p. 83). The study was conducted in the fall semester of 2013 with 17 learners who were enrolled in the Levantine Spoken Arabic class at the School of Middle Eastern and North African Studies (MENAS) at the University of Arizona. Spoken Levantine Arabic is the variety spoken in Jordan, Syria, Lebanon, and Palestine and is considered the lower-prestige variety compared to the Modern Standard Arabic which is considered the higher-prestige variety (Alosh, 1997; Ariew & Palmer, 2009; Ryding, 2006; Shiri, 2013). The researcher taught the beginning-level, three-credit spoken Levantine Arabic class in a blended learning setting where learners met once a week for 75 minutes instead of meeting twice a week for a total of 150 minutes. The blended learning setting was supported by the Online Education Project (OEP) run by the Office of Instruction and Assessment (OIA) at the University of Arizona. In this setting, the researcher developed 12 modules that simulate the spoken nature of the class using a variety of technology tools including BYKI ( Before You Know It) flashcard program, Eyejot (video mailing tool: [www.eyejot.com](http://www.eyejot.com)), Facebook (private page), Hypermedia lessons (Hypermedia is a hypertext multimedia tool), in addition to the Desire to Learn (D2L) Course Management System (CMS). In designing the course, the teachers gave more attention to the course assessment because the class addressed the spoken colloquial dialect in the Levantine region. Therefore, formative and summative assessments were integrated in the class and their assignments included producing short individual videos, group or pair skits,



video mailing, presentations, situational prompts, in addition to posting and commenting on the Facebook page created for the class.

In the first two weeks of classes, the learners received intensive training on class technology tools and were able to produce work using each tool. The study looked at learners' previous experiences with blended setting and their satisfaction with the current blended setting, modality preference, integration of technology, interaction among class stakeholders, resources, learning about the Arab and the Levantine cultures, and class work and reflections.

### 3.4.2 Research Questions

The current study sought to answer the following research questions:

- c. What are the affects surrounding the learners of the blended spoken Levantine Arabic class in regards to the following factors:
  - i. learners' satisfaction with blended setting
  - ii. modality preference
  - iii. the integration of technology tools
  - iv. interaction, resources
  - v. learning about culture
  - vi. class work and reflections?
- d. Are there any statistically significant differences between the learners' responses in the pre- and the post-questionnaires?

### 3.5 Methodology

#### 3.5.1 Participants

The participants of this study were 17 Arabic learners enrolled in the Levantine spoken Arabic class at MENAS at the University of Arizona. The learners were 10 males and 7 females. The ethnic background of the learners were: 7 white, 5 Hispanics/Latinos, 1 African American, 1 Asian, 1 African American/white, 1 Middle Eastern/Hispanic, and 1 other. The vast majority of the learners were undergraduates -95%- and their computer competence ranged from average to excellent as self-reported in the pre-questionnaire.

#### 3.5.2 Instruments

Pre- and post-questionnaires were used to collect data for this study. The questionnaires were based on a similar one by the Rochester Institute of Technology and a study by Starenko, Vignare & Humbert (2007). The pre- and post-questionnaires used in this study were generated and adapted to fit the purpose of this study

A graduate student volunteered to be the Research Assistant (RA) to help out in conducting the study with the researcher. The reason behind assigning an RA was to avoid any pressure on the learners because the researcher of the study was himself the teacher of the class in the study. The researcher met with the RA and explained to him the purpose of the study and briefed him about the instruments of the study, the methodology, and his role in executing the study. In the third week of classes, the RA visited the class while the researcher left the class so that he could talk to the learners freely and without any pressure from the researcher. The RA introduced the study and its goals to the learners. He explained that participation is voluntary and that there will be no penalty if any of them decided not to participate or decided to participate

then changed his/her mind and wanted to opt out. The researcher also explained that their participation or lack of participation was not going to affect their grade in this class and that they will not be rewarded if they chose to participate. The RA distributed the consent form asking learners to read it and to decide whether they wanted to participate or not. All of the learners in the class consented and then were provided with the pre-questionnaire to fill out in two days. The RA returned to class after two days and collected the filled-out pre-questionnaires. All pre-questionnaires were coded with a unique identifier and the names of participants were saved separately.

The pre-questionnaire consisted of questions about the learners' background followed by, closed questions and open-ended questions. The closed section asked questions about the learners' expectations regarding eight factors, namely: (1) background, (2) satisfaction, (3) preference (4) integration of technology tools, (5) interaction, (6) resources (7) learning about culture, and (8) class work and reflections. In the open ended part, learners were asked to share their previous experiences with blended learning, if they had any, and what their expectations were regarding what they would like or dislike about the blended setting and the kind of advice they expect to give to teachers and learners in a blended setting.

The post-questionnaire was distributed to the learners by the RA in week 14. The RA visited the class and the researcher left the class to give the learners the freedom to voluntarily participate in the post-questionnaire segment of the study. The RA reminded the learners of the study and its objectives, then distributed the post-questionnaire asking learners to fill them out in two days. All the 17 learners accepted to participate in this part of the study. The RA revisited the class after two days and collected the filled-out questionnaires and gave them to the

researcher afterwards. All post-questionnaires were coded with a unique identifier and the names of participants were saved separately.

The post-questionnaire consisted of closed questions and open-ended questions. The closed section asked questions about the learners' experiences regarding the same seven factors addressed in the pre-questionnaire, but focused on the learner's experiences rather than their expectations. In the open-ended part, learners were asked to share their experiences about the blended learning class and what they liked and disliked about it. They were also asked about the kind of advice they would give to the teacher of a blended class and learners new to blended classes.

### **3.5.3 Data Analysis Procedures**

Data was analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistical analyses. The descriptive analysis has provided details about the learners' responses to the pre- and post-questionnaires in regards to their experiences, satisfactions, modality preferences, integration of technology interactions, resources, culture learning, and class work and reflections. The inferential analysis has helped make prediction about the degree to which the blended language learning environment has been set up to meet the objectives of the study. This was done by analyzing data of the participants and by comparing differences between the responses in the pre- and the post-questionnaires.

To determine if there are statistically significant differences between responses obtained from learners in the pre-questionnaire and those obtained in the post-questionnaire, contingency table analysis was performed using the data analysis software R Language (Kabacoff 2011; Zumel & Mount 2013) for each question asked in both questionnaires. In the statistical significance analysis, the null hypothesis ( $H_0$ ) states that the categorical variables (responses to

questions) for both the pre- and the post- questionnaires come from the same population, i.e. the responses of learners in both questionnaires are the same. While the research (or alternative) hypothesis ( $H_a$ ) states the opposite: the responses to questions obtained from learners in both questionnaires come from different populations and there are significant statistical differences between the responses obtained from the pre-questionnaire and those obtained from the post-questionnaire for the same question.

For each test performed on each question, Pearson's Chi-squared test was performed to test the null hypothesis using a rejection region of  $\alpha = 0.05$  which represents a Type I Error (Ott and Longnecker 2001). A Type I Error is committed if we reject the null hypothesis when it is true. A p-value was obtained from the significant test analysis, if the p-value was less than 0.05 then the null hypothesis was rejected and the research hypothesis was accepted which meant that there was a statistical significant difference between the responses obtained from the learners in the pre-questionnaire and those obtained from the learners in the post-questionnaire. And if the p-value was greater than 0.05 then the null hypothesis was accepted and the research hypothesis was rejected which meant that there was no statistical significant difference between the responses obtained from the learners in the pre-questionnaire and those obtained from the learners in the post-questionnaire.

### **3.6 Results**

This part of the study addresses the results using the pre- and post-questionnaire data. The background section appears only in the closed part of the pre-questionnaire analysis as it covered the same types of questions and, therefore, the results serve both the pre- and the post-questionnaire analysis.

### 3.6.1 Pre-questionnaire

The pre-questionnaire was divided into two sections: closed and open-ended

#### 3.6.1.1 Closed questions

This part of the pre-questionnaire addressed eight sections: (1) background, (2) learners' satisfaction with the blended setting, (3) modality preference, (4) integration of technology, (5) interaction, (6) resources, (7) learning about culture, and (8) class work and reflections.

##### 3.6.1.1.1 Background

In order to understand their ability to handle the blended setting, the learners were presented with three introductory questions asking them if they are multi-taskers, have strong time management skills, and are motivated to succeed. The learners were given five choices on a Likert scale: 'strongly agree', 'agree', 'neutral', 'disagree', 'strongly disagree'. When asked whether they were multi-taskers, 46.6% of the learners indicated that they either 'strongly agree' or 'agree' while 26.6% were 'neutral' and 20% chose 'disagree'. The learners were asked if they had strong time-management skills and the majority responded with either 'strongly agree' or 'agree'. When asked if they were motivated to succeed, 53.3% indicated that they either 'strongly agree' or 'agree', 33.3% chose 'neutral' and 13.6% 'disagree'. The learners were also presented with a background question about their computer competence and were given five choices: 'excellent', 'above average', 'average', 'less competent', and 'not competent'. The results show that 33.3% of the learners responded with 'excellent', 33.3% responded with 'above average', and 33.3% responded with 'average'.

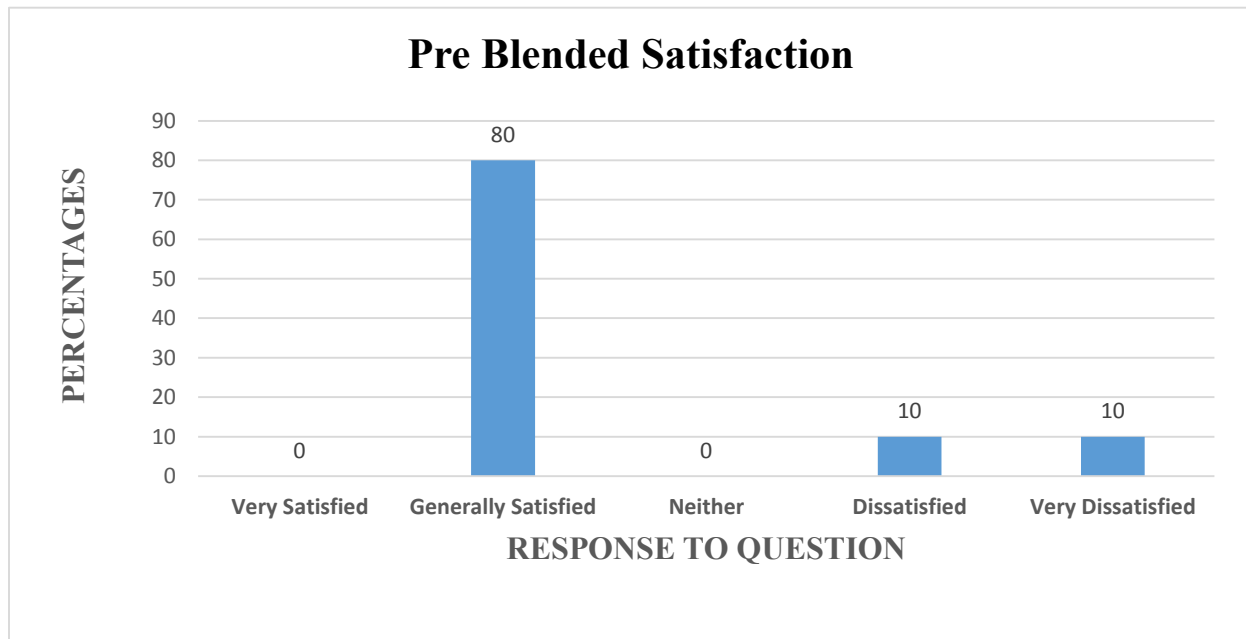
The results of this section show that the learners were generally multi-taskers, had strong time management skills, were motivated to learn in this setting, and were competent in computer usage.

#### **3.6.1.1.2 Satisfaction**

The learners were presented with a question asking about how satisfied they were with their previous blended course(s) including this course. The learners were given five choices: (1) 'very dissatisfied', (2) 'dissatisfied', (3) 'neither', (4) 'generally satisfied', and (5) 'very satisfied'.

Figure 1 below shows that 80% of the participants responded with 'generally satisfied', 10% 'dissatisfied', and 10% 'very dissatisfied'. It should be noted here that 33% of the participants have never taken any blended course, therefore, the results might partly reflect the learners' view about the blended course at the time when the study was conducted. The result clearly shows that the learners were pleased with any previous blended class they have taken before, if they took any.

Figure 1: Results of the learners' satisfaction of blended setting

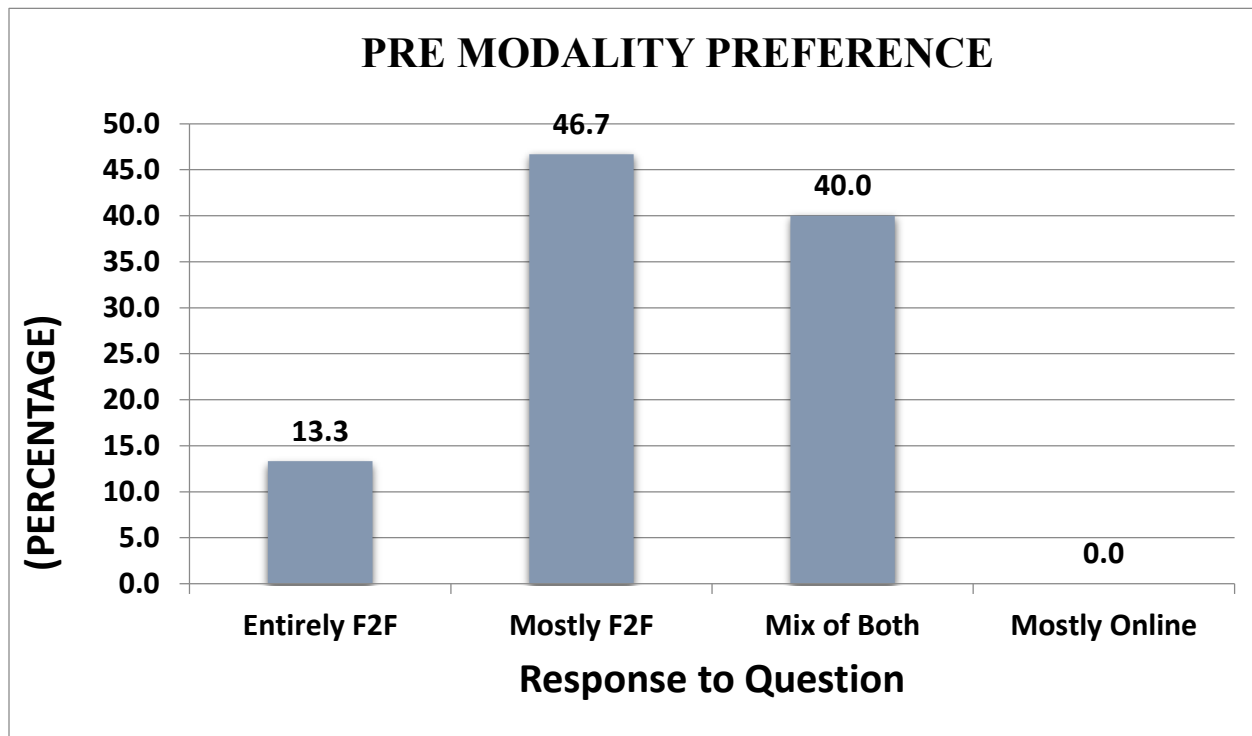


### 3.6.1.1.3 Preference

In this section of the questionnaire, the learners were given four questions to gauge their preference in regards to learning modalities, namely, F2F, online, or the mixture of both – blended. The learners were asked about which class modality they prefer and they were given 5 choices: (1) ‘entirely F2F’, (2) ‘mostly F2F’, (3) ‘mix (F2F & blended)’, (4) ‘mostly online’, and (5) ‘entirely online’. The results show that 46.7% of the learners chose ‘mostly F2F’, and 40% chose ‘mix (F2F & blended)’ (see Figure 2 below).



Figure 2: Results of the learners' preference of learning modalities



In the second question and when the learners were asked to choose all that apply about their primary reason(s) for choosing blended courses, 33% of them attributed that to the flexibility of accessing the class content anytime online; 40% said that they didn't have a choice; 40% said that blended courses "fit" in their schedule; 13.3% said that their choice was based on the instructor; 6.6% said that they like the convenience of not coming to campus as much; and 6.6% said that they prefer technology classes.

The third question asked the learners about their opinion on whether they like having part of the course online and part of it in the classroom. The learners were given 5 options: 'strongly agree', 'agree', 'neutral', 'disagree', 'strongly disagree'. The results show that 60% of the learners either 'strongly agree' or 'agree' with the statement, while 36.6% either 'strongly disagree' or 'disagree'. Lastly, when asked if they like learning from online activities, 53% either

‘strongly agree’ or ‘agree’, while 26.7% either ‘strongly disagree’ or ‘disagree’ and 20% chose ‘neutral’.

The results show that the learners were swinging between preferring learning mostly in classroom and learning in the blended settings and others indicated that they didn’t have a choice when enrolled in the class. The majority of the learners, however, stated that they liked the flexibility of blended setting and liked the option that they can do activities online.

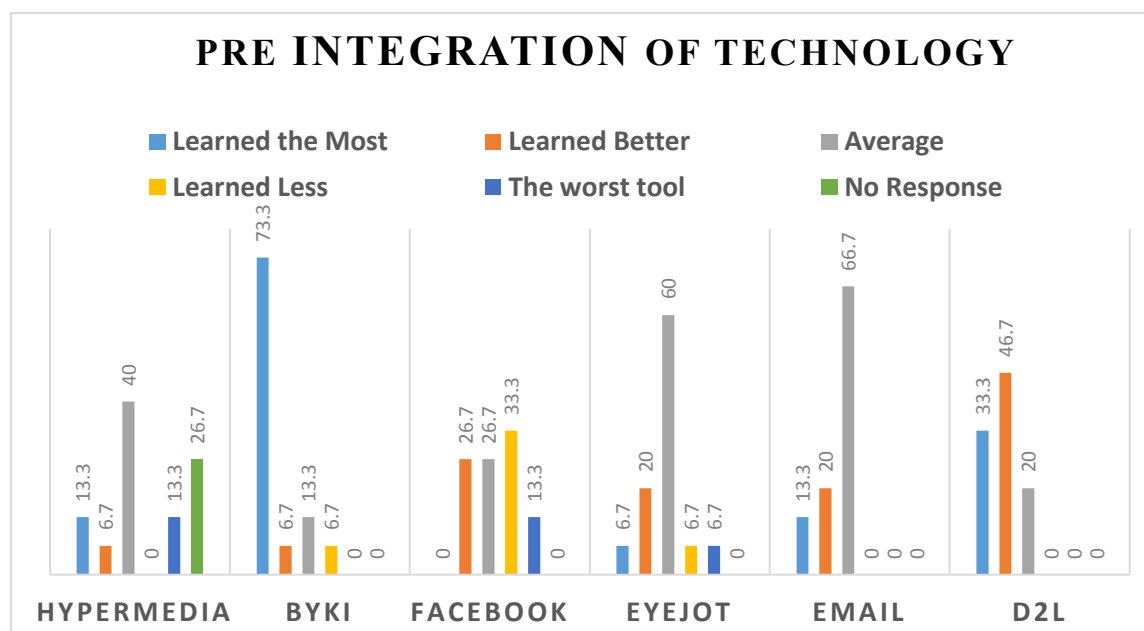
#### **3.6.1.1.4 Integration of technology tools**

The spoken Levantine Arabic class being blended and focusing mostly on the speaking skill required integrating specific tools to meet the learning outcomes of this class. Therefore, the learners were trained to use these tools to be able to complete the many assignments that required them to develop videos, skits, presentations, video mail, post and comment on other students’ work, and visit Arabic shops and restaurants. In the first two weeks of the Levantine Arabic class, the learners had the chance to practice and produce some work using the technology tools that were chosen to be integrated in the class. Hence, the responses of the learners in the pre-questionnaire might have been affected by the technology training that they received at the beginning of the semester. The learners received training in the following tools: Hypermedia (a combination of hypertext –characterized by its use of textual information in nodes and links –and multimedia –text, audio, and graphic annotations to help in reading comprehension (Ariew & Ercetin (2004)), BYKI (Before You Know It flashcard software: [www.byki.com](http://www.byki.com)), Facebook page (created for the class in a private mode), Eyejot (video mailing website: [www.eyejot.com](http://www.eyejot.com)), Skype (internet software application that allows users to make voice and video calling, instant messaging, sharing and low-cost local and international calls. The website is: [www.skype.com](http://www.skype.com)),

Email (Learners' university email account), and D2L ('Desire to Learn' Course Management System (CMS)).

The learners were asked to rate the technology tools used that they think will help them learn more. Figure 3 below presents the results of the learner's rating of the technology tools used in the class. The results show that BYKI is the most favorable tool for this class with 80% of the learners rating it as either 'learned the most' (73.3%) or 'learned better' (6.7%). D2L came second in rating with 33.3% of the learners 'learned the most' and 46.7% 'learned better'. Email tool came third with 33.3% either 'learned the most' or 'learned better' followed by Eyejot tool with 26.7% either 'learned the most' or 'learned better', then Facebook page with 26.7% 'learned better'. Hypermedia lessons came in last with 20% either 'learned the most' or 'learned better'. It should be noted here that Skype is not included in the results because of the very limited usage of this tool by the learners in the pre-questionnaire and post-questionnaire period.

Figure 3: Results of the learners' rating of blended technology tools



In another set of questions about technology, the learners were given five choices: (1) 'strongly disagree', (2) 'disagree', (3) 'neutral', (4) 'agree', and (5) 'strongly agree'. They were asked if their personal devices, such as smart phone and iPod help with their learning and most of them responded with either 'strongly agree', or 'agree' (20% & 46.7%, respectively) and 33.3% responded with 'neutral'. When asked if they think that social networking applications, such as Facebook, help them with learning, 46.6% either 'strongly agreed' or 'agreed', 26.7 'neutral', and 26.7% either 'strongly disagree' or 'disagree'. When asked if they think course technology tools will help them with their learning, the vast majority of the learners either 'strongly agree' with 40% or 'agree' with 46.7%. Finally, when asked about the reliability of the technology used for the online portion of the class, the vast majority of the learners either 'strongly agree' with 33.3% or 'agree' with 60%.

The results show that the learners believe that the technology tools, personal devices, and social media are reliable tools and could lead to effective learning.

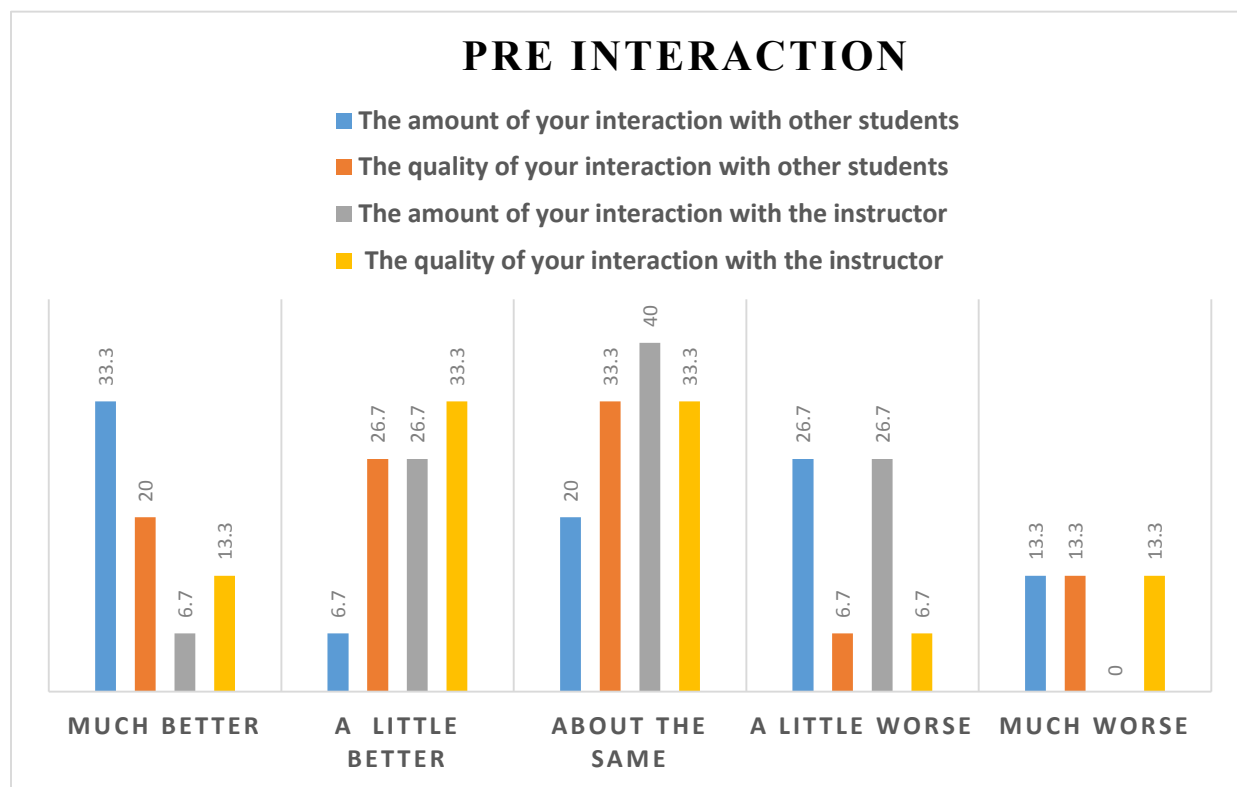
#### **3.6.1.1.5 Interaction**

In the first segment of this section, the learners were asked about how they feel the technology component of the blended course has affected/would affect the following interaction aspects, when compared with their F2F courses. The learners were given five choices: (1) 'much worse, (2) 'a little worse', (3) 'about the same', (4) 'a little better, and 'much better' (see Figure 4).

The first aspect was about the amount of their interaction time with other students. In the responses, 40% of the learners chose either 'much better' or 'a little better', 40% chose either 'much worse' or 'a little worse', while 20% chose 'about the same. The second aspect asked about the quality of the learners' interaction with other learners and 46.7% said either 'much

better' or 'a little better', 20% said either 'much worse' or 'a little worse', and 33% 'about the same'. The third aspect asked about the amount of learners' interaction with the instructor and 33% responded with either 'much better' or 'a little better', 40% 'about the same', and 26.7% 'a little worse'. The final aspects asked about the quality of the learner's interaction with the instructor and 46.6% responded with either 'much better' or 'a little better', 26.6% with either 'much worse' or 'a little worse', and 33.3% with 'about the same'.

Figure 4: Results of the learners' expectations of the effect of blended setting on interaction

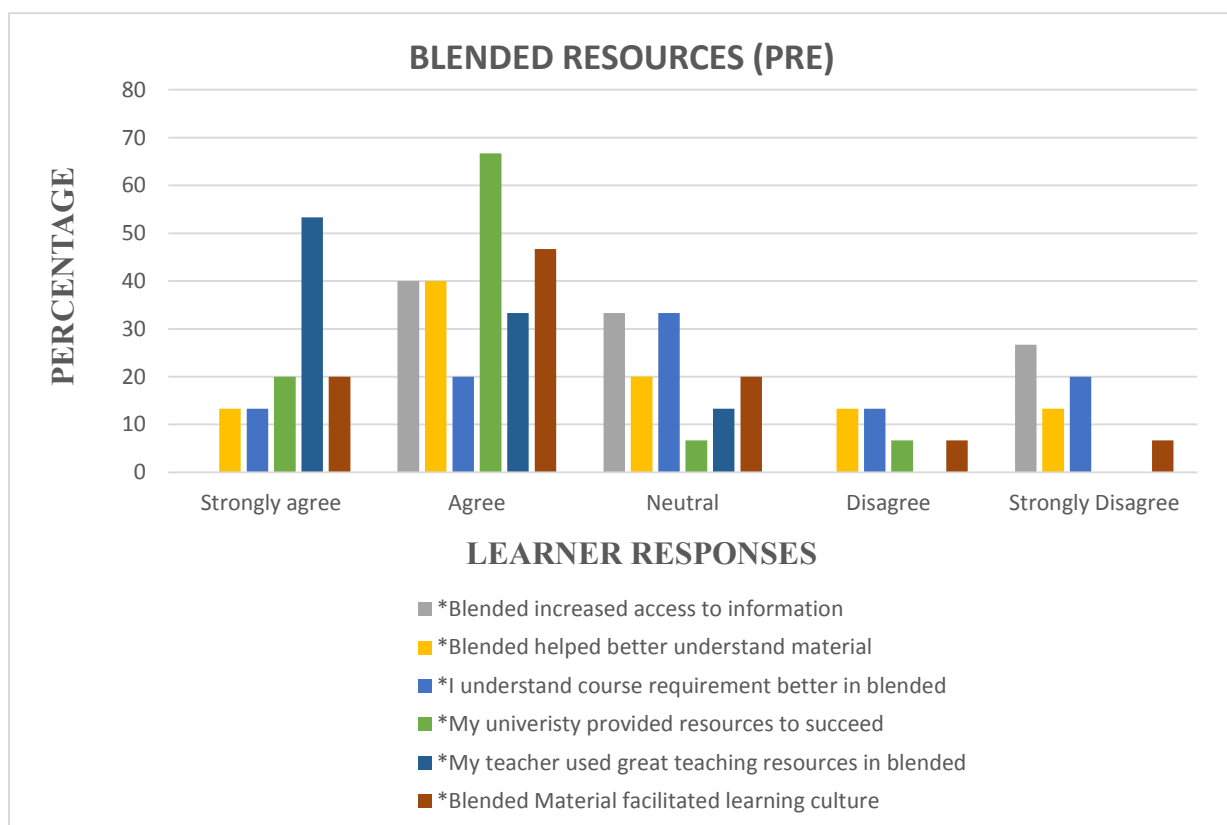


The results show that the learners evaluated the blended setting to be a good venue to interact with the teacher and the other learners and that the setting provides enough time for interactions and good quality interactions.

### 3.6.1.1.6 Resources: course materials, requirements, etc.

This section aimed at exploring the learners' views about resources available for them in the blended setting including course material, requirements, access to information, and teaching resources. The learners were asked six questions and were given five choices: (1) 'strongly disagree', (2) 'disagree', (3) 'neutral', (4) 'agree', and (5) 'strongly agree' (see Figure 5).

Figure 5: Results of the learners' responses to questions about resources



When asked if they expect that the blended course experience would increase their opportunity to access and use information, 40% of the learners responded with 'agree', 26.7% with 'strongly disagree', and 33.3% with 'neutral'. When asked if they expect that the blended learning would help them better understand course material, 53.3% responded with either 'strongly agree' or 'agree', but 26.6% responded with either 'strongly disagree' or 'disagree'.

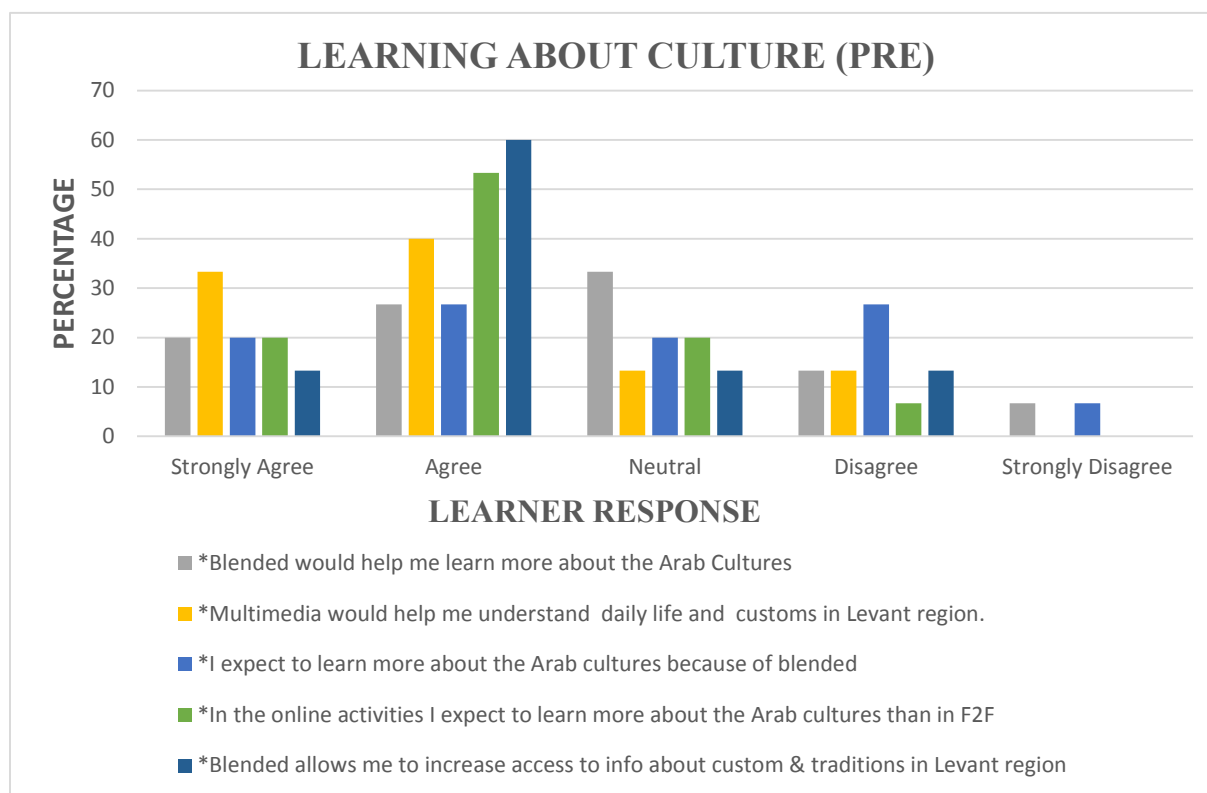
When asked if they expect that they would generally understand course requirements better in a blended course, 33.3% responded with either 'strongly agree' or 'agree', 33% responded with 'strongly disagree' or 'disagree', and 33.3% responded with 'neutral'. When students were asked if the university provides the resources necessary for learners to succeed in blended courses, the majority (86.7) responded with either 'strongly agree' or 'agree'. The learners were asked if they think that the teacher is using a greater variety of teaching resources (e.g. web, print, videos, and cartoons) because part of this course was online and the majority (86.6%) responded with either 'strongly agree' or 'agree'. Finally, the learners were asked if they expect that the materials used in the blended setting would facilitate their learning of Levantine Arabic and its cultures and 64.7% said either 'strongly agree or 'agree' and 30% 'neutral'.

The results of this sections show that the learners have high expectations from the blended course in regards to providing various resources, but they were not sure whether they would better understand the course requirement in a blended setting.

### **3.6.1.1.7 Learning about the Arab Cultures**

This section aimed at investigating the learners' views about learning the Arab and the Levantine cultures in the blended setting. The learners were presented with five questions and were given five choices: (1) 'strongly disagree', (2) 'disagree', (3) 'neutral', (4) 'agree', and (5) 'strongly agree' (see Figure 6).

Figure 6 Results of the learners' responses to questions about Arab cultures



The first question asked the learners if they expect that blended setting will help them learn more about the Arab cultures and almost half of the learners responded with either 'strongly agree' or 'disagree', 20% responded with either 'strongly disagree' or 'disagree', and 33.3% responded with 'neutral'. As the course aimed at integrating technology to teach language as culture, the second question asked the learners if the use of multimedia would help them understand the daily life and customs of the Levantine region and the majority (73.3%) responded with either 'strongly agree' or 'agree'. When asked if they expect to learn more about the Arab cultures because part of this class was online, the learners responded to the third question with 46.7% 'strongly agree' or 'agree'. However, 33.3% responded with either 'strongly disagree' or 'disagree'. In the fourth question, the learners were presented with a question about whether the online activities would give them the opportunity to learn more about the Arab

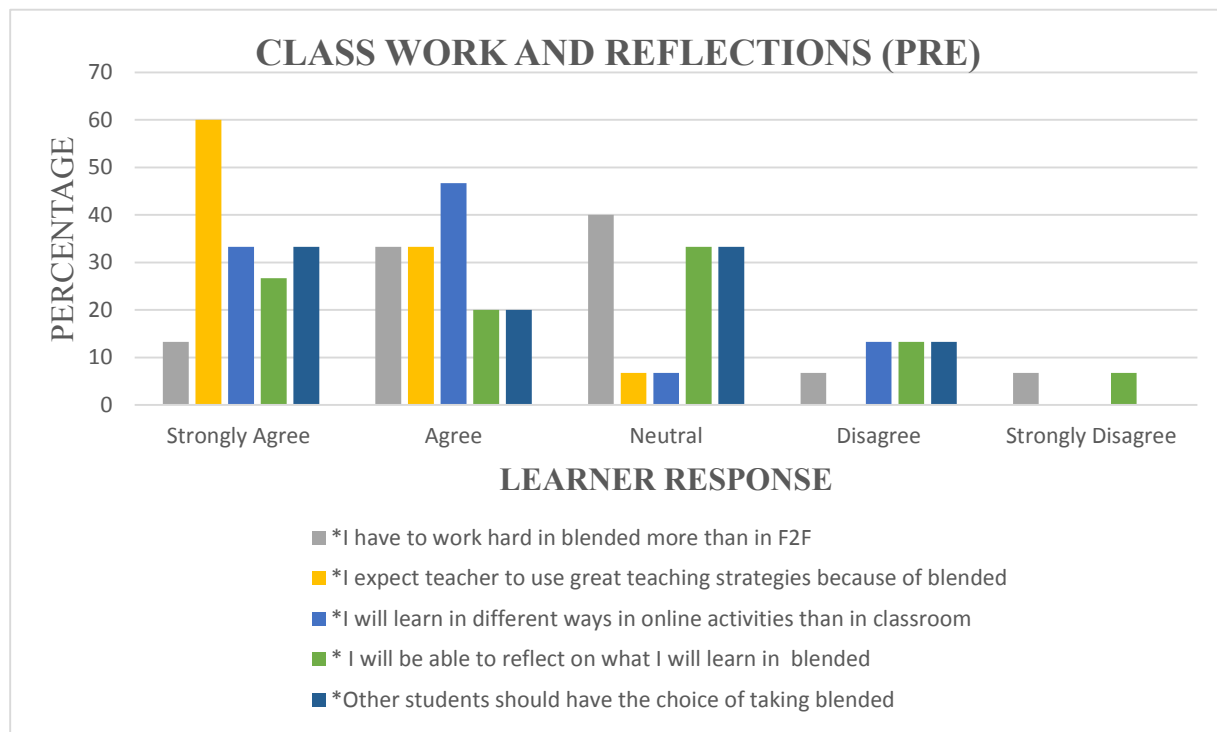


cultures than they would in the classroom. The majority of the learners (73.3%) responded with either ‘strongly agree’ or ‘agree’ and 20% ‘neutral’. The final question asked the learners if the blended course experience so far has increased their opportunity to access more information about customs and traditions in the Levantine region and the majority (73.3%) responded with either ‘strongly agree’ or ‘agree’.

### 3.6.1.1.8 Class Work and Reflections

This section asked the learners a variety of questions related to class work, teaching strategies, learning styles and reflections. The learners were presented with five questions and were given five choices: (1) ‘strongly disagree’, (2) ‘disagree’, (3) ‘neutral’, (4) ‘agree’, and (5) ‘strongly agree’ (see Figure 7).

Figure 7 Results of the learners’ responses to questions about class work and reflections



When asked if they think that they have to work harder in this blended course than they would in the classroom setting, 46.6% of the learners responded with either 'strongly agree' or 'agree' and 40% responded with 'neutral'. When asked if they expect that the teacher will use a greater variety of teaching strategies because part of this course is online, the vast majority of the learners (93.3%) responded with either 'strongly agree' or 'agree'. The learners were asked if the online activities will give them the opportunity to learn in different ways than in the classroom, the majority (80%) of the learners responded with either 'strongly agree' or 'agree'. When asked if they think that they will have more opportunities to reflect on what they will learn in their blended course, 46.7% of the learners responded with either 'strongly agree' or 'agree', 33.35 'neutral', and 20% either 'strongly disagree' or 'disagree'. In the final question, the learners were asked if they think that other students should have the opportunity to take a class like this in the future. Half of the learners responded with either 'strongly agree' or 'agree' and 33.3% responded with 'neutral'.

The learners in this section were happy with the kinds of activities and teaching strategies expected to be used in the class, moderately happy that they will be given the opportunity to reflect on what they will learn, and that they agree that their fellow colleagues should be given the chance to experience blended learning.

### **3.6.1.2 Open-Ended Section**

The open-ended section asked the learners to share their experiences with blended learning, what their expectations were regarding what they would like and dislike about blended setting, and the kind of advice they expect to give to teachers and learners of blended setting. The data was collected and analyzed based on the various themes in the learners' responses. The learners mainly focused on the hopes and concerns regarding the integration of technology, time

management, clarity of assignments, course requirements, and motivation. Below is a summary of what the learners said in answering the questions.

In answering question one about what the learners expected to like the most, the learners said that what they would expect to like is the integration of technology, being able to work on their own time, and being exposed to audio recordings of vocabulary and colloquial expressions. In answering question two about what they expected to like the least, the learners had various answers. They mentioned working on their own and making sure they are doing the right thing, problems with technology tools, less F2F interaction with the teacher, and confusion about what is due and when. In answering question three about their advice to a learner new to blended setting, the learners stressed that newcomers should manage their time, stay on top of things, avoid procrastination, and be up to date with assignments and technology tools. In answering question four about their advice to a teacher of blended course, the learners suggested that the teacher has to be available and reachable, provide more F2F classes, commit learners to work by reminding them of due dates, be clear, train students on technology, and use less technology if possible.

In this section, the learners were excited about the use of technology but were also afraid that they will face challenges with technology. As many of the learners were new to the blended setting, F2F was a comfort zone so they can ask questions to their teacher and interact with their peers, and being able to work on their own. This explains why learners stressed the teachers' constant availability and ease of communication when they gave advice to blended teachers and keeping up with assignments when they gave advice to a learner new to blended setting.

### 3.6.2 Post-questionnaire

The post-questionnaire was divided into two sections: Closed and Open-ended

### 3.6.2.1 Closed questions

This part of the pre-questionnaire addressed seven sections: (1) learners' satisfaction with the blended setting, (2) modality preference, (3) integration of technology, (4) interaction, (5) resources, (6) learning about culture, and (7) class work and reflections.

#### 3.6.2.1.1 Satisfaction

The learners were presented with a question asking about how satisfied they were with their spoken Levantine blended course. The learners were given five choices: (1) 'very dissatisfied', (2) 'dissatisfied', (3) 'neither', (4) 'generally satisfied', and (5) 'very satisfied' (see Figure 8 below).

Figure 8: Results of the learners' satisfaction of blended setting

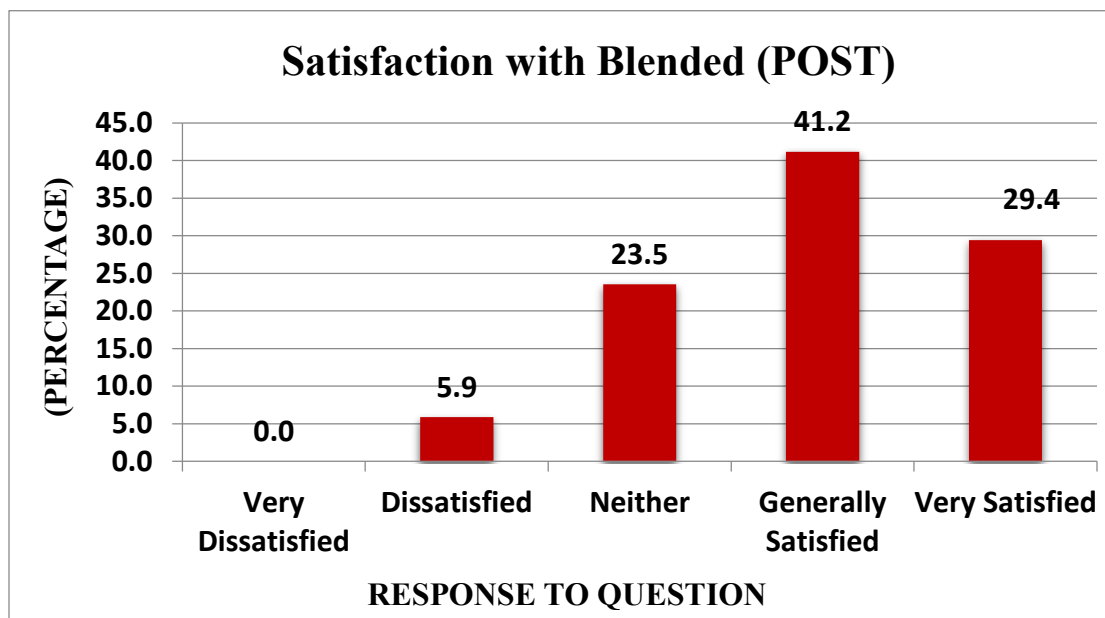


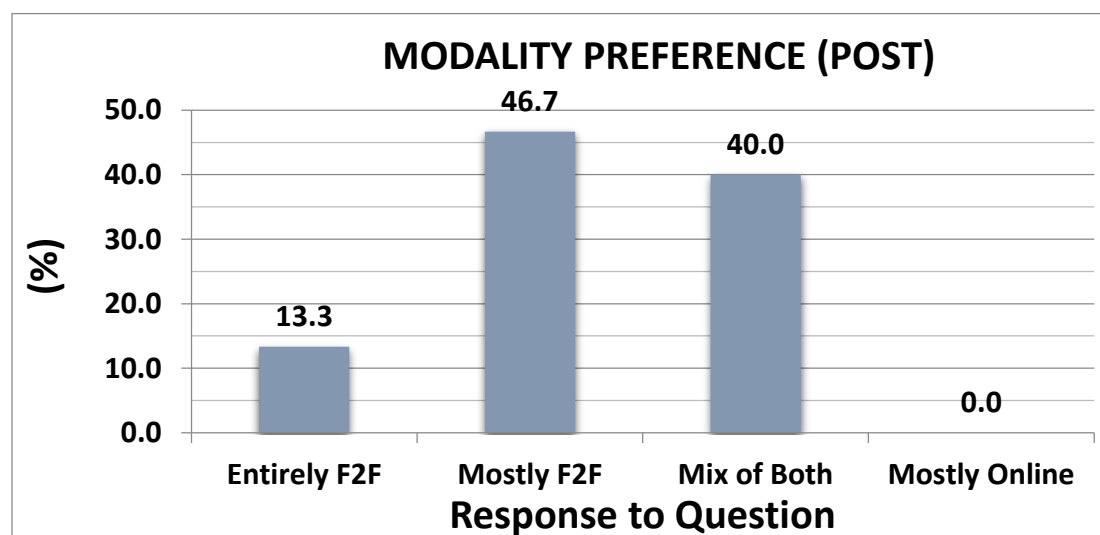
Figure 2 above shows that 70.6% of the learners responded with either 'very satisfied' or 'generally satisfied', 23.5% responded with 'neither' and only 5.9% responded with

‘dissatisfied’. The results show that the majority of the learners were pleased with the blended course, which aligns with the results in the pre-questionnaire but more spread out in the post-questionnaire. For example, in the pre-questionnaire, 80% indicated that they were ‘generally satisfied’ and 20% indicated that they were either ‘very dissatisfied’ or ‘dissatisfied’. In the post-questionnaire, however, it is noticeable that only 5.9% were ‘dissatisfied’, 0% were ‘very dissatisfied’, and 23.5% moved to ‘neither’.

### 3.6.2.1.2 Preference

This section of the questionnaire looks at the learners’ preference in regards to the various learning environments, namely, F2F, online, or the mixture of both –blended. The learners were asked about which class modality they prefer and they were given 5 choices: (1) ‘entirely F2F’, (2) ‘mostly F2F’, (3) ‘mix (F2F & blended)’, (4) ‘mostly online’, and (5) ‘entirely online’ (see Figure 9 below). The results show that 46.7% of the learners chose ‘mostly F2F’, 13.3% ‘entirely online’, while 40% chose ‘mix (F2F & blended)’.

Figure 9: Results of the learners’ preference of learning modalities



In the second question the learners were asked to choose all that apply about their primary reason(s) for choosing this blended course, 53% of them attributed that to the flexibility of accessing the class content anytime online; 23.5% said that they didn't have a choice; 29.4% said that blended courses "fit" in their schedule; 23.5% said that their choice was based on the instructor; and 11.2% said that they like the convenience of not coming to campus as much.

The third question asked the learners about their opinion on whether they liked having part of the course online and part of it in the classroom. The learners were given 5 options: 'strongly agree', 'agree', 'neutral', 'disagree', 'strongly disagree'. The results show that 58.9% of the learners either 'strongly agree' or 'agree' with the statement while only 17.6% either 'strongly disagree' or 'disagree', and 23.5% responded with 'neutral'. In the last question, the learners were asked if they liked learning from online activities, 64.7% either 'strongly agree' or 'agree', 29.4% 'neutral', and only 5.9% 'disagree'.

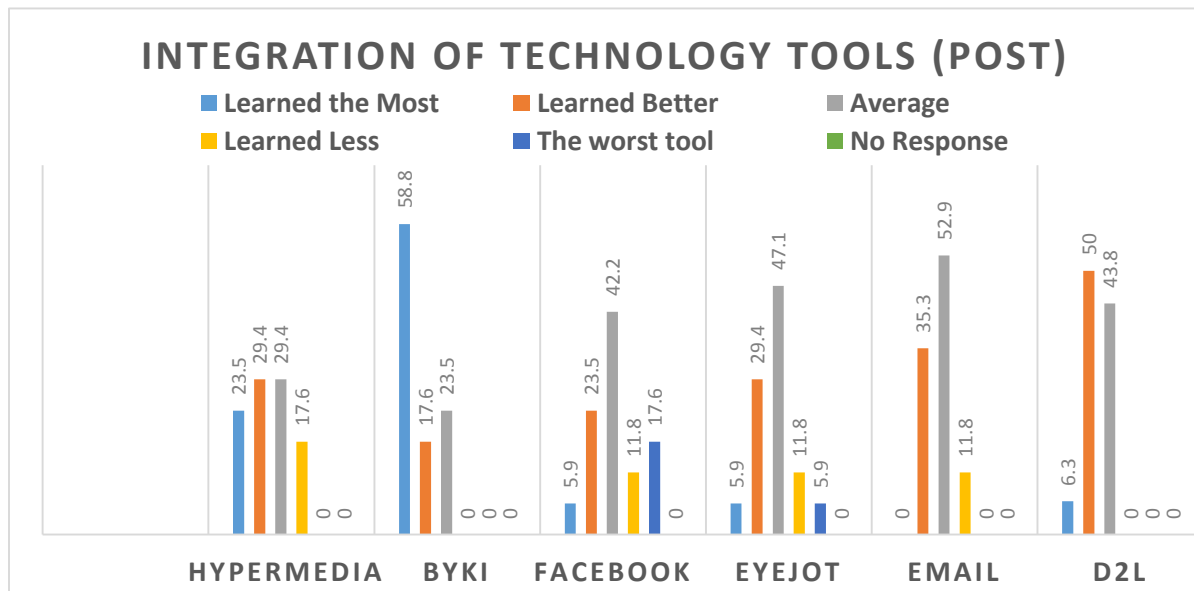
The results show that the learners' preference is swinging between mostly F2F and blended. The study also shows that the learners liked the mix of F2F and online and they also liked learning from online activities.

### 3.6.2.1.3 Integration of technology tools

The learners were asked to rate the technology tools used in the class that they think had helped them learn more. Figure 10 below illustrates the results of the learner's rating of the technology tools used in the class. The results show that BYKI is the most favorable tool for this class with 76.4% of the learners rating it as either 'learned the most' or 'learned better'. The D2L tool came in second place with 56.3% either 'learned the most' or 'learned better'. Hypermedia lessons came in third place after it was the last in the pre-questionnaire with 53.1% either 'learned the most' or 'learned better'. Email tool came in fourth in rating with 35.3% of the

learners 'learned better'. Eyejot video mailing came fifth with 33.3% either 'learned the most' or 'learned better' followed by Facebook page with 29.3% either 'learned the most' or 'learned better'.

Figure 10: Results of the learners' rating of blended technology tools

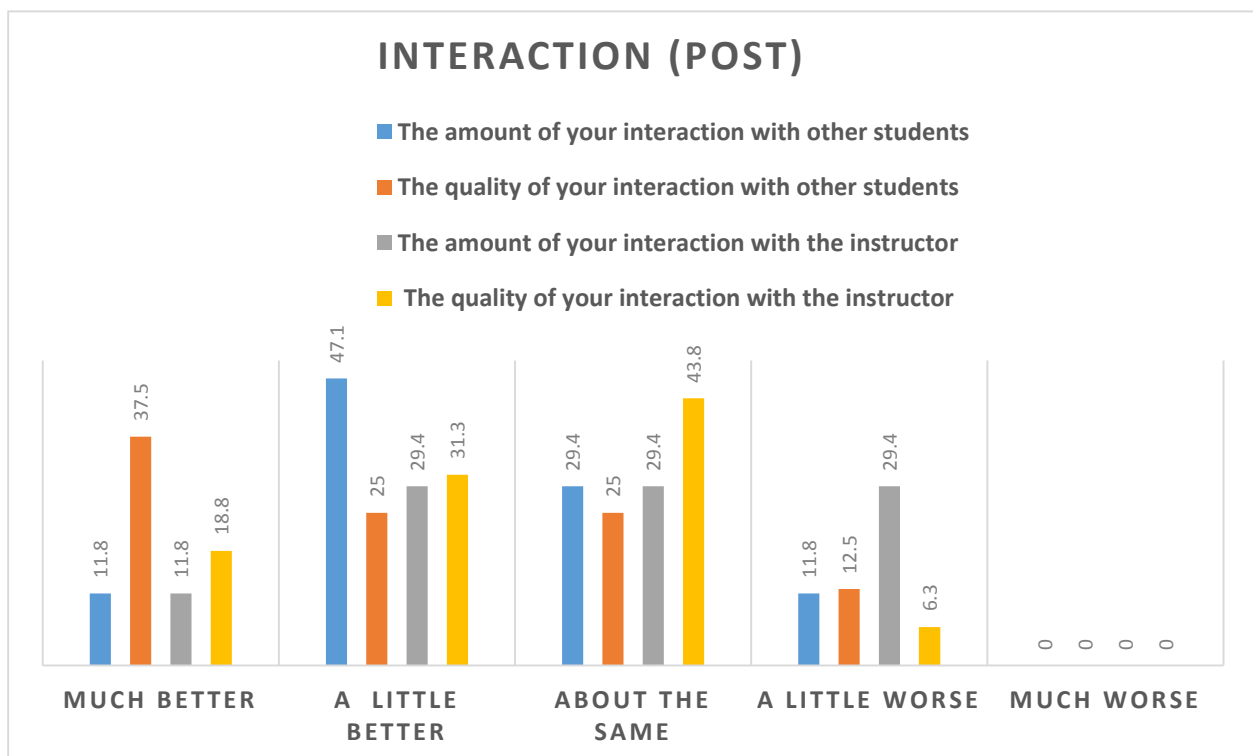


In another set of questions about technology, the learners were given five choices: (1) 'strongly disagree', (2) 'disagree', (3) 'neutral', (4) 'agree', and (5) 'strongly agree'. The learners were asked if their personal devices such as smart phone and iPod, had helped them with their learning. The majority of the learners responded with either 'strongly agree', or 'agree' (29.3% & 47.1%, respectively) and 23.5% 'neutral'. When asked if social networking applications, such as Facebook, helped them with learning, half of the learners responded with either 'strongly agree' or 'agree', 29.4% responded with either 'strongly disagree' or 'disagree', and 17.6% 'neutral'. When asked if course technology tools had helped them with their learning, the vast majority of the learners responded with either 'strongly agree' or 'agree'. Finally, when asked about the reliability of the technology used for the online portion of the class, again the vast majority of the learners either 'strongly agree' or 'agree'.

### 3.6.2.1.4 Interaction

In the first segment of this section, the learners were asked about how they feel the technology component of the blended course has affected the following interaction aspects when compared with their F2F courses. The learners were given five choices: (1) ‘much worse’, (2) ‘a little worse’, (3) ‘about the same’, (4) ‘a little better’, and ‘much better’ (see Figure 11).

Figure 11: Results of the learners’ expectations of the effect of blended setting on interaction



The first aspect was the amount of the learners’ interactions time with other learners. Unlike the pre-questionnaire, the majority of the learners responded with either ‘much better’ or ‘a little better’ and 29.4% responded with ‘about the same’. The second aspect asked about the quality of the learners’ interaction with other learners and 62.5% said either ‘much better’ or ‘a little better’, 25% said ‘about the same’. The third aspect asked about the amount of learners’



interaction with the instructor and 41.2% of the learners responded with either ‘much better’ or ‘a little better’, 29.4 ‘about the same’, and 29.4% ‘a little worse’. The final aspect asked about the quality of the learner’s interaction with the instructor and half of the learners responded with either ‘much better’ or ‘a little better’, 43.8% responded with ‘about the same’.

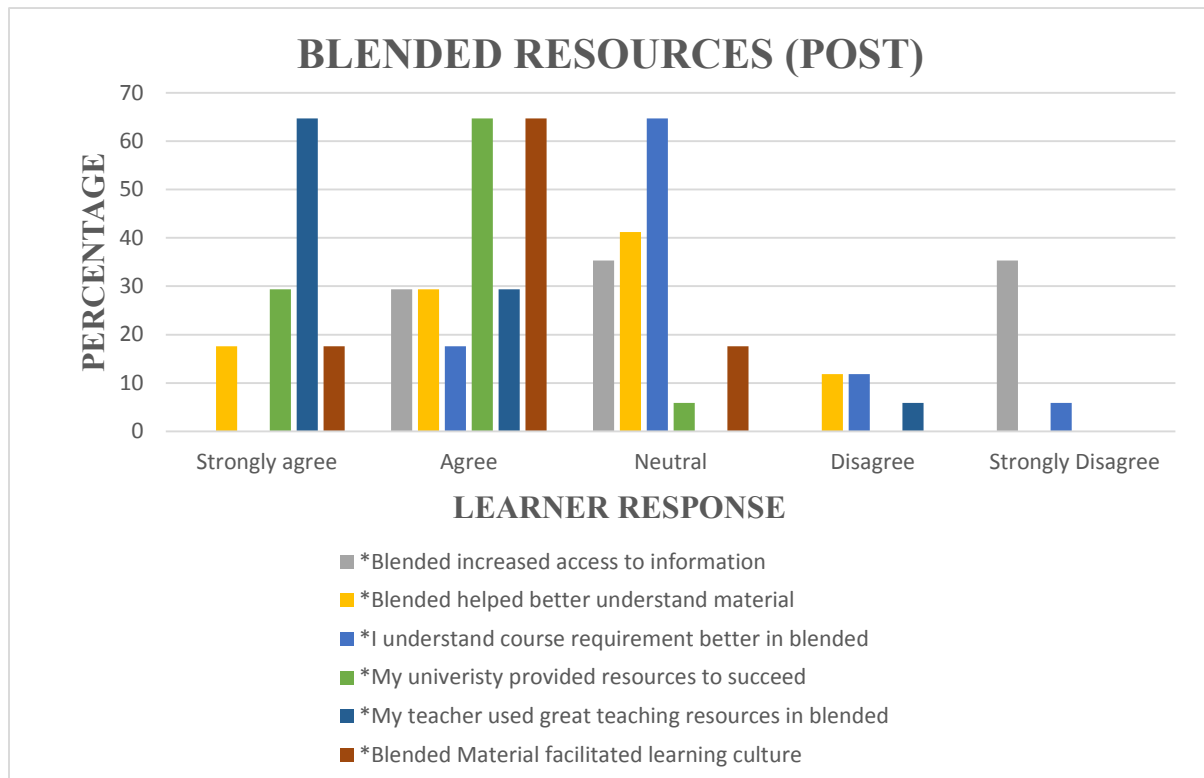
The results of this section show that there was a good quality interaction between the teacher and the learners and amongst the learners themselves. This section showed a statistically significant difference between the pre-questionnaire and the post-questionnaire which means that the interaction has exceeded the learners’ expectations and that they have benefited from this experience.

#### **3.6.2.1.5 Resources: course materials, requirements, etc.**

This section aimed at exploring the learners’ views in regards to resources available for them in the blended setting including course material, requirements, access to information, and teaching resources. The learners were asked six questions and were given five choices: (1) ‘strongly disagree’, (2) ‘disagree’, (3) ‘neutral’, (4) ‘agree’, and (5) ‘strongly agree’ (see Figure 12).

When asked if the blended course experience has increased their opportunity to access and use information, 29.4% of the learners responded with ‘agree’, 35.5% with ‘strongly

Figure 12: Results of the learners' responses to questions about resources



disagree', and 35.5% with 'neutral. When asked if the blended learning experience has helped them better understand course material, 47% responded with either 'strongly agree' or 'agree', 11.8% responded with 'disagree' and 41.2% 'neutral'. When asked if they generally understood course requirements better in a blended course, 64.7% responded with 'neutral', 17.6% 'agree', and 17.7% responded with either 'strongly disagree' or 'disagree'. When learners were asked if the university provides the resources necessary for learners to succeed in blended courses, the vast majority responded with either 'strongly agree' or 'agree'. The learners were asked if they think that the teacher is using a greater variety of teaching resources (e.g. web, print, videos, and cartoons) because part of this course was online and the vast majority (94.1%) responded with either 'strongly agree' or 'agree'. Finally, the learners were asked if the materials used in the

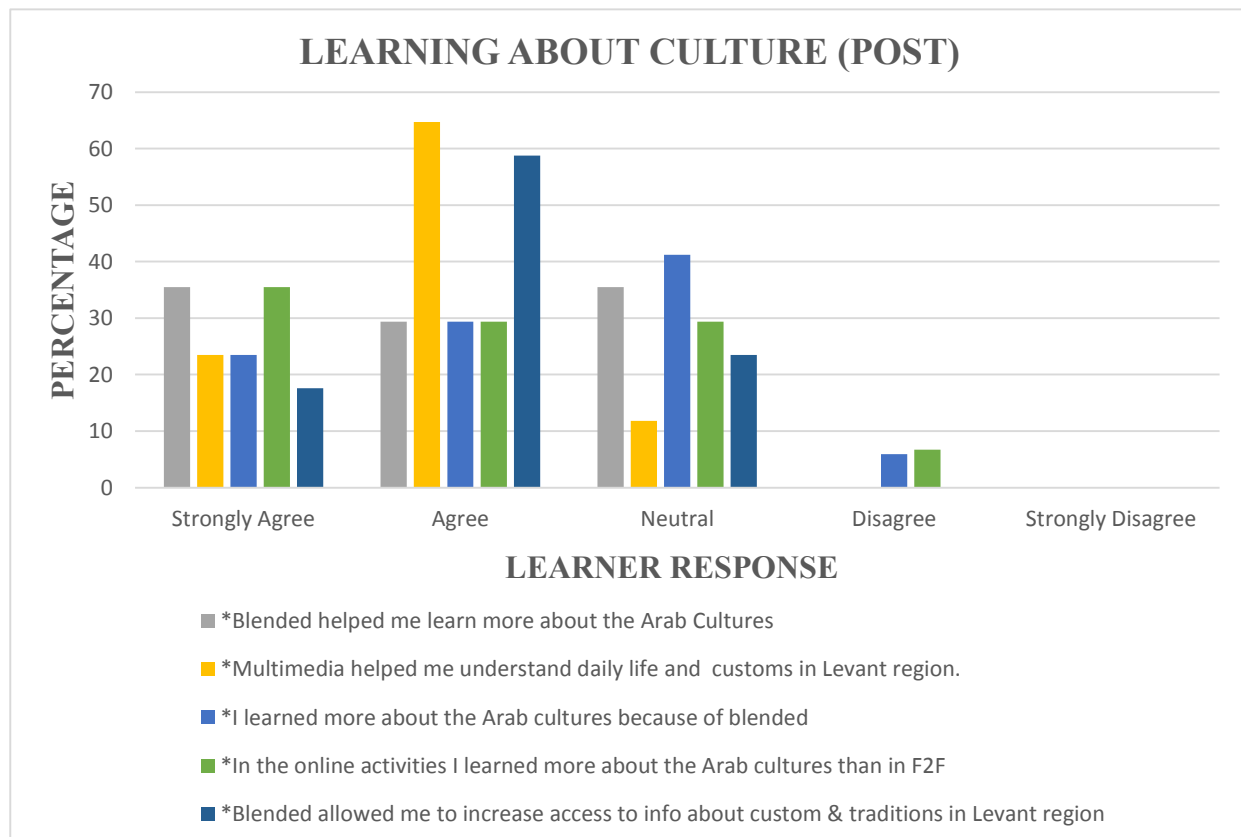
blended setting facilitated their learning of Levantine Arabic and its cultures and the majority (86.4%) said either ‘strongly agree’ or ‘agree’.

The results of this section showed that resources were available for the learners to access them, understand them, use them, and benefit from them. This includes course material, cultural materials, university facilities, and teaching methodologies.

### 3.6.2.1.6 Learning about culture

This section aimed at investigating the learners’ views about learning the Arab and the Levantine cultures in the blended setting. The learners were presented with five questions and were given five choices: (1) ‘strongly disagree’, (2) ‘disagree’, (3) ‘neutral’, (4) ‘agree’, and (5) ‘strongly agree’ (see Figure 13).

Figure 13 Results of the learners’ responses to questions about Arab culture



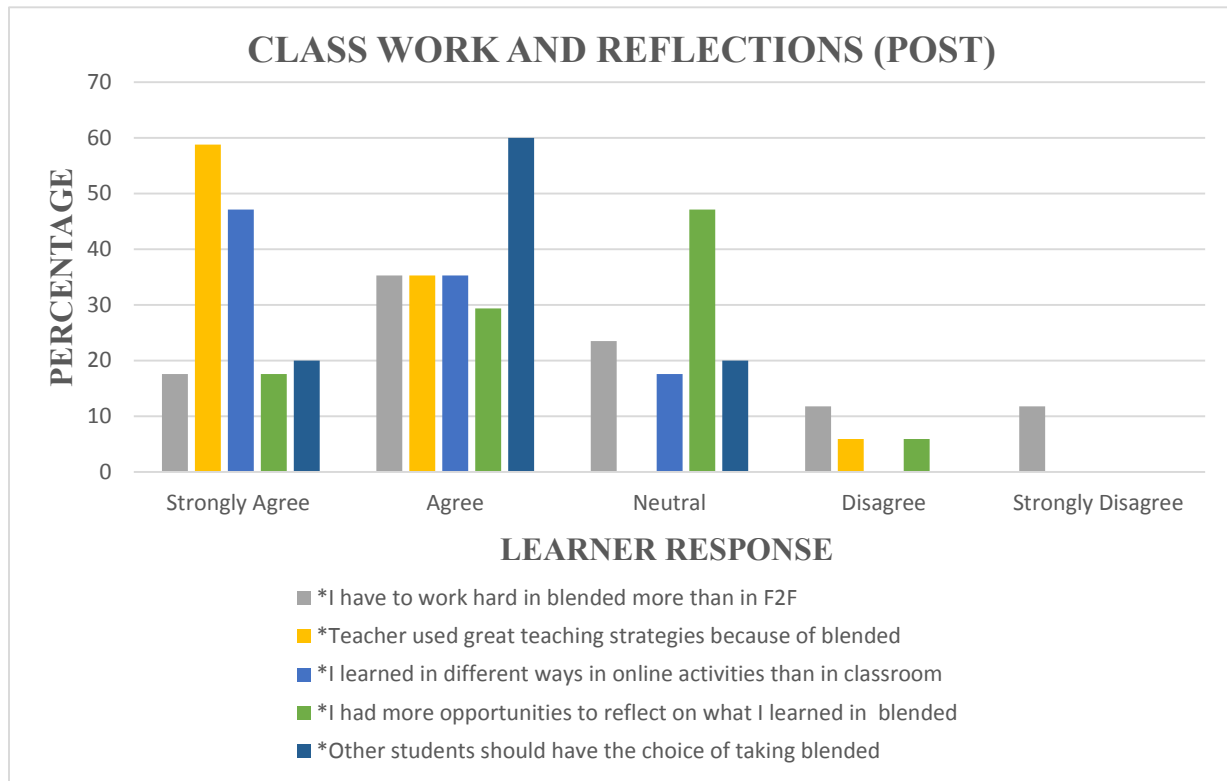
The first question asked the learners if the blended setting had helped them learn more about the Arab cultures and 65.9% of the learners responded with either ‘strongly agree’ or ‘disagree’ and 35.5% responded with ‘neutral’. The second question asked the learners if the use of multimedia had helped them understand the daily life and customs of the Levantine region and the vast majority (89.2%) responded with either ‘strongly agree’ or ‘agree’. In the third question and when asked if they learned more about the Arab cultures because part of this class was online, 52.9% of the learners responded with ‘strongly agree’ or ‘agree’ and 41.2% responded with ‘neutral’. In the fourth question, the learners were presented with a question about whether the online activities had given them the opportunity to learn more about the Arab cultures than they would in the classroom. The majority of the learners (64.9%) responded with either ‘strongly agree’ or ‘agree’ and 29.4% ‘neutral’. The final question asked the learners if the blended course experience has increased their opportunity to access more information about customs and traditions in the Levantine region and the majority (76.4%) responded with either ‘strongly agree’ or ‘agree’ and 23.5% with ‘neutral’.

The responses of the learners are a clear indication that the blended setting, use of multimedia, and online activities have helped them learn and understand the Arab culture.

#### **3.6.2.1.7 Class Work and reflections**

This section asked the learners a variety of questions related to class work, teaching strategies, learning styles and reflections. The learners were presented with five questions and were given five choices: (1) ‘strongly disagree’, (2) ‘disagree’, (3) ‘neutral’, (4) ‘agree’, and (5) ‘strongly agree’ (see Figure 14).

Figure 14: Results of the learners' responses to questions about class work and reflections



When asked if they think that they had to work harder in this blended course than they did in classroom courses, 52.9% of the learners responded with either 'strongly agree' or 'agree', 23.6% responded with either 'strongly disagree' or 'disagree', and 23.5% responded with 'neutral'. When asked if the teacher used a greater variety of teaching strategies because part of this course is online, the vast majority of the learners (94.1%) responded with either 'strongly agree' or 'agree' and 17.6% responded with 'neutral'. The learners were asked if the online activities gave them the opportunity to learn in different ways than in the classroom, the majority (82.4%) of the learners responded with either 'strongly agree' or 'agree'. When asked if they think that they had more opportunities to reflect on what they have learned in their blended course, 47% of the learners responded with either 'strongly agree' or 'agree' and 47.1%

‘neutral’. In the final question, the learners were asked if they think that other students should have the opportunity to take a class like this in the future. Eighty percent of the learners responded with either ‘strongly agree’ or ‘agree’ and 20% responded with ‘neutral’.

The results show that the blended setting made the learners study more and reflect more on their own learning. The learners are in favor of giving the chance to other learners to try blended courses. This could be attributed to the fact that the learners themselves had encountered beneficial ways of learning and good teaching strategies, as their responses show, and they, therefore, wanted others to experience this learning environment.

### **3.6.2.2 Open-ended questions**

This part of the post-questionnaire asked the same four questions addressed in the pre-questionnaire. It asked the learners to share their experiences with the blended class, what they liked and disliked, and the kind of advice they would give to teachers and learners of blended setting. The data was collected and analyzed based on the various themes addressed in the learners’ responses. The learners focused on the hopes and concerns regarding the integration of technology, time management, flexibility, communication channels, resources, and assignments. In answering the first question about what they liked the most, the learners chose flexibility, availability of resources and information, teacher’s availability, integration of technology, and interaction with others as the most aspects they liked about the blended class. In answering the second question about what they liked the least, the learners mentioned less opportunities to practice, limited F2F meetings, too many assignments, and confusion with some of the deadlines. In answering question three about their advice to a learner new to blended setting, the learners suggested that learners who are new to blended should make blended courses work for them, take advantage of at home resources, understand not memorize, learn how to use technology

tools, benefit from online work, find a language partner, and always do homework. In answering question four about their advice to a teacher of blended course, the learners suggested for the teacher to be available, be reachable, be clear, balance work load, make the most out of online tools, and post assignments on all possible communication channels.

This section shows that many learners took advantage of the flexibility and the availability of the resources, while others found technology and time management as challenges they needed to work hard on.

The results section presented a collection of experiences that the learners lived throughout in this blended course. The integration of technology, managing their time, handling their assignments, interacting with others, learning about the Arab and the Levantine cultures and having the urge to keep up with such a course was challenging and rewarding to the learners. Overall, many of the learners benefitted from the experience and others felt that it was hard to find the motivation and the organizational skills to do well in the course.

### **3.7 Discussion**

This section discusses the results of the study by comparing the outcomes of the pre-and the post-questionnaire and by looking at any statistically significant differences between them.

This study answered the two research questions in which it first presented the learners' affect by highlighting the seven sections discussed in the study: learners' satisfaction with the blended setting, modality preference, integration of technology, interaction, resources, learning about the Arab and Levantine cultures, and class work and reflections. The study also answered the second question by looking at statistically significant differences between the responses of

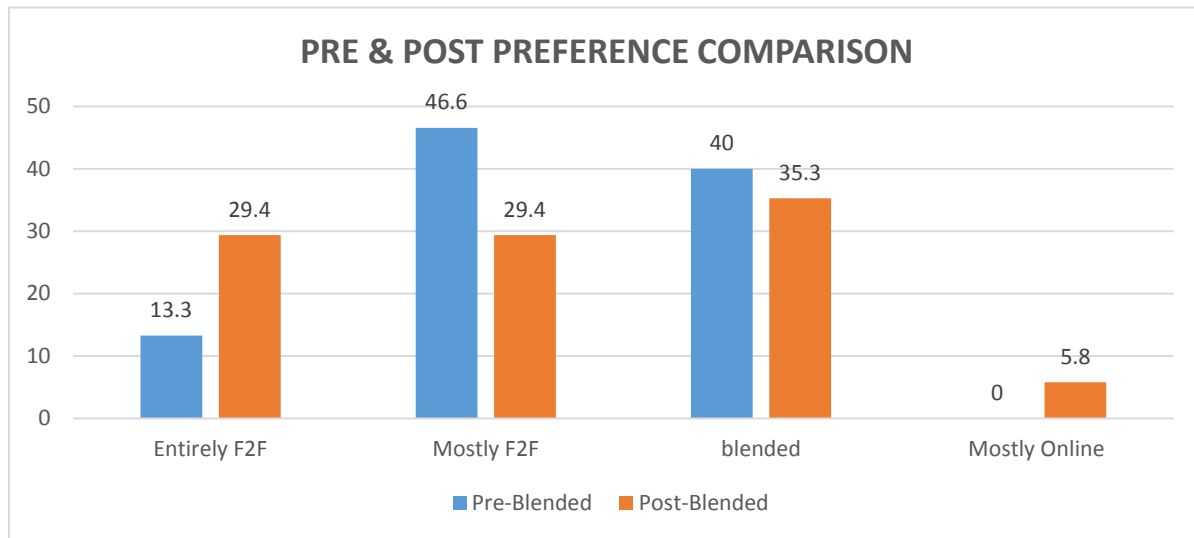
the learners in both questionnaires. The following discussion will tackle both research questions concurrently.

Overall, the study didn't show major statistically significant differences between the responses of the learners in the pre- and the post-questionnaires. In addressing the learners' satisfaction with the blended course, the results showed that learners in both pre-and post-questionnaire were satisfied with the blended setting. The fact that one-third of the learners had never experienced blended setting, might have affected the overall results of the pre-questionnaire. However, the results of the post-questionnaire were more reflective to the learners' satisfaction which showed that the learners were either satisfied or highly satisfied with the blended setting. This section has shown no statistically significant differences between the responses of the learners in both questionnaires.

The preference section showed that most of the learners liked learning from online activities and also liked having part of the class online and part of it F2F. However, when the learners were directly asked about which class modality they prefer, their responses were scattered between entirely F2F, mostly F2F, and blended (see Figure 15 below).



Figure 15: Comparison between results of the learners' modality preference



This shows that the learners still had mixed feelings towards the blended environment and this might be due to the fact that this particular course aimed at developing oral proficiency which is considered the most difficult skill to develop in an online or blended environment when compared with other language skills (Goertler, 2011). Another possible reason for their mixed feelings maybe that this course was the first Arabic course to be offered by the department in a blended setting. This section showed no statistically significant differences between the responses of the learners in both questionnaires.

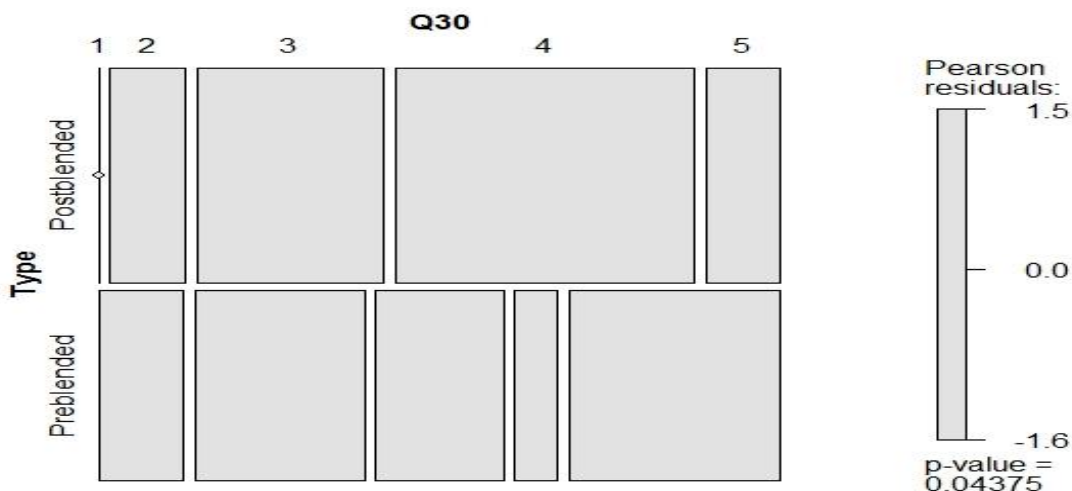
The results in the integration of technology section showed that the learners rated the flashcard software BYKI as the most effective tool followed by D2L in the pre-questionnaire and Hypermedia in the post-questionnaire. The study also showed that the majority of the learners believe that personal devices, social networking, and technology tools, are reliable and can help them to learn. Despite the technological challenges that the learners faced and addressed in the various sections of this study, the learners strongly believe that the technology tools used in this course were helpful and had facilitated their learning process. Other studies support this finding

in the sense that using technology tools were helpful (Alm, 2008; Shih, 2011; and Jia et al., 2012). However, the use of BYKI and Hypermedia as a learning tool has not been addressed adequately in blended language learning research because the two software tools are new and, therefore, there are no results to compare with the results of other studies in this area. The responses of the learners in this section in both the pre- and the post-questionnaire have shown no statistically significant differences.

The interaction section showed promising results in regards to the amount and quality of interaction between stakeholders, especially the amount of interaction between the learners themselves, when compared to F2F. This section showed a statistically significant difference between the responses of the learners in the pre- and post-questionnaire in regards to the amount of their interaction with other learners with a P-Value of 0.0437 (see Figure 16 below). The results of the interaction section parallel with the results of other research studies in the same area, namely, Dziuban & Moskal (2001), Gallini and Barron (2002), and (Aycock et al., 2002).

Figure 16 below shows proportional areas for learners' responses to question 30 of the Interaction section which are (1) for 'much worse', (2) for 'a little worse', (3) for 'about the same', (4) for 'a little better, and (5) for 'much better' The vertical length of the "Participant" being the learner shows the size of the samples relative to each other and 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 show the size of the relative responses for the questions by the participants. The p-value of 0.04375 is calculated based on the Pearson chi-square test. Pearson residuals are used to calculate the p-value by the R Language.

Figure 16: Mosaic Plot including the P-Value of the question about the amount of learners' interaction with other learners.



The results of this section are very encouraging in that they prove that blended setting can be a good tool to increase interactions. What might have helped in this is the nature of the class assignments which required the learners to interact via many technology tools and, therefore, increased their chances of interacting with their teacher and the other learners.

The results of the resources section showed that although a good percentage of the learners agree that the blended course increased their opportunity to access and use information, more learners disagreed in the post-questionnaire than in the pre-questionnaire. However, the learners had general consensus in that the blended learning environment and its material have helped them understand course material, course requirements, and the Levantine Arabic and its cultures. The learners also agreed highly that the university provided needed resources for blended learning and that the teacher used a greater number of teaching resources. This also showed that the resources and the course materials were available and the learners were able to

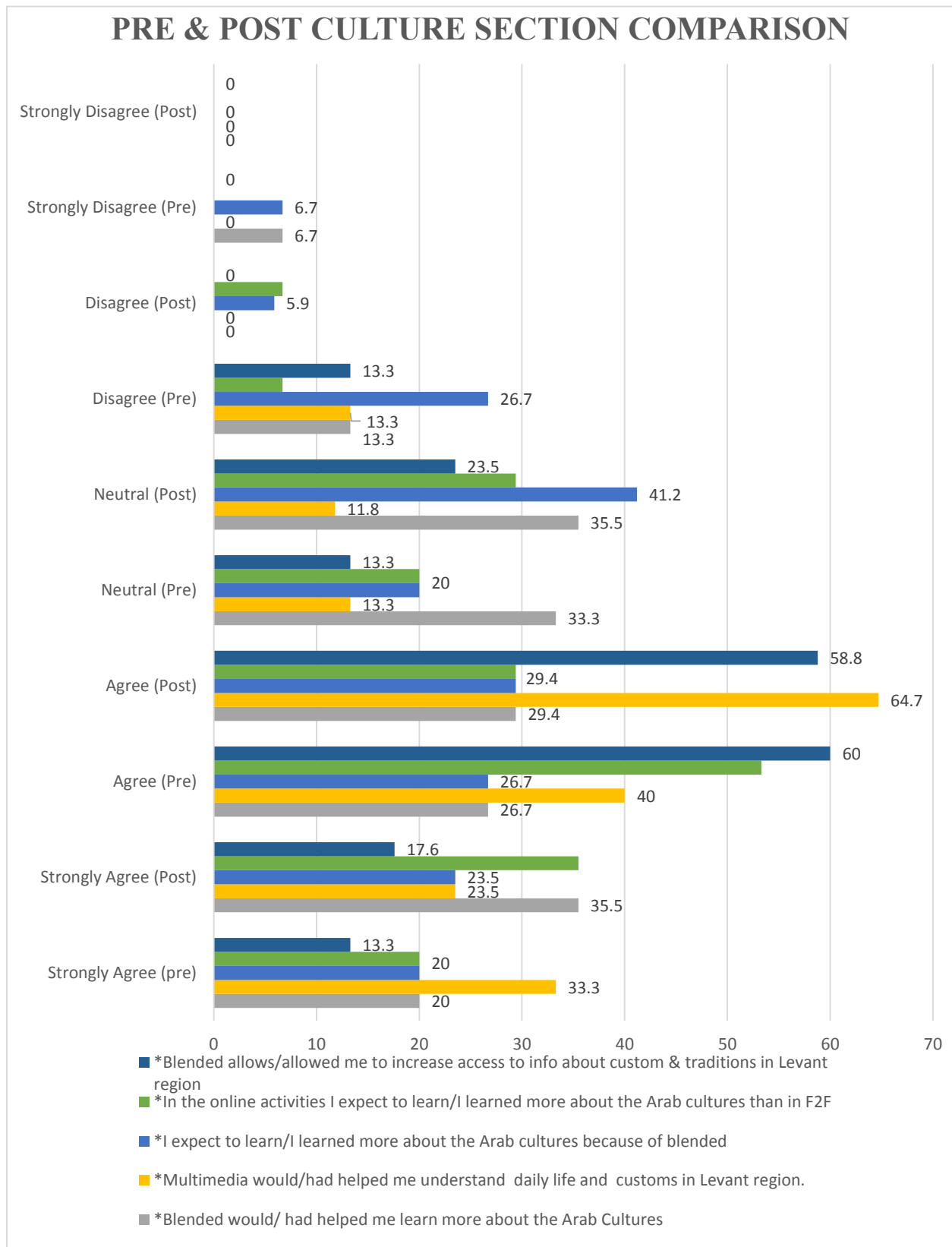
understand them and benefit from them in the blended setting. This section showed no statistically significant differences between the responses of the learners in the pre-questionnaire and the post-questionnaire.

In the ‘learning about culture’ section, the learners strongly believed that the blended setting was an excellent environment to learn about the Arab and the Levantine cultures. The learners came to an understanding that blended learning had helped them learn more about culture. They also believed that the online activities that the multimedia used in this course had all helped them understand and increase the opportunity to access information about the daily life and various customs and traditions than they would have in a classroom setting. Although this section did not show any statistically significant differences between the responses of the learners in the pre- and the post-questionnaire, the learners’ views in the post-questionnaire have moved towards ‘agree’ and ‘strongly agree’. This shows that the blended course experience might have strengthened the learners’ beliefs in the accountability of the blended setting to learn about the Arab and Levantine cultures (see Figure 17 below). The results of this section promote and support the argument about the effectiveness of teaching language as culture using technology.

In the last section addressed in this study, ‘class work and reflections’ section showed that most of the learners either ‘strongly agree’ or ‘agree’ with the fact that the online activities have given them the chance to learn in a variety of ways, study more, and had given them the chance to reflect on what they have learned. The findings of this section align with the results of the study by Dziuban & Moskal (2001) mentioned earlier in which the teachers and the students used new online methods of engagement because of the blended setting. The learners also

strongly agreed that the teacher used various successful teaching strategies in the blended setting and that other learners should be given the choice of taking blended classes. Learning in a

Figure 17: Comparison between pre- & post-questionnaire about 'learning of culture' section.



variety of ways and being able to reflect on your own learning is an advantage that this setting provides due to the flexibility and the adaptability of the course materials and the technology tools used in the course.

This study has investigated the affect surrounding the learners' perspectives regarding blended learning setting. The results showed that learners were satisfied with this environment compared to the F2F setting and have been positive to having part of the class online due to its flexibility, the availability of resources, and the integration of culture. In addition, the learners had more access to materials, resources, and Arab cultures. They also indicated more involvement and interaction with their teachers and peers. The technology tools used in this study were helpful and have accelerated their learning of the Arab cultures and promoted the concept of teaching language as culture using technology. The learners, however, specified some challenges in the blended setting including time management, motivation, less F2F practice, and confusion with some assignments.

The results of this study have not shown major statistically significant differences between the responses of the learners in the pre- and the post-questionnaire. This could be due to the fact that the learners were given the pre-questionnaire in the third week of the semester and, therefore, they were already aware of what the class is about and had already formulated their perspectives before they filled out the questionnaire. The reason behind distributing the pre-questionnaire in the third week is that the learners had undergone an intensive F2F training on the course and the various technology tools in the first two weeks of classes so as to equip the learners with enough knowledge and practice about the course and its technology tools. Another explanation why no major statistically significant differences resulted from the learners' responses is that more than half of the learners submitted their responses of the pre-questionnaire

in week four and five. The reasons behind the tardiness in submitting the pre-questionnaire is that the researcher, who was also the teacher of the class, was not allowed to contact the learners directly due to human subject protection restriction and he had to contact the learners through the volunteer RA who contacted the learners many times asking them to fill out the questionnaire. This long process made the learners fully aware of the class and its blended setting which might have made the learners' responses to the pre- and the post-questionnaire very similar.

When teaching or learning Arabic courses, or any foreign language courses for that matter, the following factors and implications play a vital role in assuring the success of such courses.

The findings of this study are promising and should encourage teachers and learners of Arabic to engage in such experiences and benefit from the advantages this setting has to offer. This includes increase in interaction, more learning of culture, interest in the use of technology tools, and more access to resources and information. Teaching Arabic in blended setting is new to many Arabic teachers, therefore, it is important that the hosting institutions or departments design teacher-training programs in order to help teachers overcome the stress and the challenges they face as new blended teachers, so that they can become experts in the field and make use of this innovative and promising tool towards helping their learners. This training could include shifting courses from traditional setting to blended; hands-on training on using various technology such as the ones used in this course, namely, BYKI, Hypermedia, Eyejot, Facebook page, and emails; orientation on the Learning Management System (LMS) used by the university such as Moodle, Desire to Learn, Blackboard, and Nicenet; curriculum design; designing interactive online activities; etc. A good example of such training is the Faculty Development



Program at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. (Please visit:

[http://www4.uwm.edu/lrc/hybrid/faculty\\_development/](http://www4.uwm.edu/lrc/hybrid/faculty_development/) or see Aycock, 2002).

As this study postulated, students need support while online, as the technical knowledge required is new to many of them. Some teachers assume that students coming out of high school are “computer savvy” (Kaleta, et al., 2006, p. 134), but they are not. They might know how to use technology for social purposes, but when it comes to the use of technology for academic situations, they need training. Many of the challenges mentioned in this study can be avoided by providing appropriate training on technology tools; developing materials that meet students’ levels of proficiency; writing instructions in a simple, understandable language; and creating a clear calendar with specific deadlines for assignments.

Redesigning courses and curricula to use blended setting requires funding and administrative support. A good example of redesign support is the one given to redesigning the Spoken Levantine Arabic course by the Online Education Project (OEP) at the University of Arizona. OEP provided a training workshop and weekly consultation to the project team to ensure that the course is designed well. Teachers should keep in mind that blended learning and online learning are here to stay, therefore, teachers should benefit from the findings of this study and engage themselves in redesigning and teaching their courses in blended setting. Such experiences would equip them with a strong tool that will help them compete and excel.

In Blended language learning assessment is challenging and teachers –and students –need support to implement it. One of the challenges is that the online part of the blended setting gives a higher opportunity for students to cheat and plagiarize from others in their work. In designing a course assessment, designers and teachers should modify the blended assessment as compared

with a F2F environment, they also need to use more formative than summative assessments, and divide the assignments into smaller increments throughout the semester.

Teachers of blended setting should make themselves available to their learners through various media for questions or concerns in order to make up for the limited F2F interaction. Teachers should also post assignments, deadlines, news, test dates, etc. frequently using more than one tool/medium. By doing this, learners would be aware of class activities and would be up to date and on task.

This study faced four challenges. The first challenge is that the number of the learners was limited. Only 17 subjects took part in the study. The second challenge is that wearing the hat of the teacher and the hat of the researcher at the same time in the same class made it difficult, but not impossible, to act objectively. The third challenge is lack of studies in Arabic blended research which made it hard to compare and contrast results. A fourth challenge in this study is that the pre- and the post-questionnaires were adopted from another study, which was not designed for teaching Arabic. Although changes were made on the questionnaires to fit the Arabic context, but it would have been more suitable to design the questionnaires to fit the broader context of Arabic language, culture as well as the blended context. However, starting with new questionnaires would have required a questionnaire designer who is trained and understands the particularities of Arabic in a blended setting.

Further research can address the issues raised in this study so results can be compared and further implications can be drawn. Other future research can address in-depth the challenges that faced the learners so as to suggest solutions. Researchers interested in conducting studies in this area need to keep in mind the timing of using the various instruments. If questionnaires are used, researchers should choose the right time to distribute the questionnaire and should get support to

find quick and efficient ways to collect the filled-out questionnaires. Those researchers should also make sure that they are not the teachers and the material developers of the blended class in order to avoid confusion, stress, biasness and tardiness. Finally, other future research can use additional instruments, such as semi-structured interviews and class visits, in order to have a better picture about the learners' experience in the blended setting.

### **3.8 Conclusion**

This study has investigated the affect of the learners of Arabic in a spoken Levantine course. Although there are shortcomings to blended language learning, as is the case with any other teaching approach, this study has shown that learners find it positive and satisfying. This study has given learners more space for self-pace work and flexibility, reflect on their own work and culture, and equipped them with many practical, technological and cultural skills. The study has shown that blended language learning has facilitated higher quality interaction between the teacher and the learners and between the learners amongst themselves. The study has also highlighted the challenges that faced the learners such as time management, motivation, technology tools and F2F practice.

## CHAPTER 4: TEACHING CULTURE IN ARABIC: LEARNERS' AFFECT SURROUNDING THE USE OF HYPERMEDIA

### 4.1 Abstract

Hypermedia is defined as a combination of hypertext –characterized by its use of textual information in nodes and links –and multimedia –text, audio, and graphic annotations (Ariew & Ercetin (2004). This study investigated the affect of 17 learners of Arabic at the School of Middle Eastern and North African Studies (MENAS) at the University of Arizona in regard to two Arabic Hypermedia lessons presented to them as part of a spoken Levantine Arabic class that was offered in a blended setting–face-to-face and online setting. Using a pre- and a post-questionnaire with open and closed ended questions, the study looked at four factors surrounding the use of Hypermedia to learn Arabic cultures. Namely, learners' satisfaction with Arabic Hypermedia, technology used, learning about the Arab cultures, and learners' affect.

The results of the study show that learners were satisfied, were able to handle technology, believed that Hypermedia is a good tool to learn about the Arab cultures, and had positive feelings towards Hypermedia. The statistical analysis of the data showed no statistically significant differences between the responses of the learners in the pre- and post-questionnaire except for one item in the affect section.

## 4.2 Introduction

Ariew & Ercetin (2004) define Hypermedia as a combination of hypertext –characterized by its use of textual information in nodes and links –and multimedia –text, audio, and graphic annotations to help in reading comprehension. AbuSeileek (2008) gives the gloss or Hypermedia annotation a more general meaning, defining it as a technique used in language learning and teaching to enhance reading comprehension and vocabulary acquisition. Ketabi, Ghavamnia and Rezazadeh (2012) present a non-conventional definition of Hypermedia in terms of interactivity and nonlinearity: “Hypermedia refers to computer-based applications that provide information in a nonlinear way through multiple types of resources such as text, graphics, sound, video, and animation” (p. 41).

Lomicka (1998) refers to glosses as short descriptions of the meanings of words available at the end or at the sides of a text aimed at helping the learners to comprehend a reading text. Roby (1999) criticized Lomicka’s definition in his “taxonomy of glosses” and defines glosses in a more comprehensive way stating "glosses are many kinds of attempts to supply what is perceived to be deficient in a reader's procedural or declarative knowledge" (p. 96). Roby explains that procedural knowledge refers to skills and declarative knowledge refers to facts and he lists both of them under “gloss function” (p. 95). Yun (2011) complemented Roby’s definition, showing that gloss can function based on the kind of knowledge the reader has -- procedural or declarative. Yun also gave an example to illustrate his point, “in terms of gloss functions, glosses not only give linguistic and definitive explanations but also allow readers to consider their deeper metacognitive action of whether or not they are actively reading” (p. 41). The various definitions of hypermedia, hypertext, and glosses swing from the traditional marginal glossing on the bottom or the sides of texts to the computer-based environment with

text, images, and videos. Finally, Widdowson (1984) (cited in Ariew & Ercetin, 2004) defines glossary in simple words as “a list of words and phrases and their meanings that are judged to be outside the learner’s current competence” (p. 239). In this paper, the term ‘hypermedia’ is used instead of both the terms hypertext and gloss for the sake of convenience.

### **Multimedia Learning Theory**

In an early study, Clark (1992) reported that media is just a tool to deliver instruction. Using more than one medium does not necessarily cause more effective learning than the use of one medium. However, Based on Paivio’s (1986) Dual Coding Theory (DCT), Mayer (1997, 2001) has further developed the Generative Theory of Multimedia Learning, which illustrates how both pictorial and written inputs collaboratively enhance second language (L2) readers’ reading comprehension and vocabulary learning. This model emphasizes the importance of readers’ integrative learning ability to enhance vocabulary acquisition with multimedia input by connecting two verbal and visual systems with written and pictorial cues in the brain. That is, better vocabulary learning with multimedia input is more likely to take place when L2 learners are cognitively capable of dealing with both written and pictorial information at the same time such as a picture illustrating a vocabulary in a reading passage.

### **The Effect of Glosses on Reading Comprehension and Vocabulary Acquisition**

In the last twenty years, a growing interest in hypertext glosses and annotation has resulted in many research studies. However, these studies are inconclusive (Chun, 2006) and inconsistent (Jacobs, 1994, Yun 2011) showing varied discrepancies in the effectiveness of using Hypermedia glossing in L2 vocabulary learning (Yun, 2011). Some of these studies have appealed to integration of Hypermedia in Second Language Acquisition (SLA) reading comprehension and learning vocabulary due to its “authenticity, salience, and nonlinearity”

(Yun, 2011, p. 39). Studies also showed an overall effect of using hypertext glosses on vocabulary acquisition and reading comprehension by increasing readers' retention time and reducing look-up behavior time (Abuseileek, 2008; Lomicka, 1998; Chun, 2001). However, other studies have shown that the use of hypertext glosses might have a positive effect on learners with regard to perception, motivation and attitudes, but not reading comprehension or vocabulary acquisition (Roby, 1993; Ariew & Ercetin, 2004; Yanguas, 2009; Sakar & Ercetin, 2004).

The discrepancies between the benefits of Hypermedia will be addressed in more details in the literature review section that follows. However, the present study takes into consideration the lack of concrete results in research that show linguistic gains -such as vocabulary acquisition and reading comprehension- from using Hypermedia and, therefore, addresses using Hypermedia to investigate cultural gains, among other goals, instead.

### 4.3 Literature Review

Research in Hypermedia mainly looked at the usefulness of Hypermedia in reading comprehension and vocabulary acquisition. Although research shows positive effect on motivation, perception, attitude and retention, the results of Hypermedia research showed marginal linguistic gains (Roby, 1993; Ariew & Ercetin, 2004; Yanguas, 2009; Sakar & Ercetin, 2004).

The focus of this research paper, among other issues, is using Hypermedia to investigate the teaching and learning of the Arab cultures. I begin with looking at studies that deal with vocabulary since they are the most numerous in connection with Hypermedia

Ercetin (2003) investigated the frequency of annotation access and the amount of time spent on annotations for 84 intermediate and advanced ESL students. The results showed that

intermediate students accessed all types of annotations more frequently, while advanced students accessed fewer annotations, but spent more time on each one. Although the results showed a positive impact on the participants' attitudes towards reading on the computer, annotation use did not facilitate reading comprehension for either group. Ariew and Ercetin (2004) used the same data that Ercetin (2003) used in her study, but looked at it from different perspectives. Using Hypermedia reading software, Ariew and Ercetin (2004) examined the usefulness of different types of annotations for reading comprehension and whether their effectiveness differed based on students' proficiency levels. The study showed that 1) textual and contextual annotations do not enhance reading comprehension for intermediate level learners, 2) advanced level learners did not rely on annotation for text comprehension, and 3) prior knowledge about the reading topic was an important indicator of reading comprehension. In sum, the study showed a negative correlation between certain annotation use and reading comprehension for the ESL intermediate students. Last, O'Donnell and Kelly (2001) a few years earlier had conducted a study in the same way as Ariew and Ercetin (2004) and supported their findings with regard to the advantage of having prior knowledge. In their study on twelve undergraduate students in an educational psychology course, Last et al. (2001) examined the impact of students' prior knowledge and desired goal on the difficulties and advantages associated with using hypertext. Students were assigned into either a high or a low prior knowledge group and then assigned into subgroups with strong or weak goals. Results show that prior knowledge and goal strength are important predictors of students' cognitive and affective reactions to the hypertext program. Another study by Davis and Lyman-Hager (1997) found a positive attitude towards annotation for 42 intermediate-level French students, but no meaningful relationship between annotation use and reading comprehension was found. However, Ercetin (2010) examined topic interest and prior



knowledge on 54 Turkish learners of English using Hypermedia reading text and found that topic interest had a significant main effect on text recall, while prior knowledge did not.

Yanguas (2009) investigated the effect of multimedia glosses on text comprehension and vocabulary learning. Ninety four fourth-semester college-level learners of Spanish were divided into four groups: textual, pictorial, textual & pictorial, and the control group. Participants were asked to read an authentic internet-based text from an online Spanish newspaper and were provided with 21 annotated words. Pre and post production and recognition tasks in addition to comprehension tasks were used as assessment tools. Results of the study showed that all multimedia groups noticed and recognized more of the target words than the control group. Results also showed that the combination group (textual & pictorial group) outperformed the other groups in regard to reading comprehension. This study showed that the type of annotation might affect the impact on vocabulary learning and reading comprehension, and that combination annotation is more beneficial for reading comprehension than single annotation.

Chun (2001) also investigated vocabulary knowledge and reading comprehension. She conducted a study on 23 second-year L2 learners of German who were divided into high and low levels and were asked to read two texts in a web program. The study investigated learner behavior in looking up unknown words using internal and external dictionaries, and whether this helps in vocabulary knowledge and reading comprehension. Results show that learners looked up more words and better understood the text that had the internal glosses and the external dictionary available (text 1), and that they performed better on the preposition recall task than they did with the text (text 2) that had only an external dictionary. Moreover, there was a positive relationship between the amount of time spent on a specific task and the number of recalled prepositions. The study also showed that high level and low level learners showed no difference

in the number of prepositions recalled despite the fact that high level learners looked up fewer words and spent less time on task. This is an indication that lower level students benefited more from the lookup behavior (Chun, 2001).

Moreover, Chun and Plass (1996a) conducted a study asking the following question: How effective are annotations with different media types for vocabulary acquisition? The study involved 160 second-year German students where the subjects watched a video preview of a story, then read the story and wrote a recall about it. Reading the story was a process that included annotation with textual, graphic, and video details. Annotation on the reading was either one annotation or a mixture of text & picture, or text & video. Results show significantly higher scores for annotated words with pictures & text than those with video & text. The results also found a correlation between looking up a specific annotation category and using this category as the recall hint for remembering words. However, in a study with intermediate learners of English as a second language, Al Seghayer (2001) found that glosses that provided text & videos were more facilitative of vocabulary learning compared to glosses providing only text and text & pictures. Ariew and Ercetin (2004) reviewed research studies about the use of text dictionaries and computer dictionaries and results showed that the ability to access a computer dictionary (hyper-dictionary) allows readers to refer to annotation more frequently and reduces study time. They also found out that lower level students benefit more from annotations than intermediate and advanced students. Yun (2011) conducted a meta-analysis study on 57 selected articles, reports and papers then filtered them to 10 papers. The meta-analysis examined the effect of hypertext gloss on L2 vocabulary acquisition and the effect of media combination of text-only, or text & visual. The results show that the media combination of more than one condition, i.e. text & visual, was moderately effective in vocabulary acquisition when the learners were

exposed to both conditions; text-only and text & visual. The study also showed that beginner-level learners benefitted more with regard to L2 vocabulary acquisition when exposed to multiple hypertext glosses.

As we can see from the literature review, using Hypermedia glosses is welcomed by learners and has positively affected their perception, motivation, and attitude towards reading comprehension. However, studies have shown marginal linguistic gains from using Hypermedia glossing. Studies have indicated that prior knowledge of the text in hand aids learners in reading comprehension. Also, using a combination of media annotation such as textual, graphic, and video has shown some help to learners in vocabulary knowledge and reading comprehension.

### **Arabic Hypermedia**

Interest in learning Arabic has rapidly increased in the last two decades. The questions that Arab students ask have shifted from “Why study Arabic?” to “How long does it take to become fluent?” (Ryding, 2006, p. 13). However, readiness of educational institutions in regard to preparing qualified instructors, developing textbooks, and using technology as a means to create teaching materials is minimal (Ryding, 2006). This section sheds light on using Hypermedia technology in teaching Arabic reading with a focus on the challenges encountered in this field

Arabic is a diglossic language which means, as defined by Ferguson (1959), the existence of two varieties of the Arabic language used in one speech community: Modern Standard Arabic (MSA), A modern rendering of older classical and Quranic Arabic, and the spoken varieties. Classic Arabic is a third variety, but it is only used in Quranic and classical readings. In the Arab world, MSA is considered the higher-prestige variety and is the written language, although it has

a spoken form in media and formal settings. The spoken variety, considered the lower-prestige variety, is, however, used in everyday functional and communication purposes (Alosh, 1997; Ariew & Palmer, 2009; Ryding, 2006). It should be noted that, of the two varieties, more attention has been paid to the study of Modern Standard Arabic presenting a big demand on textbooks, dictionaries, and new teaching methodologies (Versteegh, 2006).

Until recently, grammar-translation and audio-lingual methods were the main approaches adopted by educational institutions, embodied through language instruction and textbooks. Along with those approaches, the focus of teaching was on two of the language skills: reading and writing (Allen, 1976) leaving speaking and listening aside. In the middle of 1990, the first Arabic communicative language teaching textbook appeared; *Al-Kitaab* (Part One, 1995). However, this textbook lacks color and is not designed for self-instruction Awad (1998).

Recently, attention has been paid to enhancing the role of technology in teaching Arabic and many Web tools have been created to promote teaching Arabic communicatively. The Language Center at Cornell University (<http://www.lrc.cornell.edu/medialib/ar>) developed video files on their website that provide learners with a series of contextual situations to promote learning Levantine Arabic for beginner and intermediate levels. *Aswaat e'Arabiyya* (Arabic Voices) (<http://www.laits.utexas.edu/aswaat/>) is another website that was developed by the University of Texas at Austin which provides listening materials and accompanying activities that are intended for various levels of proficiency from Novice to Superior. These listening materials have been selected from television stations throughout the Arab world and they treat a wide variety of topics and listening genres. Also, *Arabic Without Walls* (<http://arabicwithoutwalls.ucdavis.edu/aww/>) is a distance-learning Arabic course/website developed by the University of California (UC) Consortium for Language Learning and

Teaching, the National Middle East Language Resource Center at Brigham Young University, and Near Eastern Studies Department at UC Berkeley. The website contains three complementary web-based components: Course Content into *Al-Kitaab*, Interviews, and Culture. *Arabic Without Walls* is designed around two textbooks with accompanying DVDs: *Alif Baa: Introduction to Arabic Sounds and Letters* and *Al-Kitaab Fii Ta'allum Al-'arabiyya Part I* both by Kristen Brustad, Mahmoud Al-Batal and Abbas Al-Tonsi. The website is meant to be interactive with *Chat* and *Forum* links, has glossed vocabulary and includes images, audio, and videos. The three websites discussed above are just a few examples among many other websites and software that attempt to promote learning Arabic communicatively and interactively.

Unlike teachers of many other languages, Arabic instructors face several challenges in designing Hypermedia materials. The main challenge is that multimedia design tools used for Hypermedia are not friendly to Arabic as a language, since it uses non-Latin symbols (Ariew & Palmer, 2009). Another challenge is that any Hypermedia tool used must be able to deal with the fact that the Arabic writing system displays text from right to left and requires characters to be rendered as a unified script. These particulars make it very hard for the user of the design tool to type Arabic, which forces that person to use different programs to type the right size and font, then copy and paste and try to see if what was pasted matches the space available in the software. Also, identifying appropriate images that are culturally authentic is another challenge, on top of adding glosses.

A template design for Hypermedia was developed by Ariew (2006) using Adobe Director 11.5 software. The reasons behind developing this software were the ease of use of hypermedia, their ability to include many languages, their ability to be distributed through the Web, and their potential to help readers make sense of the material (Ariew & Palmer 2009). The template was

used for conducting at least two studies: Cooledge (2004) on 85 intermediate students of French as a foreign language, and Ariew and Ercetin (2004) on 84 intermediate and advanced students of English as second language (Ariew, Ercetin, & Cooledge, 2008). As an attempt to meet the challenges that faced Arabic language teaching, the design had to be reprogrammed in order to be able to accept languages that use non-Latin alphabets, accept the Arabic right to left script direction, and to be web-based so people have easy access to its outcome materials.

Hypermedia in Arabic and Hypermedia and culture are fields that have not been explored yet; to the best of my knowledge, there are no empirical studies in the literature that used Arabic Hypermedia environments to examine reading comprehension or vocabulary acquisition or to examine culture for that matter. However, despite the challenges, a Hypermedia project, including Arabic hypermedia, was sponsored by the Center for Educational Resources in Culture, Language and Literacy (CERCLL) at the University of Arizona, aimed at facilitating linguistic and cultural comprehension of reading texts for language learners. The project was organized into two phases. The outcome of the first phase was the production of five hypertext Arabic lessons accompanied with annotations in order to explain the meanings of words and expressions as well as illustrate rhetorical, socio-cultural, and historical concepts embedded in the texts. The lessons included pre-reading, reading, and post-reading activities with cultural references (Ariew & Ercetin, 2004) (see Image 1). In addition to the Hypermedia lessons, five interactive blogs were developed to complement the Hypermedia lessons and contained readings, videos, and activities about the theme of the lesson. The lessons and the blogs are available on the Web for teachers to use as part of classroom resources.

**Image 1: A snapshot was taken from CERCLL's lessons of Hypermedia reading passage in Phase 1 showing the glossed vocabulary with the meaning in English and the image**

شهر رمضان هو شهر كريم ومقدس عند المسلمين. فهو شهر العبادات حيث تكثر فيه الصلوات والعباءة والتقرب الى الله. وهو شهر القرآن لان القرآن الكريم نزل فيه. ويعتبر ايضا شهر الانتصارات حيث ان كثيرا منها حدثت في عهد النبي محمد في هذا الشهر. وفي هذا الشهر القمري يصوم المسلمون من قبل طلوع الشمس وحتى مغيبها ليأكلوا بعدها المأكولات والمشروبات والحلويات الشهية. ومن فوائد الصيام انه



Delicious

The second phase of CERCLL's Hypermedia project used a new software called TIARA (The Interactive Annotated Reading Application) which was developed by a team from the University of Arizona and Brigham Young University. TIARA is a web-based browser that is friendly to Arabic, accept the Arabic right to left script direction, and accommodates the non-Latin Arabic symbols. The outcome of the Arabic portion was the production of two comprehensive spoken Levantine Arabic lessons that fully integrated culture (see Image 2 below). The two lessons were used in this experimental study.



## Image 2: A snapshot was taken from CERCLL's lessons of Arabic Hypermedia lesson in Phase 2

showing the glossed vocabulary with the meaning in English and two videos.

TIARA

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المهباج

TEXT IMAGE AUDIO VIDEO ALL

### CUSTOMS AND TRADITIONS IN THE LEVANTINE REGION: القهوة العربية ARABIC COFFEE

II. Arabic Coffee: Watch the Video

III. Arabic Coffee: The Text

القهوة العربية مشهورة في معظم الدول العربية وخاصة الجزيرة العربية وبلاد الشام. وفي نوعين من القهوة: القهوة الحلوة أو القهوة التركية والتي يكون فيها سكر وتتقدم بفنجان إله يد و القهوة السادة أو القهوة المرّة والتي تتقدم بفنجان سادة.

وشرب القهوة إله بروتوكول وإتيكيت خاص ومن أهمها إنه صاحب البيت يصبب القهوة في دلة ويحمل الدلة في الإيد الشمال وفنجان القهوة في الإيد اليمين وبيقدم القهوة للضيف الذي جالس على اليمين. وصاحب البيت يقدّم القهوة للضيف أكثر من مرّة وبكمية قليلة ولما الضيف ينتهي من شرب القهوة يقول "بيكفي!" أو بيهز فنجان القهوة. وتتقدم القهوة في المناسبات الإجتماعية المختلفة زي الزواج و عيد الفطر السعيد و عيد الأضحى المبارك والزيارات العائلية وزيارات الأصدقاء.

وفي طرق كثيرة لعمل القهوة ومن أشهرها **تحميص القهوة** على نار حطب وبعد هيك صاحب البيت **يبطحنها** في إناء اسمه **المهباج** وبعدها **ببجط** القهوة في دلة على النار ولما تجهز بيقدمها للضيف. وفي الثقافة والفن العربي في كثير من الأغاني والمسلسلات والأفلام التي يتحكي عن شرب القهوة وأهميتها في عادات العرب وتقاليدهم.

وخارج البيت يبروج الأصحاب على القهوة (الكافية) أو **المقهى** عشان يشربوا قهوة ويسهروا. وكثير من الشباب يشربوا القهوة مع الأرجيلة في الكافية. و الأرجيلة أصبحت مشهورة كثير عند الشباب والبنات. ولما تطلب قهوة

TIARA - THE INTERACTIVE ANNOTATED READING APPLICATION Credits

المهباج

دقة المهباج.mp4

A wooden container used to grind coffee manually and has a distinguished musical sound.

أغنية دقوا المهباج

Activate Windows  
Go to PC settings t

1 / 1

## 4.4 The Study

### 4.4.1 Background

This case study investigated learners' affect regarding the use of Arabic Hypermedia lesson to teach the Levantine Arabic vernacular and Arabic cultures under the concept of teaching "language as culture" presented by Kramersch (Kramersch, 1995, p. 83). The study was conducted in the fall semester of 2013 with 17 learners who were enrolled in the blended Levantine spoken Arabic class at the School of Middle Eastern and North African Studies (MENAS) at the University of Arizona. Spoken Levantine Arabic is the variety spoken in Jordan, Syria, Lebanon, and Palestine and is considered the lower-prestige variety compared to the Modern Standard Arabic which is considered the higher-prestige variety (Alosh, 1997; Ariew & Palmer, 2009; Ryding, 2006; Shiri, 2013). The researcher taught the beginning-level, three-



credit spoken Levantine Arabic class in a blended learning setting where learners met once a week for 75 minutes instead of meeting twice a week for a total of 150 minutes. The blended learning class was designed with a grant by the Online Education Project (OEP) run by the Office of Instruction and Assessment (OIA) at the University of Arizona. In this setting, the researcher developed 12 modules that simulated the spoken nature of the class using a variety of technology tools.

Two Hypermedia lessons, ‘Ramadan Kareem’ and ‘Arabic Coffee & Cafés’, were presented to class in weeks 9 and 10. In week 8, the learners filled out a pre-questionnaire after they received a short introduction and practice on the lessons in the TIARA software. In week 11, the learners filled out a post-questionnaire. The study looked at four major aspects; (1) learners’ satisfaction with Hypermedia experience, (2) technology used, (3) learning of Arab cultures, and (4) learners’ affect towards the Hypermedia associated lessons.

#### 4.4.2 Research Questions

The study aimed at answering the following research questions:

- c. What are the learners’ views about the Hypermedia lessons in regard to the following aspects:
  - i. learners’ satisfaction with Hypermedia experience
  - ii. technology used
  - iii. learning about Arab cultures
  - iv. learners’ affect toward the Hypermedia lessons
- d. Are there any statistically significant differences between the learners’ responses in the pre- and the post-questionnaires that asked about the aspects detailed in Question a?

## 4.5 Methodology

### 4.5.1 Participants

The participants of this study were 17 learners of Arabic enrolled in the Levantine spoken Arabic class at MENAS at the University of Arizona. The learners were 10 males and 7 females. The ethnic background of the learners were: 7 white, 5 Hispanics/Latinos, 1 African American, 1 Asian, 1 African American/white, 1 Middle Eastern/Hispanic, and 1 other. The vast majority of the learners were undergraduates -95%- and their computer competence ranged from average to excellent as self-reported in the pre-questionnaire.

### 4.5.2 Instruments

Pre- and post-questionnaires were used to collect data for this study. The questionnaires were based on a similar one by Strachota (2006). The pre- and post-questionnaires used in this study were generated and adapted to fit the purpose of this study.

A graduate student volunteered to be the Research Assistant (RA) to help out in conducting the study with the researcher. The reason behind assigning an RA was to avoid any pressure on the learners because the researcher of the study was himself the teacher of the class in the study. The researcher met with the RA and explained to him the purpose of the study and briefed him about the instrument of the study, the methodology, and his role in executing the study. In the eighth week of classes, the RA visited the class while the researcher left the class so that he could talk to the learners freely and without any pressure from the researcher. The RA introduced the study and its goals to the learners. He explained that participation is voluntary and

that there will be no penalty if any of them decided not to participate or decided to participate then changed his/her mind and wanted to opt out. The researcher also explained that their participation or lack of participation was not going to affect their grade in this class and that they will not be rewarded if they choose to participate. The RA distributed the consent form asking learners to read it and to decide whether they wanted to participate or not. All of the 17 learners present in the class consented and then were provided with the pre-questionnaire to fill out in two days. The RA returned to class after two days and collected the filled-out pre-questionnaires. All pre-questionnaires were coded with a unique identifier and the names of participants were saved separately.

The pre-questionnaire consisted of questions about the learners' background followed by closed questions and open-ended questions. The closed section asked questions about the learners' expectations regarding four aspects, namely: (1) learners' satisfaction with the Hypermedia experience, (2) technology used, (3) learning about Arab cultures, and (4) learners' affect towards the Hypermedia lessons. In the open ended part, learners were asked about what their expectations were regarding what they would like or dislike about the Arabic Hypermedia lessons.

The post-questionnaire was distributed to the learners by the RA in week 11. The RA visited the class and the researcher left the class to give the learners the freedom to voluntarily participate in the post-questionnaire segment of the study. The RA reminded the learners of the study and its objectives, then distributed the post-questionnaire asking learners to fill them out in two days. Fifteen learners out of the 18 learners were present in class that day and they all accepted to participate in this part of the study. The RA revisited the class after two days and collected the 15 filled-out questionnaires and gave them to the researcher afterwards. All post-

questionnaires were coded with a unique identifier and the names of participants were saved separately.

The post-questionnaire consisted of closed questions and open-ended questions. The closed section asked questions about the learners' experiences regarding the same four factors addressed in the pre-questionnaires, but focused on the learner's experiences rather than their expectations. In the open-ended part, learners were asked to state what they liked the most and the least about their Arabic Hypermedia lessons experience and they were also asked about the kind of advice they would give to the teacher of Hypermedia class and a learner new to a Hypermedia lessons.

#### **4.5.3 Data Analysis Procedures**

Data was analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistical analyses. The descriptive analysis has provided details about the learners' responses to the pre- and post-questionnaires in regard to their experiences, satisfactions, technology used, learning about the Arab cultures, and their affect towards the Hypermedia experience. The inferential analysis has helped make prediction about the degree to which Arabic Hypermedia lessons have been set up to meet the objectives of the study. This was done by analyzing data of the participants and by comparing differences between the responses in the pre- and the post-questionnaires.

To determine if there were statistically significant differences between responses obtained from learners in the pre-questionnaire and those obtained in the post-questionnaire, contingency table analysis was performed using the data analysis software R Language (Kabacoff 2011; Zumel & Mount 2013) for each question asked in both questionnaires. In the statistical significance analysis, the null hypothesis ( $H_0$ ) states that the responses to questions for both the pre- and the post- questionnaires come from the same population, i.e. the responses of

learners in both questionnaires are the same. While the research (or alternative) hypothesis ( $H_a$ ) states the opposite: the responses to questions obtained from learners in both questionnaires come from different populations and there are significant statistical differences between the responses obtained from the pre-questionnaire and those obtained from the post-questionnaire for the same question.

For each test performed on each question, Pearson's Chi-squared test was performed to test the null hypothesis using a rejection region of  $\alpha = 0.05$  which represents a Type I Error (Ott and Longnecker 2001). A Type I Error is committed if we reject the null hypothesis when it is true. A p-value was obtained from the significant test analysis, if the p-value was less than 0.05 then the null hypothesis was rejected and the research hypothesis was accepted which meant that there was a statistical significant difference between the responses obtained from the learners in the pre-questionnaire and those obtained from the learners in the post-questionnaire. And if the p-value was greater than 0.05 then the null hypothesis was accepted and the research hypothesis was rejected which meant that there was no statistical significant difference between the responses obtained from the learners in the pre-questionnaire and those obtained from the learners in the post-questionnaire.

## **4.6 RESULTS**

### **4.6.1 Pre-questionnaire**

The pre-questionnaire was divided into two sections: closed and open-ended questions.

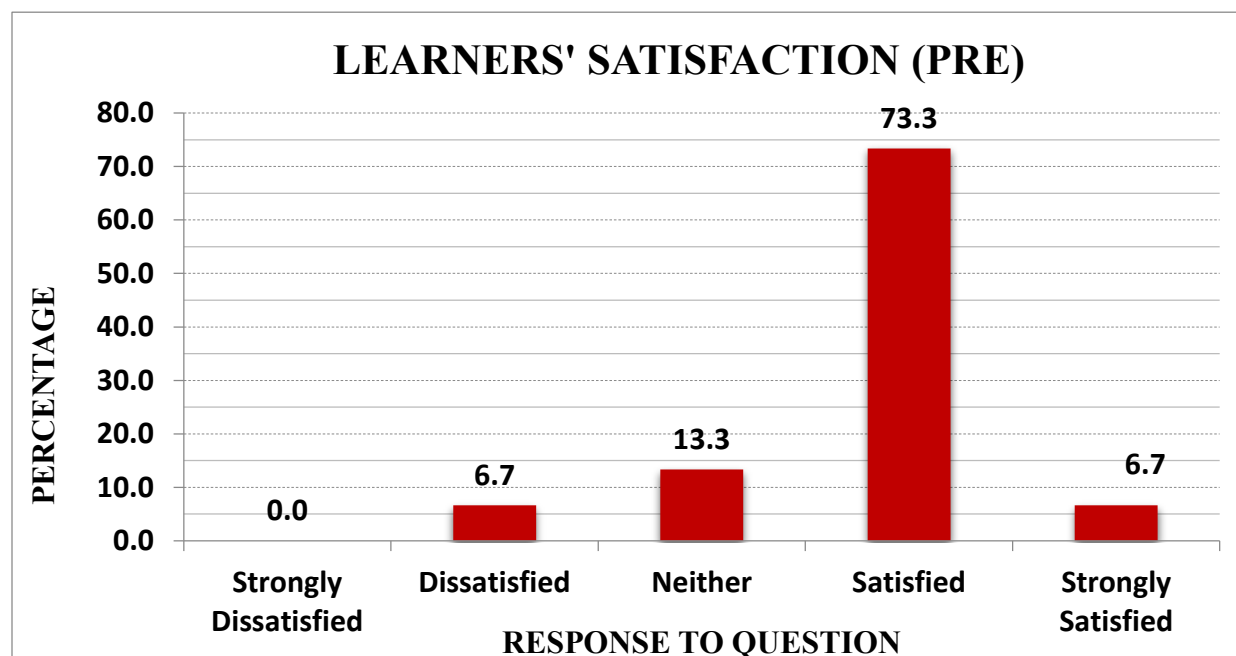
#### 4.6.1.1 Closed questions

This part of the pre-questionnaire reports the results of four sections: (1) learner's satisfaction, (2) technology used, (3) learning about Arab cultures, and (4) learners' affect towards Hypermedia associated lessons. To respond to the questions of this part of the questionnaire, the learners were given five choices: (1) 'very dissatisfied', (2) 'dissatisfied', (3) 'neither', (4) 'generally satisfied', and (5) 'very satisfied'.

##### 4.6.1.1.1 Learners' satisfaction

The learners were presented with a question about how satisfied they think they would be with the Hypermedia Arabic tool and the Hypermedia associated lessons. The results show that the 80% of the learners responded with either 'satisfied' or 'strongly satisfied' with the Hypermedia tool and the Hypermedia associated lessons (see Figure 1 below).

Figure 1: Results of the learners' satisfaction of the Arabic Hypermedia in the pre-questionnaire



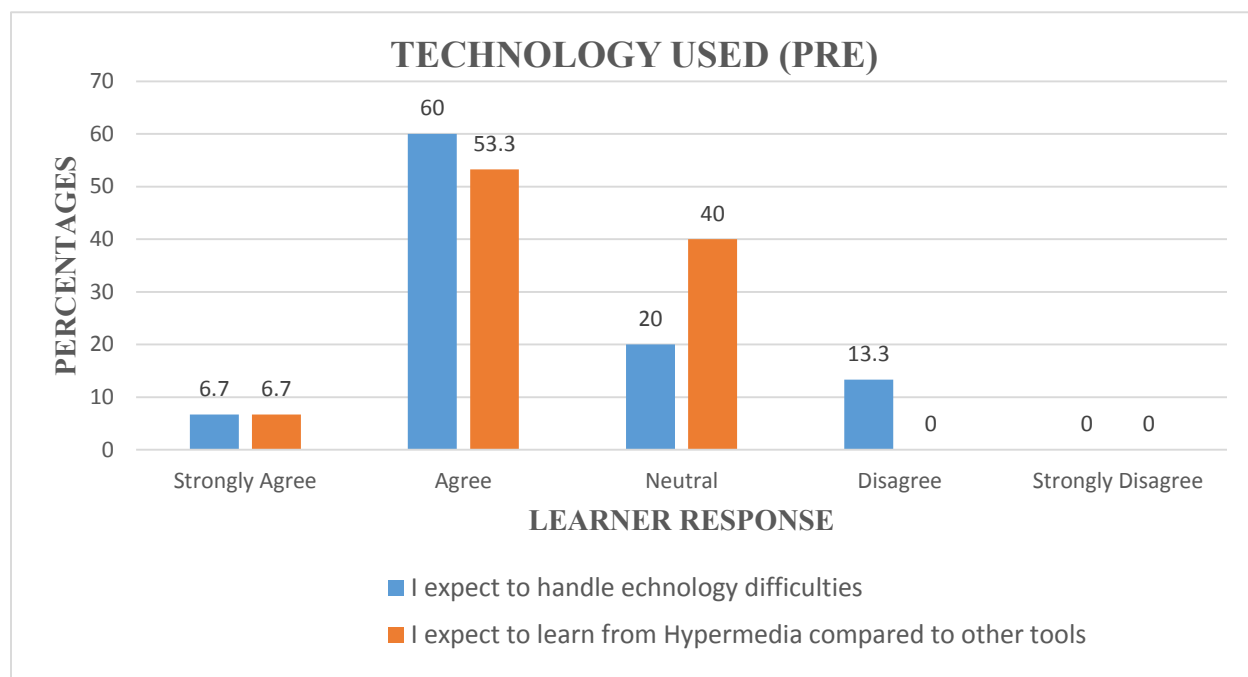
This shows that the learners were pleased with the short introduction that they received about the Arabic Hypermedia and were motivated to learn more.

#### 4.6.1.1.2 Technology used

The learners were presented with two questions about the Hypermedia technology tool. The first question asked the learners if they expected to be able to deal with most difficulties they might encounter when using the Hypermedia tool and 66.7% of the learners responded with either 'strongly agree' or 'agree'. Only 13.3% chose 'disagree' and 20% chose 'neither'. In comparing other technology tools they were familiar with, the second question asked the learners if they think that they would learn as much from Arabic Hypermedia tools as compared to other tools such as BYKI (Before You Know It flashcard software: [www.byki.com](http://www.byki.com)) and Eyejot (video mailing website: [www.eyejot.com](http://www.eyejot.com)). Sixty percent of the learners chose either 'strongly agree' or 'agree' while 40% chose 'neither'.

Although the Hypermedia tool was added to the other technology tools that they had worked on during the semester, the majority of the learners expect to be able to handle Hypermedia complications, if they faced any, and they think that Hypermedia would be a good tool to learn from compared to other tools.

Figure 2: Results of the learners' responses to Technology Used section in the pre-questionnaire



#### 4.6.1.1.3 Learning about Arab cultures

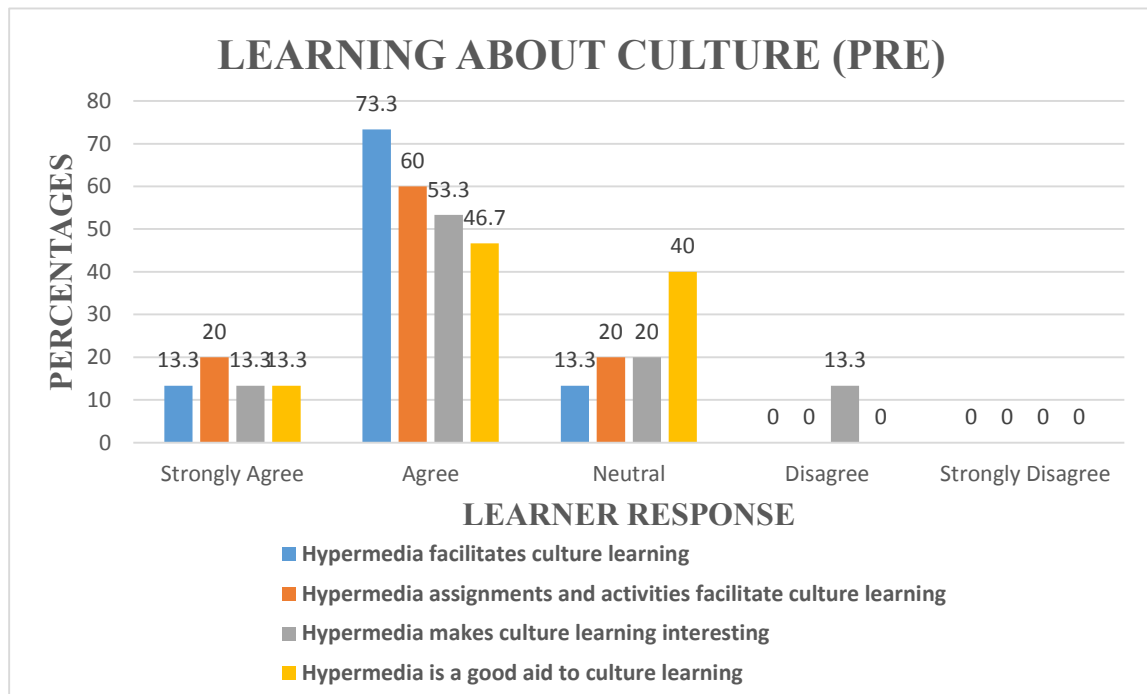
In this section, the learners were presented with four questions. The first question asked the learners if they think that the Arabic Hypermedia lessons would facilitate their learning of the Arab cultures. The majority of the learners (86.6%) responded with either 'strongly agree' or 'agree'. The second question asked the learners if they think that the assignments and learning activities in the Arabic Hypermedia lessons would facilitate their learning of the Arab cultures. The majority of the learners (80%) responded with either 'strongly agree' or 'agree' while 20% responded with 'neutral'. In responding to the third question about whether using Arabic Hypermedia lessons to learn about the Arab cultures would make learning more interesting, 66.6% of the learners chose either 'strongly agree' or 'agree'. Twenty percent chose 'neutral' and only 13.3% chose 'disagree'. The final question asked the learners if they think that software such as Hypermedia are good aids to learning about the Arab cultures. Sixty percent responded with either 'strongly agree' or 'agree' while 40% responded with 'neutral'.



The vast majority of learners think that the Arabic Hypermedia tool including the assignments and activities it presents would facilitate their learning of the Arab cultures.

The learners also think that Hypermedia is a good aid and would make culture learning more interesting (see Figure 3 below). This positive reaction to Hypermedia is encouraging and confirms the point addressed in the literature review in regard to the benefits of Hypermedia on motivation and attitude.

Figure 3: Results of the learners' responses to Learning about Culture in the pre-questionnaire



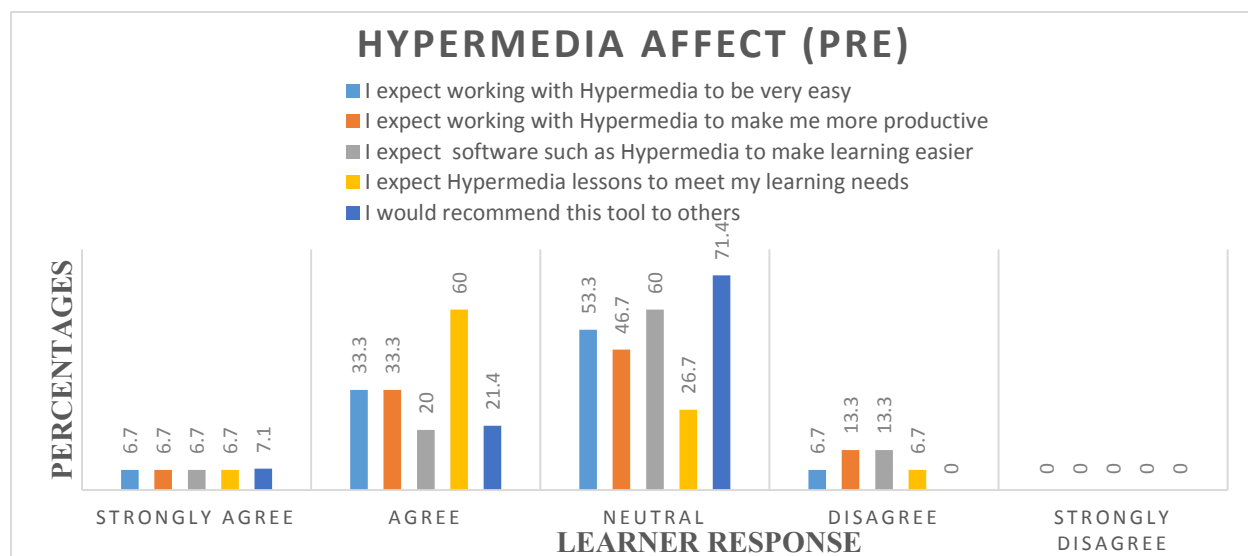
#### 4.6.1.1.4 Learners' affect toward Hypermedia lessons

In this section, the learners were presented with five questions. In their responses to the first question about whether they expect to find working with the Hypermedia tool to be very easy, 40% of the learners responded with either 'strongly agree' or 'agree' while 53.3% responded with 'neutral'. When asked in the second question if they expect that learning with

Hypermedia lessons would make them much more productive, again, 40% of the learners responded with either 'strongly agree' or 'agree' while almost half of the learners responded with 'neutral' and only 13.3% chose 'disagree'. The third question asked the learners whether they think that software such as Hypermedia would definitely make their learning easier. Only 26.7% of the learners responded with either 'strongly agree' or 'agree' while the majority of the learners (60%) responded with 'neutral' and 13.3% responded with 'disagree'. The fourth question asked the learners if they think that Hypermedia lessons would meet their learning needs. The majority of the learners (66.7%) chose either 'strongly agree' or 'agree' while 26.7% chose 'neutral'. In the final question, the learners were asked if they would recommend this tool to others and the majority of the learners (71.4%) responded with 'neutral' while 28.5% responded with either 'strongly agree' or 'agree'.

The results of this sections show that the learners were skeptical about their feelings towards this new tool and therefore, most of the responses leaned toward the 'neutral' side. The only question that the learners were positive about is the one that asked the learners for their expectations about Hypermedia meeting their learning needs. A logical explanation for the learners' neutrality is that they had not used this tool before and the introduction that was given to them about Arabic Hypermedia was not enough to help them judge it (see Figure 4).

Figure 4: Results of the learners' responses to learners' affect section in pre-questionnaire



#### 4.6.1.2 Open-Ended Section

Based on their limited knowledge about Hypermedia, this section asked the learners two questions. The first question asked them what they think they will like about Hypermedia Arabic lessons. In their responses, many of the learners liked the availability of audios and videos for developing their pronunciation. They also said that Hypermedia could be an interesting way to learn about Arabic and the Arab cultures especially that the tool provides detailed cultural materials. They also liked the easy access to the tool. In answering the second question about what they expected to like the least, some of the learners showed concerns about adding another technology tool to the already used ones in the class. Other learners raised the issue that they have to work on their own in studying for the lessons and that there would be no interactivity with the teacher or the students.

As we can see, the learners' responses to this section of the questionnaire show that they are in favor of this tool and that it provides valuable information about culture. However, adding

another technology tool to their class and dealing with technology glitches are concerns that the learners are worried about.

#### **4.6.2 Post-questionnaire**

The post-questionnaire was divided into two sections: closed and open-ended questions:

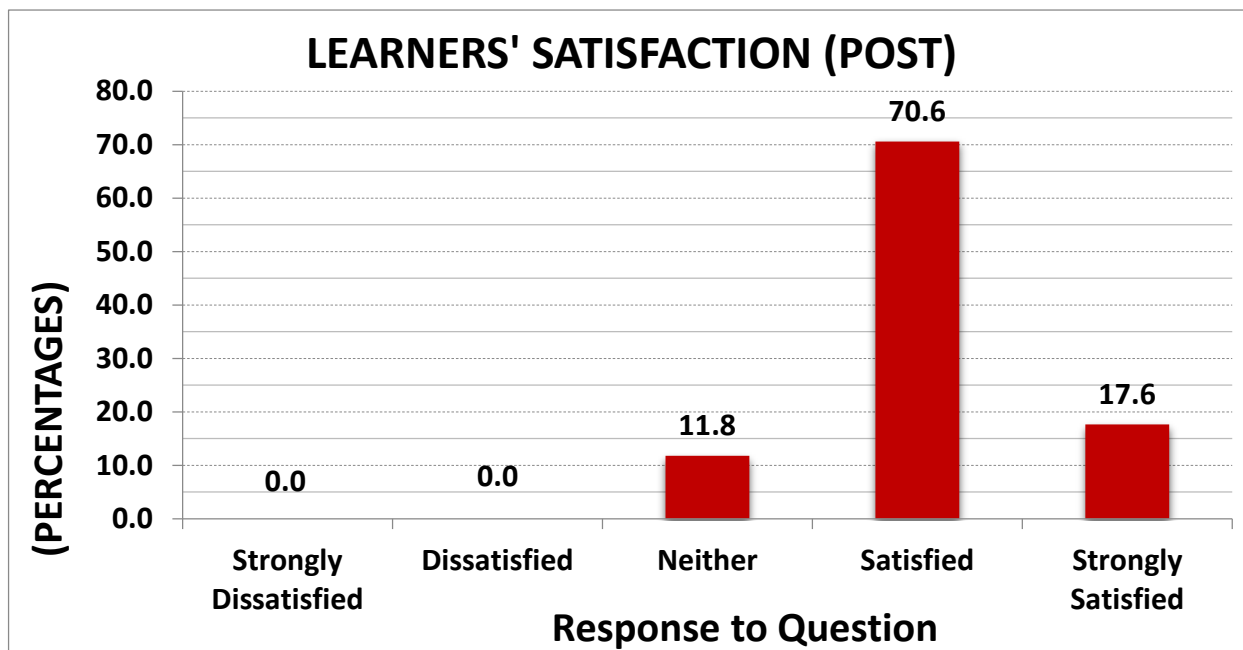
##### **4.6.2.1 Closed questions**

This part of the post-questionnaire, like the pre-questionnaire, reports the results of four sections: (1) learner's satisfaction, (2) technology used, (3) learning about Arab cultures, and (4) learners' affect towards Hypermedia lessons. To respond to the questions of this part of the questionnaire, the learners were given five choices: (1) 'very dissatisfied', (2) 'dissatisfied', (3) 'neither', (4) 'generally satisfied', and (5) 'very satisfied'.

##### **4.6.2.1.1 Learners' satisfaction**

The learners were presented with a question about how satisfied they were with the Hypermedia Arabic tool and the Hypermedia lessons. The results show that the vast majority of the learners (88.2%) were either 'satisfied' or 'strongly satisfied' with the Hypermedia tool and Hypermedia associated lessons while the rest of the learners chose 'neutral' (see Figure 5 below).

Figure 5: Results of the learners' satisfaction of the Arabic Hypermedia in the post-questionnaire

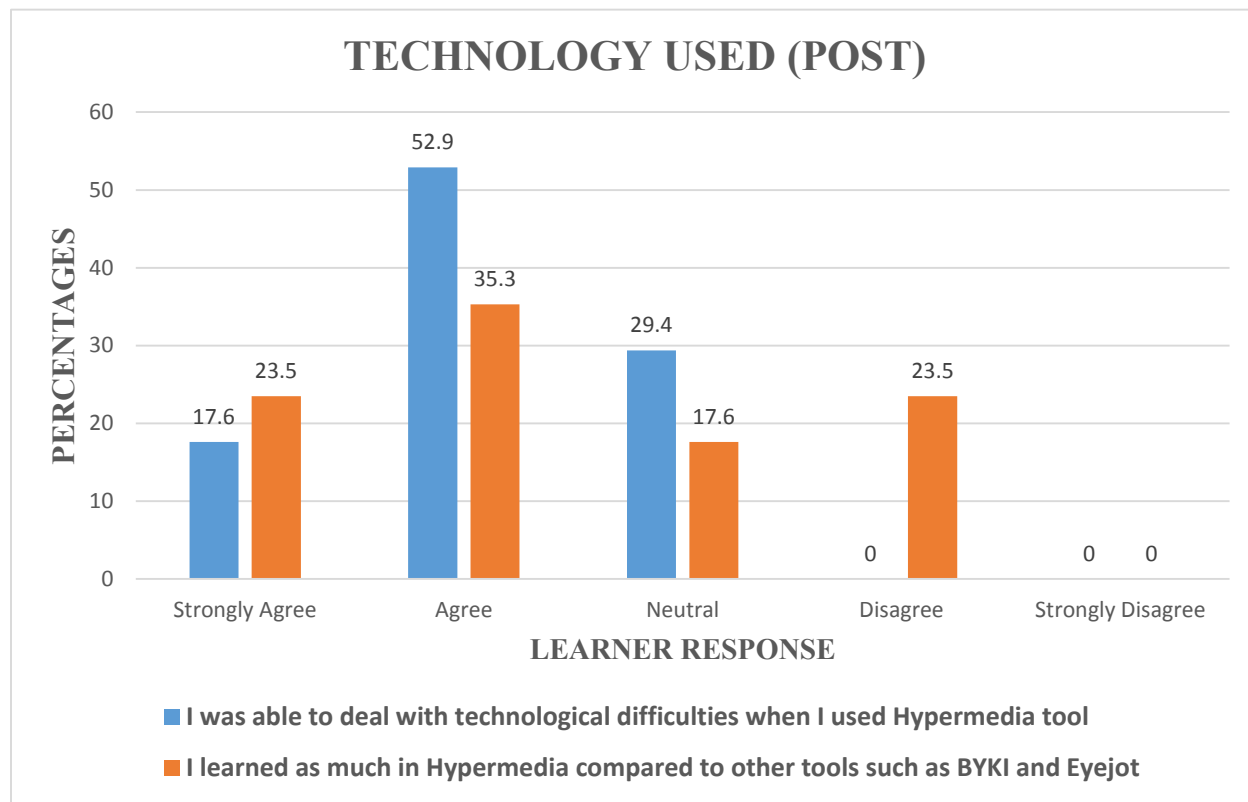


This shows that most of the learners were pleased with the Arabic Hypermedia tool after experiencing two lessons.

#### 4.6.2.1.2 Technology used

The learners were presented with two questions about the Hypermedia technology tool. The first question asked the learners if they were able to deal with most difficulties they had encountered when using the Hypermedia tool and 60.6% of the learners responded with either 'strongly agree' or 'agree' while 29.4% chose 'neutral'. In comparing other technology tools they were familiar with, the second question asked the learners if they learned as much from Arabic Hypermedia tools as compared to other tools such as BYKI and Eyejot. The learners responded with 58.8% either 'strongly agree' or 'agree', 17.5% chose 'neutral' and 23.5% chose 'disagree'.

Figure 6: Results of the learners' responses to Technology Used in the post-questionnaire



As we can see in Figure 6 above, a high percentage of the learners were able to handle technology problems when they used Hypermedia and they learned as much from Hypermedia when compared to other technology tools they were familiar with. This shows that the technology was a facilitating tool towards their learning of the Arab cultures using Arabic Hypermedia.

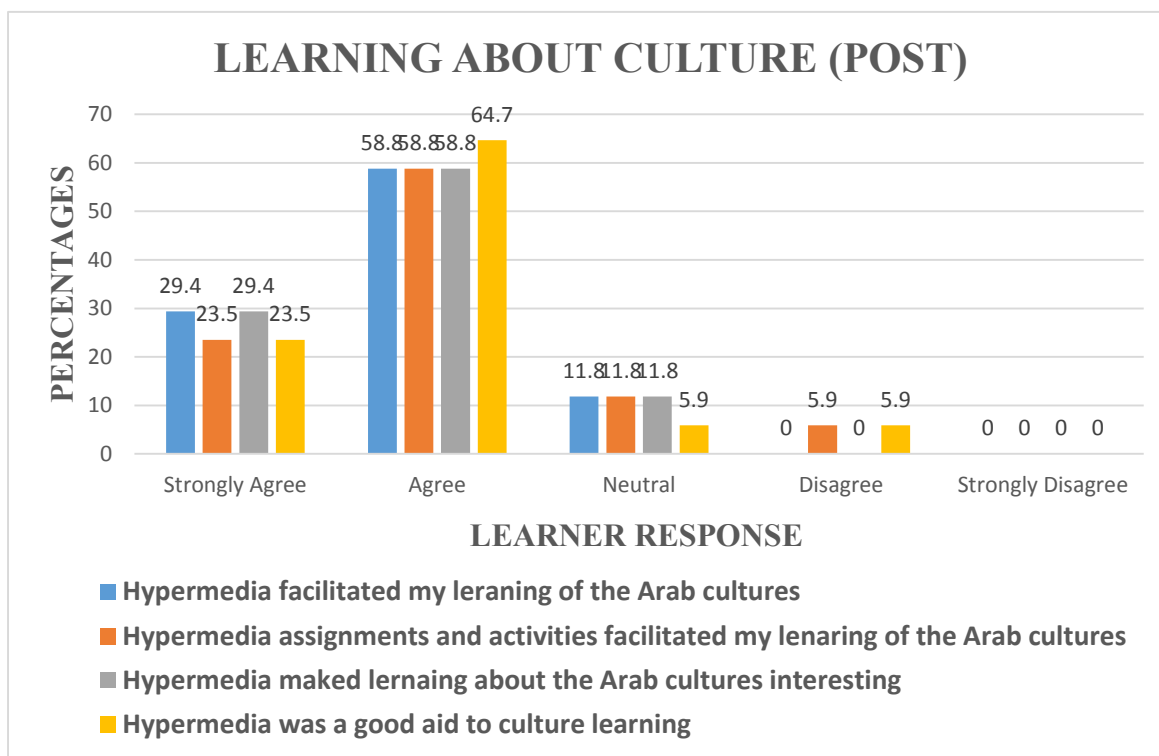
#### 4.6.2.1.3 Learning about Arab cultures

In this section, the learners were presented with four questions. The first question asked them whether they think that the Arabic Hypermedia lessons facilitated their learning of the Arab

cultures. The vast majority of the learners (88.2%) responded with either 'strongly agree' or 'agree'. The second question asked the learners if they think that the assignments and learning activities in the Arabic Hypermedia lessons facilitated their learning of the Arab cultures. The vast majority of the learners (82.3%) responded with either 'strongly agree' or 'agree', while only 11.8% responded with 'neutral'. In responding to the third question about whether using Arabic Hypermedia lessons to learn about the Arab cultures made learning more interesting, the vast majority (88.2%) of the learners chose either 'strongly agree' or 'agree' while only 11.8% chose 'neutral'. The final question asked the learners whether they think that software such as Hypermedia are good aids to learning about the Arab cultures. Again, the vast majority (82.2%) of the learners responded with either 'strongly agree' or 'agree'.

The consensus among the learners about the role Hypermedia and its activities play in learning about culture is very positive and strengthens the argument that Hypermedia could be a useful tool to be used when the teaching of language as culture is addressed (see Figure 7).

Figure 7: Results of the learners' responses to Learning about Culture in the post-questionnaire



#### 4.6.2.1.4 Learners' affect towards Hypermedia lessons

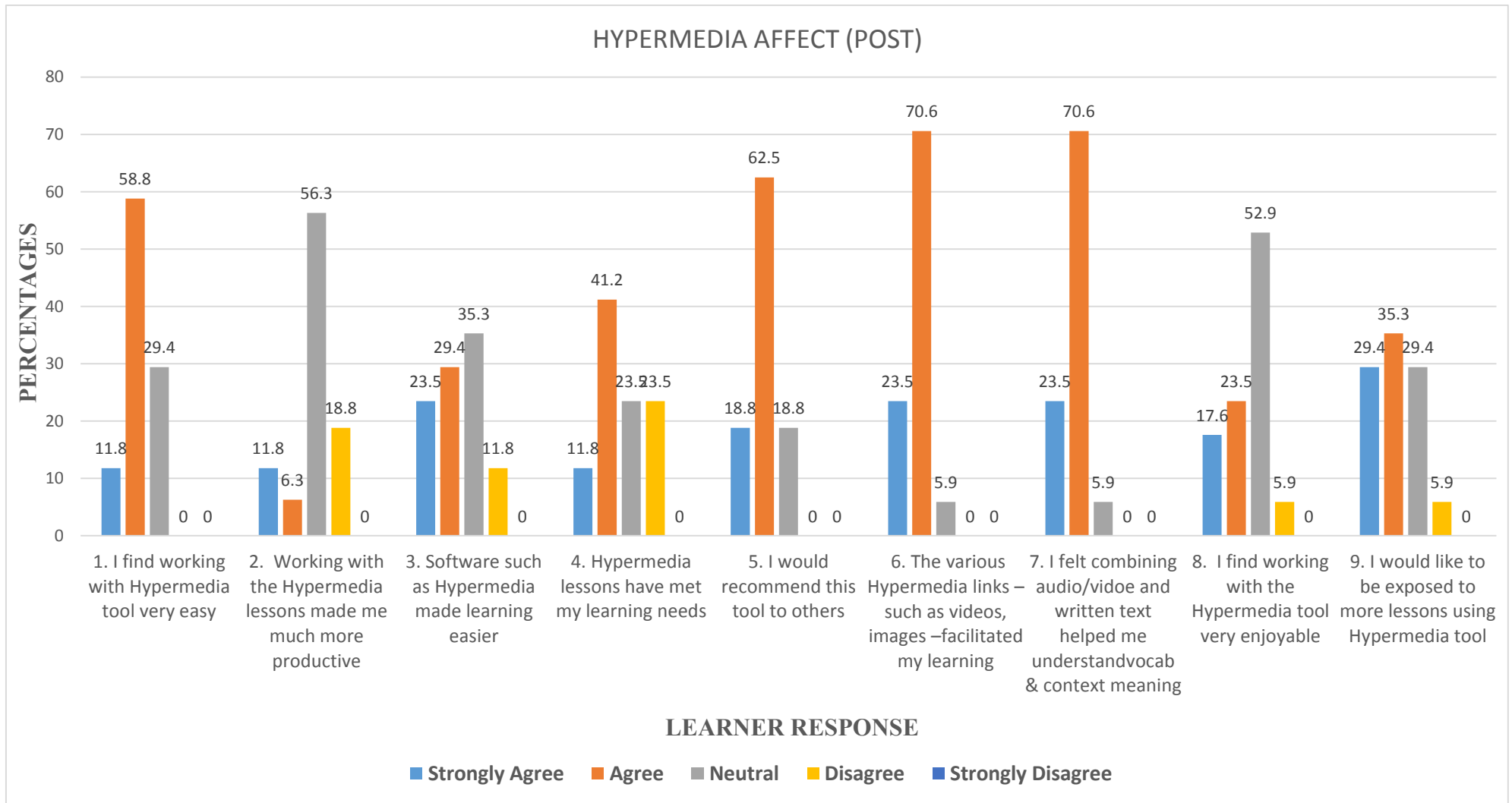
In this section, the learners were presented with nine questions. In their responses to the first question about whether they think working with the Hypermedia tool was very easy, the majority of the learners (70.6%) of the learners responded with either 'strongly agree' or 'agree' and the rest of them (29.4%) responded with 'neutral'. When asked in the second question if they expect that learning with Hypermedia lessons made them much more productive, 25.1% of the learners responded with either 'strongly agree' or 'agree' while more than half of the learners responded with 'neutral'. Only 13.3% chose 'disagree'. The third question asked the learners whether software such as Hypermedia had definitely made their learning easier. More than half of the learners responded with either 'strongly agree' or 'agree' while 35.3% of the learners responded with 'neutral' and 11.8% responded with 'disagree'. The fourth question asked the



learners if they think that Hypermedia lesson met their learning needs. More than half of the learners chose either 'strongly agree' or 'agree' while 23.5% chose 'neutral' and 23.5% chose 'disagree'. In the fifth question, the learners were asked if they would recommend this tool to others and the majority (81.3%) of the learners responded with either 'strongly agree' or 'agree' while 18.8% responded with 'neutral'. The sixth question asked the learners if they think that the various links –such as videos, images –available in the Hypermedia Arabic lessons facilitated their learning and the vast majority of the learners (94.1%) responded with either 'strongly agree' or 'agree'. In the seventh question, the learners were asked if they think that the combination of audio/video and written text has helped them understand the meanings of vocabulary and context. Again, the vast majority (94.2%) responded with either 'strongly agree' or 'agree'. When asked in the eighth question if they find working with the Hypermedia tool very enjoyable, 41.1% of the learners responded with either 'strongly agree' or 'agree' while 52.9% responded with 'neutral'. In their responses to the final question that asked whether they would like to be exposed to more lessons using Hypermedia tool, 64.7% of the learners responded with either 'strongly agree' or 'agree' while 29.4% responded with 'neutral'.

The learners' general feelings towards the Hypermedia tool is very positive. Most of the learners chose 'agree' on the various questions addressed in this section. The learners, however, are still uncertain about whether Hypermedia made them more productive and whether working with Hypermedia was very enjoyable. Nevertheless, the learners' general positive attitude towards this tool is encouraging and shows that Hypermedia could be used as an effective tool to teach language and culture (see Figure 8).

Figure 8: Results of the learners' responses to Hypermedia Affect section in the post-questionnaire



#### 4.6.2.2 Open-Ended Section

In this section, the learners were asked four questions. The first one asked them what they liked the most about the Hypermedia Arabic lessons. In their responses, many of the learners liked the fact that everything in this tool is contained in one place which meant that the text, the glossing, the audios, and the videos were all in one page and that they did not need to go to another website to view or look up things. Some of the learners reported that they liked the easy access to the pronunciation of many of the vocabulary and the text as a whole as well as the affordances and the richness of the Arab cultural materials. In answering the second question about what they liked the least, some of the learners referred to the lack of a one-on-one communication. Others faced some technical difficulties with some of the links and videos, while some preferred to have more annotated vocabulary. In the third question, the learners were asked about the advice they would give to a learner new to Hypermedia. Many of them stressed that learners new to this tool should familiarize themselves with it and utilize it. Others mentioned that they should ask questions when needed and make technology works for them. The final question asked the learners about the advice they would give to a teacher of Hypermedia lessons and some of the responses included that the teacher should be available and approachable and should provide clear instructions. In regard to content, some learners asked to have more content while others asked to have less. A final advice was to make sure that the teacher holds learners accountable for actually visiting and using the lessons.

It is clear that the learners liked the richness of the Hypermedia lessons in regard to culture, pronunciation, vocabulary, and easy access. The learners, however, did not like the lack of direct interaction with the teacher neither did they like the technical difficulties some of them have faced. The learners gave good advice to learners new to Hypermedia by stressing the

idea of taking advantage of the tool, ask questions, and to be on top of things. As for the Hypermedia teachers, the learners pointed out the importance of being available to their learners and provide them with clear instructions for assignments and activities.

#### **4.7 Discussion**

This section discusses the results of the pre-and the post-questionnaire and looks at any statistically significant differences between the responses of the learners in both questionnaires.

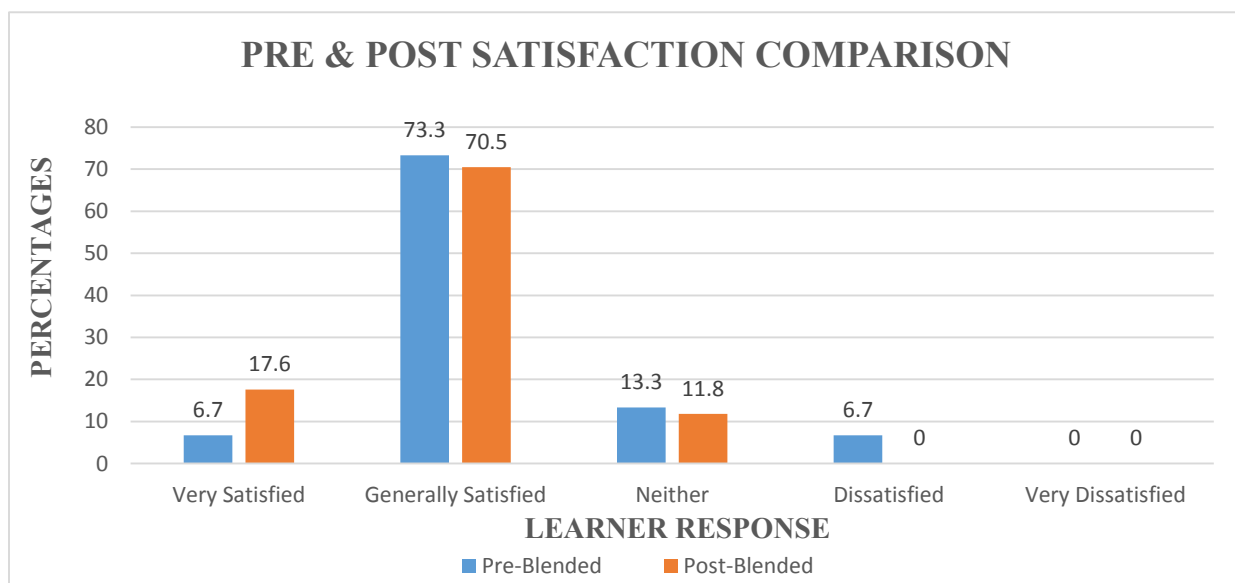
This study answered the two research questions in which it first presented regarding the learners' views about the Hypermedia tool and Arabic Hypermedia lessons by highlighting the four sections discussed in the study: learners' satisfaction with the Hypermedia tool and associated lessons, technology used, learning about the Arab cultures, and the learners' affect towards Hypermedia. The study also answered the second question by looking at statistically significant differences between the responses of the learners in both questionnaires. The following discussion will address both research questions concurrently.

In general, the study reports very positive views of the learners in the four sections of the study towards the Arabic Hypermedia tool and associated lessons. The study, however, did not show major statistically significant differences between the results of the pre- and post-questionnaires.

In addressing the learners' satisfaction with the blended course, the results illustrated in Figure 9 below show that the majority of the learners in both pre-and post-questionnaire were satisfied with the blended setting. Although the learners in the post-questionnaire are more satisfied than those in the pre-questionnaire, this section has shown no statistically significant

differences between the responses of the learners in both questionnaires. Moreover, the results of this section conform to other studies that have shown positive attitude and perception towards Hypermedia tools, namely, Davis & Lyman-Hager, 1997; Roby, 1993; Ariew & Ercetin, 2004; Yanguas, 2009; and Sakar & Ercetin, 2004.

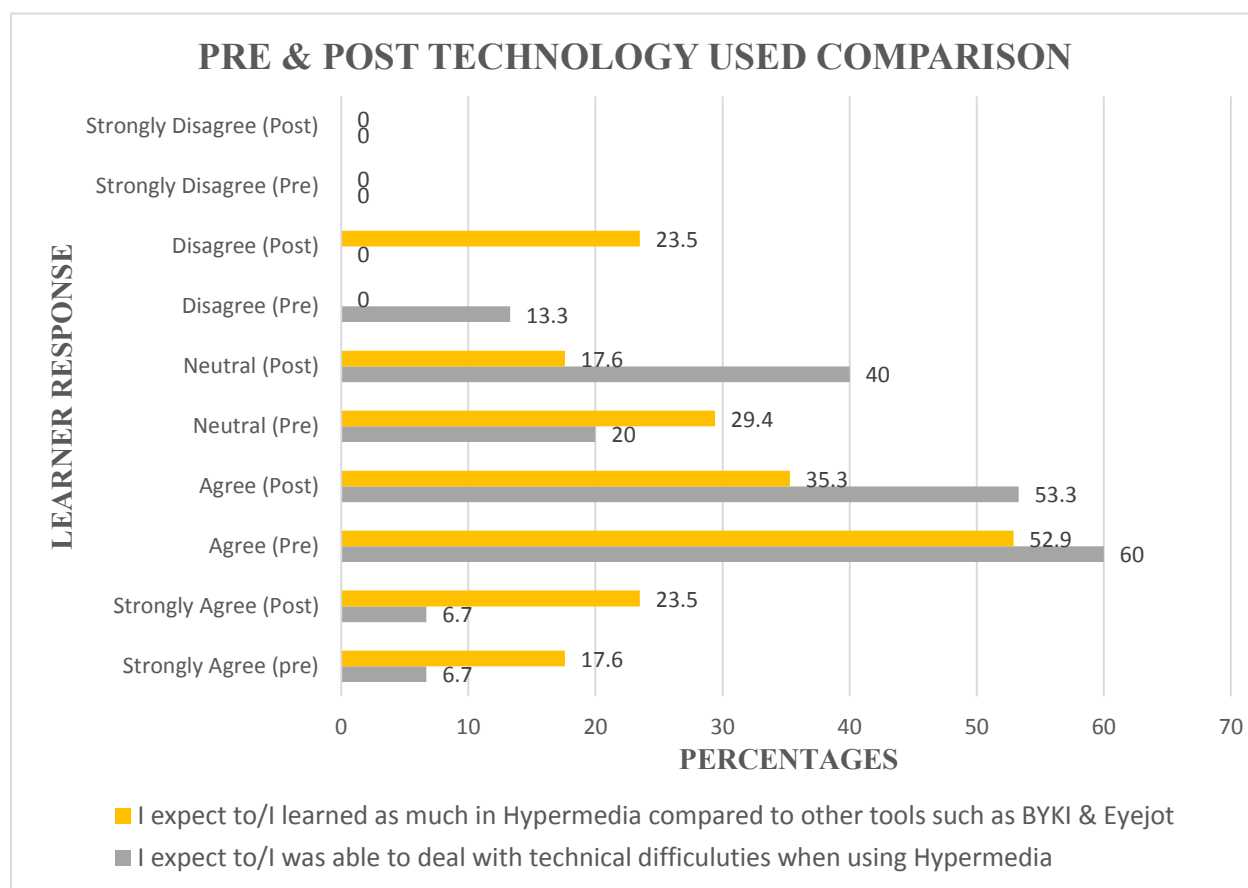
Figure 9: Comparison between the results of the pre- & post-questionnaire about learners' satisfaction with Hypermedia



In the 'technology used' section and in their responses to the first question about technical difficulties, a high percentage of the learners indicated that they had no problems in overcoming technical difficulties caused by using the Hypermedia tool, if any. Other learners in the open-ended section reported facing technical difficulties with the tool, but it looked like they were able to overcome those difficulties as the results in this section show. In the second question, the learners indicated that Hypermedia is a tool that can be compared to other software and can help in the learning process. However, a small percentage of the learners (23.5%) chose 'disagree'. It seems that this percentage of the learners did not have a pleasant experience with

Hypermedia or had a better luck with the other technology tools used in the class such as BYKI and Eyejot. This section showed no statistically significant differences between the learners' responses in the pre- and the post-questionnaires. Figure 10 below demonstrates a comparison between the results of this section in the pre- and post-questionnaires.

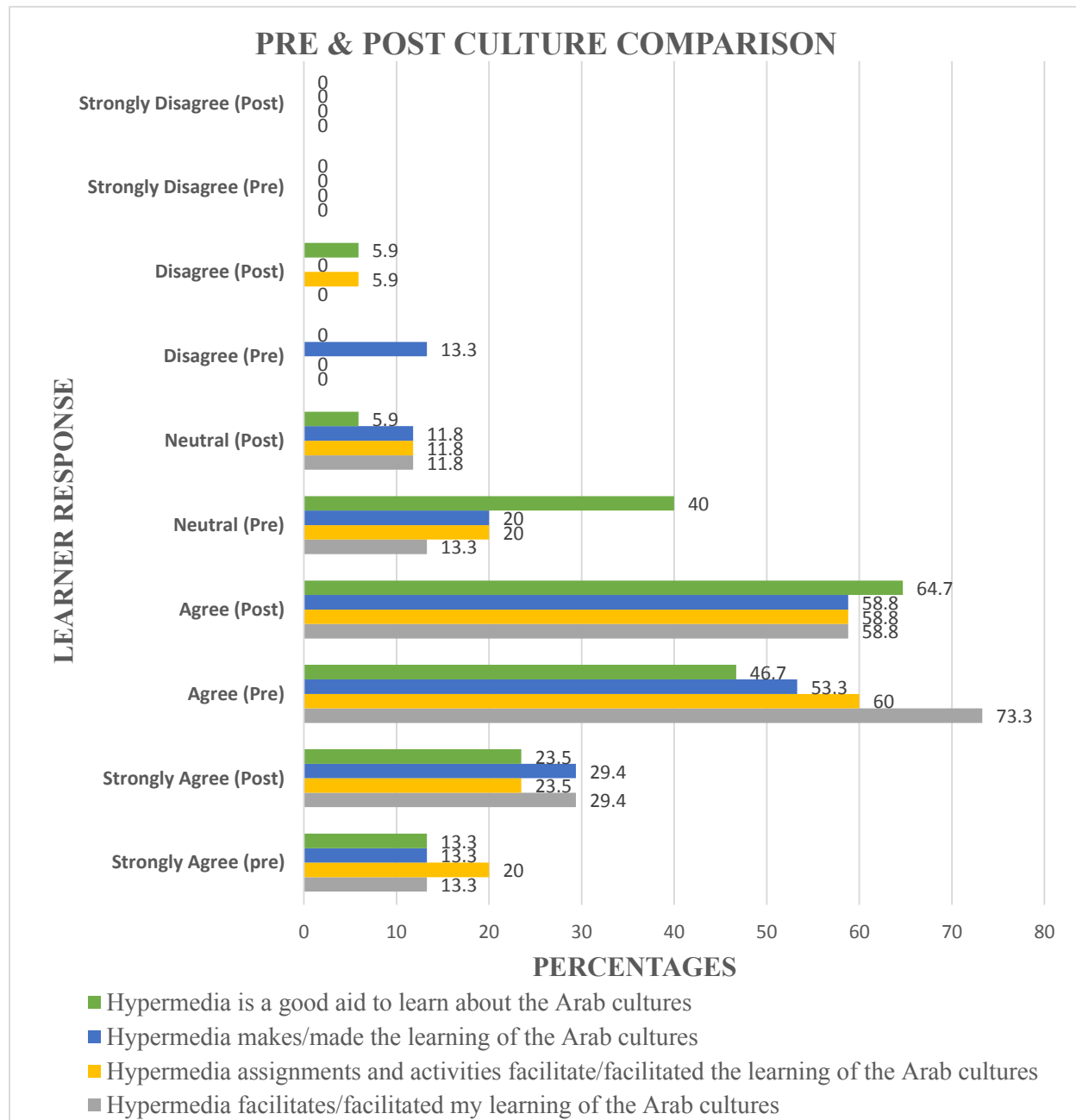
Figure 10: Comparison between pre- & post-questionnaire about 'technology used' section.



In the section about 'learning about the Arab cultures', the learners mostly agree that Hypermedia is a good tool to be used to learn about culture and that this tool along with its assignments and activities make learning about culture interesting. Figure 11 demonstrates a comparison between the results of the pre- and the post-questionnaires which shows similarities in percentages between the learners' responses in both questionnaires. The results of this section

also show that using Hypermedia to learn the target culture, which has not been done in other studies, is possible and could lead to cultural competence if designed and presented to learners appropriately.

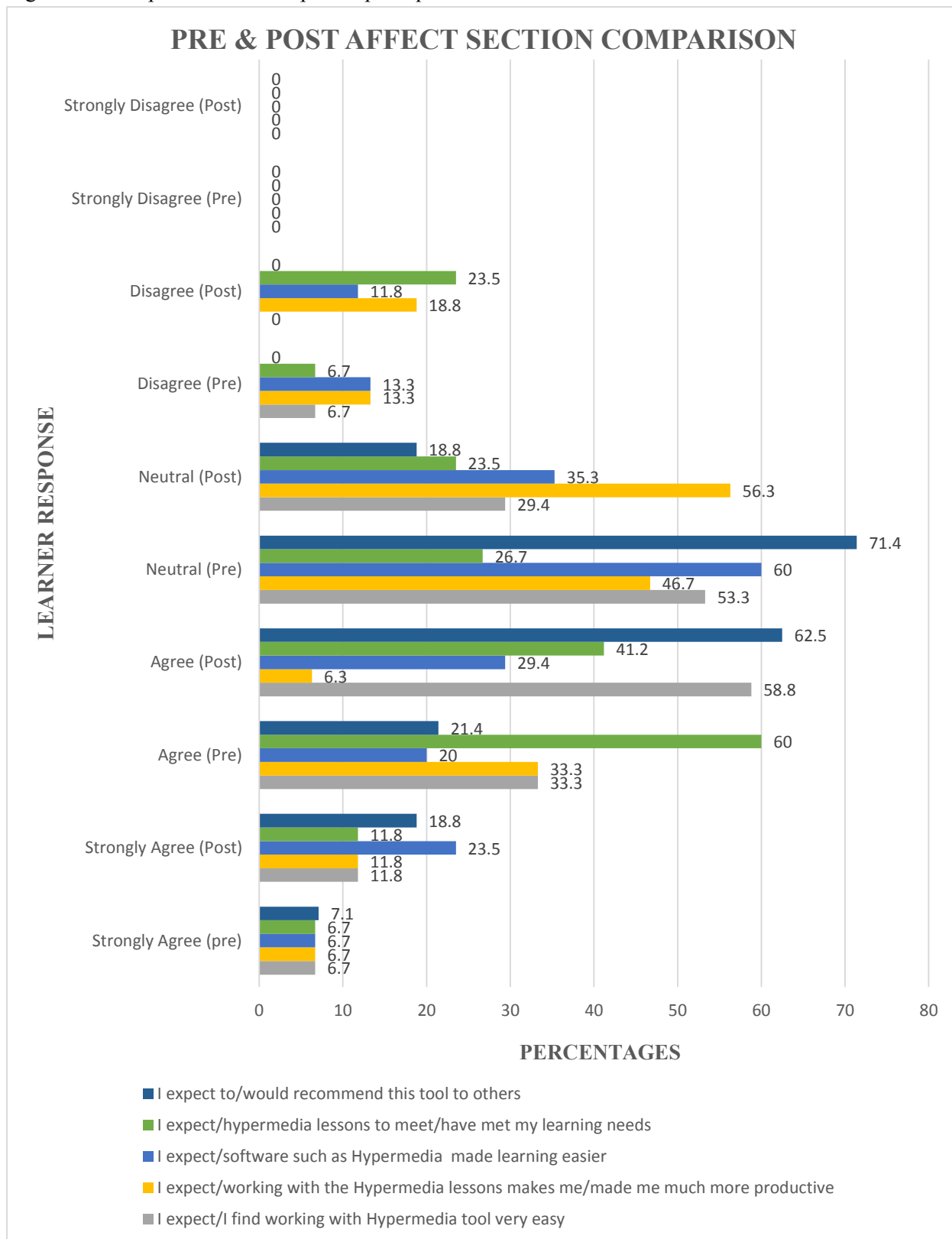
Figure 11: Comparison between pre- & post-questionnaire about ‘learning of culture’ section.



In the section about learners' affect, learners were presented with five questions in the pre-questionnaire. In the post-questionnaire, the learners were presented with the same five questions and were given four more questions that specifically asked the learners about their experience with the Hypermedia tool and Hypermedia associated lessons. The learners' affect section showed that learners were, in general, positive in their feelings towards the Hypermedia tool. In the pre-questionnaire, the learners' were hesitant about what to expect from this tool and, therefore, their responses leaned towards 'neutral'. In the first five questions in the post-questionnaire, the learners were more positive than the pre-questionnaire except for the question that asked whether Hypermedia made them more productive or not and more than half of the learners responded with 'neutral' and the rest of them responded with either 'strongly agree'/'agree' or 'disagree' (see Figure 11).

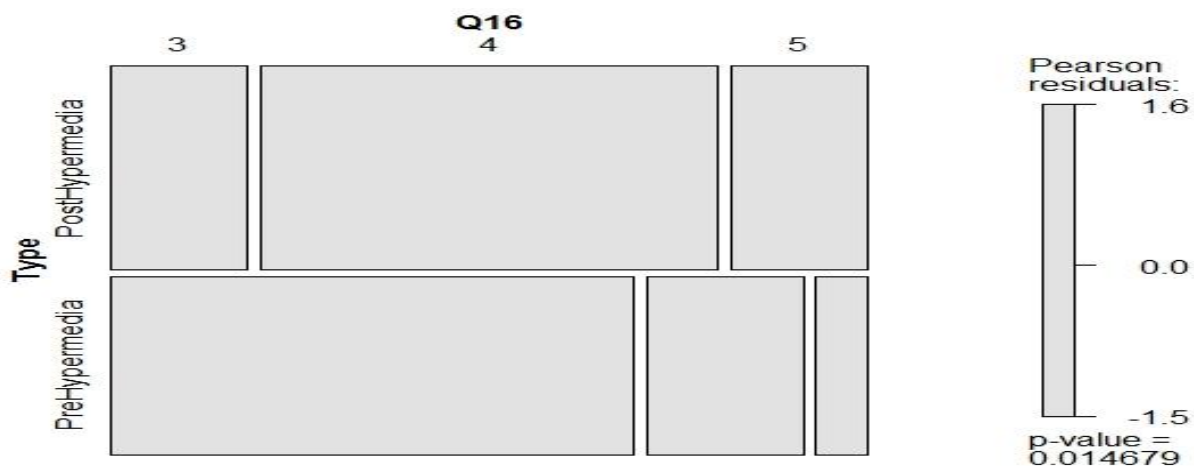


Figure 11: Comparison between pre- & post-questionnaire about 'learners' affect' section



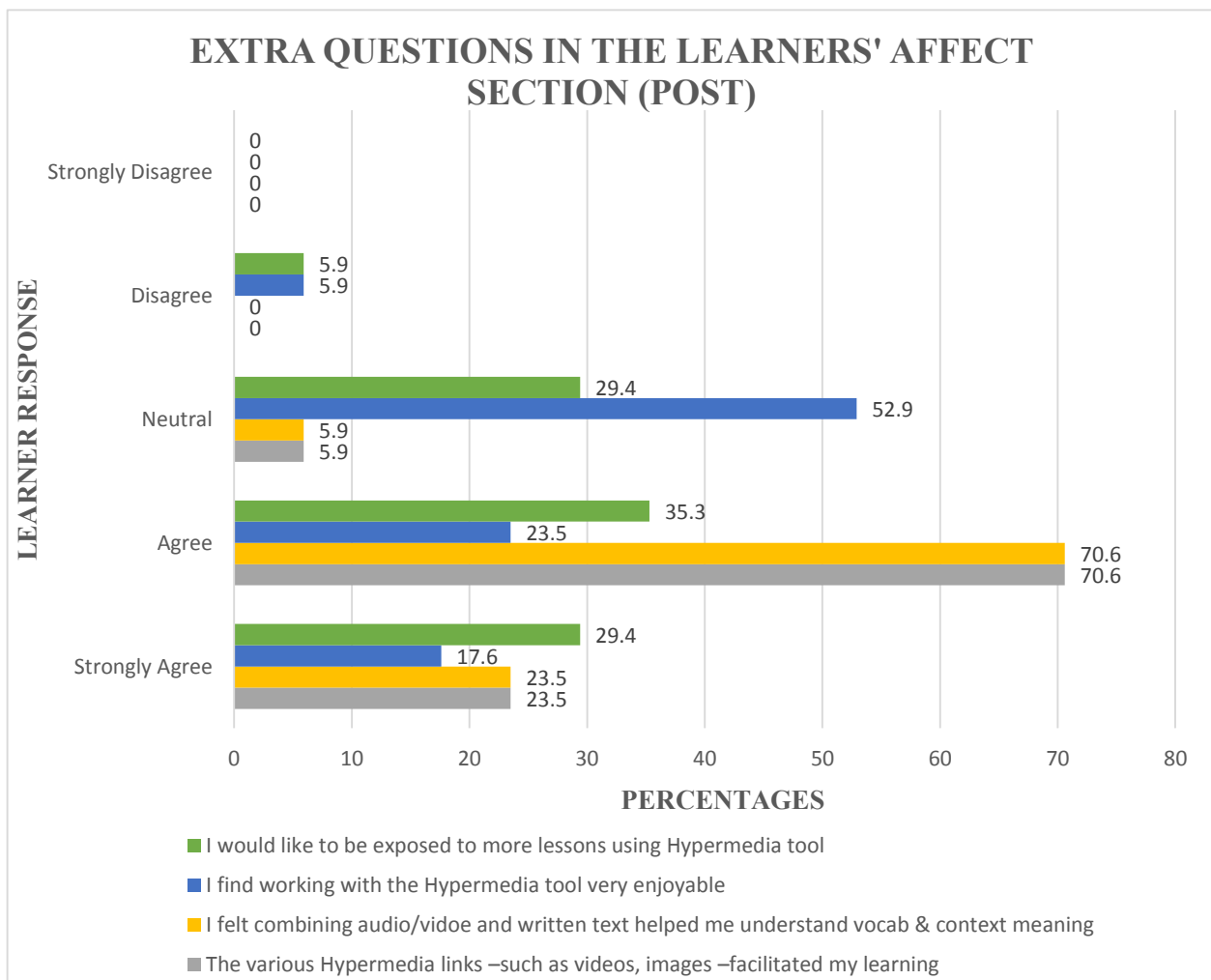
This section has shown a statistically significant difference between the responses of the learners in the pre- and the post-questionnaire in regard to the questions that asked the learners whether they would recommend the Hypermedia for others. In the pre-questionnaire, the majority of the learners responded to this questions with ‘neutral’ and the rest of them (28.5%) chose either ‘strongly agree’ or ‘agree’. In the post-questionnaire, the learners changed their minds and become convinced that Hypermedia can be a good tool and, as a result, 91.3% of them chose either ‘strongly agree’ or ‘agree’. Figure 12 below shows proportional areas for learners’ responses to question 16 of the questionnaire which are (1) for ‘strongly disagree’, (2) for ‘disagree’, (3) for ‘neutral’, (4) for ‘agree’, and (5) for ‘strongly agree’. The vertical length of the “Participant” being the learner shows the size of the samples relative to each other and 3, 4, 5 show the size of the relative responses for the questions by the participants. The p-value of 0.014679 is calculated based on the Pearson chi-square test. Pearson residuals are used to calculate the p- value by the R Language.

Figure 12: Mosaic Plot including the P-Value of the question about whether the learners would recommend Hypermedia to others.



The last four questions, which were given to the learners only in the post questionnaire of the affect section, have targeted the learners' feelings about whether they would like to be exposed to more Hypermedia lessons and whether the Hypermedia links have facilitated their learning and made it enjoyable. As we can see in Figure 13 below, the results were positive and the learners felt that the Hypermedia tool could facilitate their learning to a point that two-thirds of them chose either 'strongly agreed' or 'agreed' to be exposed to more Hypermedia lessons. None of the four questions in that section showed any significant differences between the responses of the learners in the pre- and the post-questionnaires.

Figure 13: post-questionnaire extra questions about 'learners' affect' section



This study has investigated the learners affect surrounding the use of Arabic Hypermedia lessons. The study addressed four main areas: learner's satisfaction, the use of technology, learning about the Arabic cultures, and learners' affect. The study has shown positive results in all four sections. Learners were satisfied with the tool and the lessons studied, were able to handle technical difficulties resulting from using Hypermedia, believed that Hypermedia is a good tool to learn about culture, and had positive feelings towards the tool.

The results of this study have shown that Arabic Hypermedia can be used to facilitate learners' endeavors to learn a foreign language and its culture(s). Although some learners have faced technical problems, this tool can be a good source of information to learners seeking to learn language and culture using technology. Although Hypermedia is new to Arabic context, the study has shown that it is possible to use the Arabic Hypermedia lessons, which were partially developed to conduct this study, to enrich course materials and invest in developing the 'language as culture' concept in the curricula.

The results of this study have shown no statistically significant differences between the responses of the learners in the pre-questionnaire and the post-questionnaire except in one item in the learners' affect section. This does not come as a surprise as the interval between the execution of the pre- and the post-questionnaire was not very long -3 weeks. Another reason why there was only minor statistically significant differences between both questionnaires is that the learners became familiar with the class and the technology tools used in it by the time Hypermedia was introduced to them in week 9 and, therefore, their knowledge about the course and their expectations about the Hypermedia tool were very high in many of their responses.

This study postulated some implications that can be helpful for foreign language teachers, in general, and teachers of Arabic, in particular. This tool can be used to teach more than one

linguistic aspect; teachers can use it to teach vocabulary acquisition and reading comprehension (although studies do not show enough linguistic gains in using Hypermedia, other results have shown positive perception and attitude towards language using Hypermedia). This study has shown that the two cultural Hypermedia lessons –“Ramadan Kareem” and “Coffee and Cafés” – were successfully taught and, therefore, teachers of Arabic can use this tool to teach various and unlimited aspects of Arab cultures. Teachers of Arabic can use Arabic Hypermedia to teach culture in online and blended setting, in study abroad programs, and can teach it to learners of Arabic in all proficiency levels. Teachers of Arabic can also use Hypermedia lessons as part of the curriculum or can use it as enrichment materials. Teachers of Arabic can argue for the use of Arabic Hypermedia for many reasons including the fact that the whole lesson is designed and introduced to the learner in one webpage which lessens learners’ distractions and makes them focus on the text along with the many annotations available. Teachers of Arabic can also use Hypermedia to help their learners practice pronunciation. Learners can click on each annotated vocabulary and listen to it as many times as they wish. They can also practice pronunciation by watching the short videos provided in the lessons. With proper training, teachers can develop their own lessons that are tailored to meet the learners’ expectations and the teachers’ projection of what their learners need.

Despite the fact that using Hypermedia to teach culture is new to the field, this study opens a doorway to Arabic and foreign language teachers, course designers, administrators, and software developers to collaborate and develop lessons using Hypermedia to supplement other tools and textbooks used for teaching language and culture. By doing this, we might be able to promote the integration of culture in our teaching and not treat teaching culture as a burden.

Hypermedia can also be used as a stand-alone material if developed and designed well. In fact, it

would be more appetizing to many of our learners when compared to the traditional materials that many educational institutions still use.

The study has faced a few challenges including the limited number of learners in the class, 18, and, therefore, a limited number of subjects who participated in this study (15 learners in the pre-questionnaire and 17 learners in the post-questionnaire). As a new tool, the teacher in this study, who is also the material developer, has faced technical problems in producing the lessons which led to the malfunctions of some of the links in the lessons. Also, the lack of studies in Arabic Hypermedia made it hard to compare and contrast results. Finally, wearing the hat of the teacher, the hat of the material developer, and the hat of the researcher at the same time in the same class made it difficult, but not impossible, to act objectively. However, much care was taken to conduct the research in the most objective way possible. Playing the three roles has also made it hard to interact with the learners as the researcher due to the human subject protection policies.

Further research can include more data collecting instruments such as semi-structural interviews and class visits so learners' affect can be addressed in-depth, which couldn't be done in this study as the teacher is the researcher himself. Other research can examine Hypermedia with various learners' levels and with other foreign languages. Finally, further research can integrate Hypermedia with other tools to examine the efficacy of this tool compared to other tools.

#### **4.8 Conclusion**

This study reports the results of investigating the views of 17 Arabic learners enrolled in the Levantine spoken Arabic class at MENAS at the University of Arizona towards the Hypermedia tool and the Arabic Hypermedia lessons. The study looked at four main areas:

learners' satisfaction, technology used, learning about the Arab cultures, and learners' affect. Using pre- and post-questionnaire, the results showed that the learners were satisfied with the tool and the lessons, were able to handle technical difficulties, learned about the Arab cultures as a result of using Hypermedia, and had positive feelings towards Hypermedia. The learners also reported many advantages of using Hypermedia such as flexibility, one space for the whole lesson, working on their own pace, and the plentiful of cultural materials. The learners also reports some challenges including the fear of working on their own, lack of one-on-one interaction, and use of more online work. The study closed with implications, challenges and ideas for further research.

## CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

### 5.1 Introduction

In this dissertation I looked at the teachers' and learners' perspectives of teaching culture using technology. First, I examined the perspectives of the teachers and learners in regard to teaching and learning Arab cultures. Then, I examined the learners' perspectives about the use of blended language learning in a blended spoken Arabic class. Finally, I looked at learners' affect surrounding Arabic Hypermedia tool and lessons. The purpose of this dissertation was to discuss the status of teaching culture using technology in foreign language in general and in Arabic in particular. In this context, teaching culture is not salient in foreign language and culture has to struggle to be included in the curriculum. Teaching culture using technology in the Arabic context is also neglected and has not been addressed in research. This dissertation provides a current status of teaching language as culture using technology in foreign language in general and in Arabic in particular. The study also provides implications for pedagogy in foreign language as well as Arabic contexts.

In chapter one of this dissertation, I discussed the background of the project, then the statement of the problem and the overarching questions. Then, I addressed the significance of this dissertation in the field of foreign language. Finally, I laid down the structure of the dissertation. In chapter two, I reported on the first study that addressed the teachers' and learners' perspectives about teaching culture in Arabic context. Chapter three reported the results of the second study about the learners' perspectives surrounding the use of blended language learning setting to teach spoken Arabic. Chapter four discussed the results of the third study about learners' affect surrounding the use of Arabic Hypermedia tool and associated lessons. This final chapter concludes the dissertation by presenting a discussion of the results,



implications for pedagogy, challenges of the studies, directions for future research, and contribution of the studies in foreign language teaching and learning.

## 5.2 Discussion

The three studies, addressed in chapter 2, 3, and 4, have brought tangible findings that will be put forward here. The first study investigated teachers' and learners' perspectives about the teaching of culture in Arabic context in regard to the role of culture in Arabic language teaching and learning, ranking of nine possible culture-teaching and learning objectives in order of importance, practicing cultural activities in Arabic classrooms, familiarity with the Arab culture(s), the extent to which teachers deal with the Arab cultures, the distribution of language teaching/learning and culture teaching/learning. The study also aimed at investigating whether there were statistically significant differences between the responses of the teachers and the learners. The study had 105 participants (15 Arabic teachers and 90 Arabic learners) and used the following three instruments: questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, and class visits. The study also used descriptive and inferential statistical analyses to analyze the collected data. The findings showed that teachers and learners were aware of the significant role that culture plays in foreign language teaching and learning, but also revealed ambivalences about the teachers and the learners familiarity with various cultural aspects, the extent to which teachers and learners deal with those aspects, practice cultural activities in the classroom, rank the culture teaching/learning objectives and distribute the time spent in teaching/learning language vs. culture. The results also showed that the learners faced challenges in the process of learning culture in their classes such as lack of time to teach/learn culture and restrictions from the curriculum in which they had to finish a number of chapters by the end of the semester. Most of the areas that have been discussed here have shown statistically significant differences between

the responses of the teachers and the responses of the learners. The results in this study show a discrepancy between what teachers think and teach about culture and how learners view learning culture in this Arabic program. The question that arises here is why such a gap exists. Some of the reasons could be that the way teachers view and define culture is different from the way learners see it. For the teachers, discussing a grammatical point and linking it with a specific cultural aspect might be considered as teaching culture. For the learners, on the other hand, if it doesn't say culture on the top of the page or if the teacher doesn't explicitly say that this lesson is about culture, then they might not be considered it as teaching culture. I believe that the lack of transparency and clarity in addressing culture might have caused this difference in their views. In addition, the study shows that teachers and learners rank cultural objectives differently. For the teachers, openness and tolerance to the people from the Arab cultures was an important objective in teaching culture. As for the learners, basic knowledge and behavioral skills were more important to them than openness. The difference in prioritizing cultural objectives might have lent a hand in widening the gap between the responses of the teachers and the learners. Also, 40% of the teachers have one to five years of experience and their responses, therefore, might have been affected by their limited experiences. A final explanation to the existence of a gap between the responses of the teachers and the learners is that the teachers might have answered what they thought they should do and not what they actually do in their classes. Whatever the reasons behind these discrepancies, we as researchers and teachers should benefit from the results of this study and build on it when we teach our next class or design our next study.

The results of the first study raised more questions than answers about how teaching culture is viewed and practiced and, therefore, led me to investigate how learners view teaching culture in a class that I was teaching.

In the second study, I looked at the learners' affect about using blended language setting to teach language as culture. Seventeen Arabic learners, who were enrolled in a Levantine spoken Arabic class that was offered in a blended setting, participated in the study. Using pre- and post-questionnaire with open-ended and closed questions, the study investigated the learners' affect in regard to the following aspects: their satisfaction with the blended setting, modality preference, integration of technology tools in the blended setting, interaction, availability of resources, learning about culture, and class work and reflections. The study also looked at whether there were statistically significant differences between the responses of the learners in the pre- and the post-questionnaire. The study used descriptive and inferential statistical analyses to analyze the collected data.

The findings of the study have shown that learners find blended setting positive and satisfying and that this environment gave them more space for self-pace work. The learners liked doing activities online but gave varied answers about their modality preference ranging from their preference to fully online class to fully F2F class. The learners reported that the blended setting gave them the chance to reflect on their own work and their own culture, and equipped them with many practical, technological and cultural skills. The study has shown that blended language learning has facilitated higher quality and quantity interaction between the teacher and the learners and between the learners amongst themselves. The interaction section has shown statistically significant difference between the responses of the learners in the pre- and post-questionnaire. The study has also reported the challenges that faced the learners in this class such

as difficulty with managing their time, lack of motivation, technical issues in using technology tools and the limited F2F in-class practice. The study showed no major statistically significant differences between the responses of the learners in both questionnaires. This could be due to the fact that the learners were given the pre-questionnaire in the third week of the semester and, therefore, they were already aware of what the class is about and had already formulated their perspectives before they filled out the questionnaire. The reason behind distributing the pre-questionnaire in the third week is that the learners had undergone an intensive F2F training on the course and the various technology tools in the first two weeks of classes so as to equip the learners with enough knowledge and practice of the course and its technology tools. Another explanation why no major statistically significant differences resulted from the learners' responses in both questionnaires is that more than half of the learners submitted their responses of the pre-questionnaire later than the third week –in week four and five. The reasons behind the tardiness in submitting the pre-questionnaire is that as the researcher, who was also the teacher of the class, I was not allowed to contact the learners directly due to human subject protection restrictions and I had to contact the learners through the volunteer RA who contacted the learners many times asking them to fill out the questionnaire. This long process made the learners fully aware of the class and its blended setting which might have made the learners' responses to the pre- and the post-questionnaire very similar.

Blended language learning brings the best of the two worlds –F2F and online. This study has shown that blended language learning is a reliable learning environment which opens many learning options for learners to choose from and requires commitment and dedication.

The results of the second study were promising and set the stage to look deeper into the learners' views regarding the use of a specific technology tool to teach language as culture. The

third study looked at the learners' affect surrounding the use of the Arabic Hypermedia tool and its associated lessons.

The participants of the study were 17 learners of Arabic enrolled in the Levantine spoken Arabic class at MENAS at the University of Arizona. The vast majority of the learners were undergraduates -95%- and their computer competence ranged from average to excellent as self-reported in the pre-questionnaire.

Using pre- and post-questionnaire with open-ended and closed questions, the study investigated the learners affect in regard to the following aspects: learners' satisfaction with the Hypermedia tool and associated lessons, technology used, learning about the Arab cultures, and the learners' affect towards Hypermedia. Using descriptive and inferential statistical analyses to analyze the collected data, the study also looked at whether there were statistically significant differences between the responses of the learners in the pre- and the post-questionnaires.

The results showed that the learners were satisfied with the tool and the lessons, were able to handle technical difficulties, learned about the Arab cultures as a result of using Hypermedia, and had positive feelings toward Hypermedia. The learners also reported many advantages of using Hypermedia such as flexibility, having one space for the whole lesson, working at their own pace, and the affordances provided by the cultural materials. The learners also reported some challenges including the fear of working on their own, the lack of one-on-one interaction, and the unease about the increase of online work.

The results of the three studies show that we need to take more concrete steps in order to integrate culture teaching in language teaching using technology. Although the gap that existed between the views of the teachers and the views of the learners emerged from this study, the results can lend a hand to help us think about the cause of such a gap and the remedies that need

to be executed to bridge that gap. The results of the studies provide us with a real support toward the integration of culture in foreign language using technology. The studies have demonstrated that blended learning and Hypermedia are successful and promising tools if designed and delivered appropriately. Technology has been used in language teaching for quite a long time and it is here to stay so we might as well take advantage of it and utilize it to boost and speed up the process of teaching and learning the Arabic language and the Arab cultures. By doing this, we will be able to meet the growing demand for learning Arabic and the Arab cultures.

### **5.3 Implications for Pedagogy**

Arabic teachers should adopt the concept of teaching language as culture using technology in which culture is the doorway to understand, interpret, reflect on, and practice language. Teachers and administrators need to strategically plan the curricula within which culture exists and is the core of the teaching process. Technology, moreover, should be used as a tool to facilitate the teaching and learning of the Arab cultures. The promising results of the three studies in regard to integrating technology in teaching language as culture including learners' satisfaction, the increase in teacher-learner and learner-learner interactions, the increase in learning of culture, the growing interest in the use of technology tools, and the availability of more access to resources, materials and information should motivate and encourage teachers and learners of Arabic to engage in such experiences and benefit from those advantages.

When designing an Arabic course or teaching one, teachers of Arabic should take into account their learners' exact understanding of what culture is and what they expect to learn about the target culture. Teachers also ought to be very clear about the objectives of teaching culture in Arabic context. As this project shows, learners understand the target culture and culture teaching/learning different from their teachers. Clarity and transparency are key issues to

guarantee that teachers and learners are on the same page. This can be done in various ways. Teachers can distribute a short survey at the beginning of the semester asking their learners about their understanding of culture and what they expect to learn about Arab cultures. This would give the teacher a sense of what cultural materials to integrate, what to focus on, and how to design the course. Another way to reach an understanding of culture and its objectives is to explicitly include the word culture in the syllabus, the teaching materials, and the activities. The teacher should also talk about it in class and should give the learners to ask questions and discuss it.

Using technology to teach language as culture, teachers need to be moderate and rationale in utilizing technology in their classes. Technology is a tool after all and what matters is the activities that we design with these tools and the skills that we try to develop. Learners need to be well-trained on any technology tool introduced to class and we should never assume that our learners know how to use technology. The best way to guarantee that is to train our learners on the technology tools and to ask them to produce related work at the beginning of the semester using these tools.

In order to be more specific in introducing implications to teachers of Arab, and foreign language in general, the following section will highlight implications for pedagogy for each study.

I postulate the following implications from the first study about teachers' and learners' perspectives about teaching culture. Teaching Arabic should adopt the concept of "teaching language as culture" (Kramersch, 1995, p. 83) in which culture is the doorway to understand, interpret, reflect on, and practice language. Teachers, and administrators, need to strategically plan the curriculum within which culture is at the core of the teaching process. The shift to

teaching language as culture has started and Arabic teachers should take advantage of this trend, as well as use the results of this study, to catch up.

Understanding the role of culture by the teachers and the learners is not a guarantee that culture learning will take place. Arabic teachers and learners need to understand the role of culture and put this understanding into practice; Arabic teachers should integrate culture in each and every segment of their teaching and Arabic learners should be open and tolerant to the new culture(s). A further step by the teachers can be taken in which they not only highlight the role of culture in learning Arabic, but they also explicitly explain to their learners how culture will be integrated in their classes. This can be written in the syllabus and discussed in class or it can be highlighted in the objectives of each unit or chapter and discussed at the beginning of that unit or chapter.

As this study shows, teachers and learners don't see or understand the meaning of culture the same way. To come to a consensus on this issue, teachers and learners need to agree on what culture is. Teachers can define culture in the way they understand it and based on the vision and policies of the educational institution they are part of. Teachers, then, should consult with their learners about their understanding and definition of culture. As a result, teachers and learners would be able to understand each other's perspectives and views.

Teachers need to be very clear in their explanation of the cultural objectives for their classes. As this study showed, teachers believe that attitudinal and knowledge dimensions rank high in the cultural objectives, while learners' priorities are knowledge and behavioral dimensions. Understanding where teachers and learners come from in regard to objectives helps material designers and decision makers, including teachers, take into account the needs and



preferences of the learners. The lack of transparency in addressing the objectives of teaching cultural aspects might lead to failure in achieving those objectives.

Teachers' familiarity with Arab cultural aspects is something and dealing with such aspects is something else. Teachers should take advantage of their knowledge about the Arab literature, daily life, social norms, youth culture, education, etc. and design activities and assignments based on this familiarity.

Another implication for Arabic teachers is that although it would be hard to distinguish or draw a line between the class-time designated for language and for culture, teachers should aim at fully integrating culture in language classes (50% language and 50% culture) and teach language as culture.

Finally, in order to guarantee that teaching language as culture takes place, educational institutions need to prepare their teachers for this phase. Tailored training programs for teachers ought to be conducted so teachers know how to integrate culture in their language teaching. Training teachers would help learners clearly understand the cultural aspects and the activities they are practicing.

The following implications can be claimed from the second study about learners' affect surrounding Arabic blended learning. The findings of this study are promising and should encourage teachers and learners of Arabic to engage in such experiences and benefit from the advantages this setting has to offer. This includes increase in interaction, more learning of culture, interest in the use of technology tools, and more access to resources and information. Teaching Arabic in blended setting is new to many Arabic teachers, therefore, it is important that the hosting institutions or departments design teacher-training programs in order to help teachers

overcome the stress and the challenges they face as new blended teachers, so that they can become experts in the field and make use of this innovative and promising tool towards helping their learners. This training could include shifting courses from traditional setting to blended; hands-on training on using various technology such as the ones used in this course, namely, BYKI, Hypermedia, Eyejot, Facebook page, and emails; orientation on the Learning Management System (LMS) used by the university such as Moodle, Desire to Learn, Blackboard, and Nicenet; curriculum design; designing interactive online activities; etc. A good example of such training is the Faculty Development Program at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. (Please visit: [http://www4.uwm.edu/lrc/hybrid/faculty\\_development/](http://www4.uwm.edu/lrc/hybrid/faculty_development/) or see Aycock, 2002).

As this study postulated, students need support while online, as the technical knowledge required is new to many of them. Some teachers assume that students coming out of high school are “computer savvy” (Kaleta, et al., 2006, p. 134), but they are not. They might know how to use technology for social purposes, but when it comes to the use of technology for academic situations, they need training. Many of the challenges mentioned in this study can be avoided by providing appropriate training on technology tools; developing materials that meet students’ levels of proficiency; writing instructions in a simple, understandable language; and creating a clear calendar with specific deadlines for assignments.

Redesigning courses and curricula to use blended setting requires funding and administrative support. A good example of redesign support is the one given to redesigning the Spoken Levantine Arabic course by the Online Education Project (OEP) at the University of Arizona. OEP provided a training workshop and weekly consultation to the project team to ensure that the course is designed well. Teachers should keep in mind that blended learning and

online learning are here to stay, therefore, teachers should benefit from the findings of this study and engage themselves in redesigning and teaching their courses in blended setting. Such experiences would equip them with a strong tool that will help them compete and excel.

In Blended language learning assessment is challenging and teachers –and students –need support to implement it. One of the challenges is that the online part of the blended setting gives a higher opportunity for students to cheat and plagiarize from others in their work. In designing a course assessment, designers and teachers should modify the blended assessment as compared with a F2F environment, they also need to use more formative than summative assessments, and divide the assignments into smaller increments throughout the semester.

Teachers of blended setting should make themselves available to their learners through various media for questions or concerns in order to make up for the limited F2F interaction. Teachers should also post assignments, deadlines, news, test dates, etc. frequently using more than one tool/medium. By doing this, learners would be aware of class activities and would be up to date and on task.

Finally, the internationally recognized series “the NMC Horizon Report (2014)” (Johnson, Adams, Becker, Estrada & Freeman, 2014), which identifies and describes emerging technologies likely to have a large impact over the coming five years in education around the globe, has described blended/hybrid learning as one of the fast trends that will drive changes in higher education over the next one or two years. Therefore, Arabic teachers should seek this opportunity and follow this emerging trend by collaborating in designing, redesigning, and/or teaching Arabic in a blended setting.

The third study about learners’ affect surrounding the use of Hypermedia postulated some implications that can be helpful for foreign language teachers, in general, and teachers of Arabic,

in particular. Arabic Hypermedia can be used to teach more than one linguistic aspect; teachers can use it to teach vocabulary acquisition and reading comprehension (although studies do not show enough linguistic gains in using Hypermedia, other results have shown positive perception and attitude towards language using Hypermedia). This study has shown that the two cultural Hypermedia lessons –“Ramadan Kareem” and “Coffee and Cafés” –were taught successfully and received learners’ satisfaction and, therefore, teachers of Arabic can use this tool to teach various and unlimited aspects of Arab cultures. Teachers of Arabic can use Arabic Hypermedia to teach culture in online setting, blended setting, and study abroad programs, and can teach it to learners of Arabic in all proficiency levels. Teachers of Arabic can also use Hypermedia lessons as part of the curriculum or can use it as enrichment materials. Teachers of Arabic can argue for the use of Arabic Hypermedia for many reasons including the fact that the whole lesson is designed and introduced to the learner in one webpage which lessens learners’ distractions and makes them focus on the text along with the many annotations available. Teachers of Arabic can also use Hypermedia to help their learners practice pronunciation. Learners can click on each annotated vocabulary and listen to it as many times as they wish. They can also practice pronunciation by watching the short videos provided in the lessons. With proper training, teachers can develop their own lessons that are tailored to meet the learners’ expectations and the teachers’ projection of what their learners need.

Finally, despite the fact that using Hypermedia to teach culture is new to the field, this study opens a doorway to Arabic and foreign language teachers, course designers, administrators, and software developers to collaborate and develop lessons using Hypermedia to supplement other tools and textbooks used for teaching language and culture. By doing this, we might be able to promote the integration of culture in our teaching and not treat teaching culture

as a burden. Hypermedia can also be used as a stand-alone material if developed and designed well. In fact, it would be more appetizing to many of our learners when compared to the traditional materials that many educational institutions still use.

The shift to teaching language as culture using technology has started and educational institutions that teach Arabic and teachers of Arabic should take advantage of this trend, as well as use the results of these studies.

#### **5.4 Challenges of the Studies**

The main challenge that faced conducting the three studies is the lack of research that addresses the Arabic context which made it hard to compare and contrast the results of these studies with other studies. There were no studies that looked at learner's perspectives in Arabic context or in foreign language in general and Arabic blended and Arabic Hypermedia research in particular. A second challenge in conducting the dissertation is that the questionnaires used in the studies were adopted from other studies and resources, which were not designed for teaching Arabic. Although I made changes to the questionnaires to fit the Arabic context, it would have been more suitable to design the questionnaires to fit the broader context of Arabic language and the Arab cultures. However, starting with new questionnaires would have required a questionnaire designer who is trained and aware of the particularities of the Arabic context. The third challenge is that the number of participants was limited. The number of participants in the blended study and the Hypermedia study were 17 learners out of the 18 learners in the blended class. Although the number is considerably high for enrollment in a dialect class, it might be small for a study to make generalizations with 17 participants. As for the culture study, the number of the participants was high (90 learners and 15 teachers), however, many of the teachers were Teaching Assistants (TAs) who might have not had enough teaching experience and,

therefore, might have not been able to give precise answers to the questions in the questionnaires or the interviews. Furthermore, wearing the hat of the teacher, the hat of the material developer, and the hat of the researcher at the same time in the same class in the blended study and the Hypermedia study made it difficult, but not impossible, to act in a non-biased matter. However, much care was taken to conduct the research in the most objective way possible.

The study is limited by the context of teaching and learning Arabic as a foreign language, however, it would not be impossible to claim that similar findings could be applicable to English as a foreign language or other languages. The questions that I asked in the studies dealt with generalities of culture and technology, therefore, the three studies can be used to discuss how culture and technology are viewed by English teachers and Arabic speakers learning English as a foreign language in Palestine, for instance, or any other foreign languages including less commonly taught languages.

### **5.5 Directions for Future Research**

Further research can address similar topics investigated in the studies so results can be compared and implications can be drawn. Other future research can investigate in-depth the reasons behind the disparities in the participants' responses in the sections that showed statistically significant differences, if such disparities arose in similar studies. Other cultural research can look at teachers' and learners' understanding of what culture is and what the objectives of teaching culture are. Such studies would pave the way to other research to look at how culture is taught/learned and viewed by those teachers and learners who already defined

their understanding of culture and identified the objectives of culture teaching and learning. Further studies can include more data collecting instruments such as the ones used in the first study about the participants' perspectives about culture which included semi-structural interviews and class visits in addition to the questionnaires. Adding more data collecting instruments could not be done in the second study about blended learning and the third study about Arabic Hypermedia as I was the teacher of the class for the two studies and the researcher at the same time. Further research could also investigate the effectiveness of using other technology tools such as Eyejot, Facebook, and BYKI to teach culture. Further research in blended learning and Hypermedia can keep a longer interval between the time the learners receive the pre- and post-questionnaire and learners can provide their expectations and experience without any external effect.

Finally, the questions asked in the three studies can also be addressed in other languages such as teaching and learning English as a foreign language or any other languages. By keeping this in mind, researchers may want to conduct further research in other foreign languages as well as in the less commonly taught languages based on this model.

### **5.6 Contributions**

This dissertation has examined the participants' perspective surrounding cultural pedagogy and the use of various technology tools to achieve it. The studies aimed at revealing how teachers and learners view teaching and learning culture using blended language learning and Arabic Hypermedia tool so as researchers and other educators can take further steps and make use of the findings of the studies for research, training, and teaching and learning purposes.

The studies have shown positive results and have proven that such integration is possible in Arabic and, therefore, any other language can use this model to experimentally investigate this area of research.

This dissertation has contributed to the literature in teaching and learning culture in foreign language and in Arabic context. It has also added research and studies in integrating technology to teach language as culture in the Arabic context. Those two areas have not received adequate attention in research and it is hoped that other researchers would benefit from this work and build on it to further investigate the many issues available for investigation.



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