

Development of the Interest in Arabic Culture Scale (IACS): A Measure of Interest in Arabic Culture for Students Learning Arabic in Japanese Universities

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Abstract

With the increasing demand for Arabic teaching in Japanese universities, it is necessary to understand the Japanese students' perspectives on learning Arabic, including their interests, motivations and needs. A previous study suggested that interest in the Arabic culture is one of the students' major reasons learning Arabic. The purpose of this study was to develop a measure of interest in Arabic culture for Arabic learners in Japanese universities, in order to facilitate an understanding of the research problem. The participants included 662 students (484 women and 178 men, mean age 20.87 years) who were taking Arabic class(es) in Japanese universities. It was assumed that, for Japanese students, the Arabic culture comprised 12 Arabic cultural elements, as indicated by a previous study on the students. Therefore, 12 questionnaire items corresponding these cultural elements were created, and administered to the participants. To assess the construct validity of the measure, the participants were also administered three learning outcomes scales: the Arabic Learning Motivation Scale, Arabic Learning Effort Scale, and Arabic Learning Satisfaction Scale. Since a factor analysis using the principal factor method extracted one factor from the 12 items, the final measure of the interest comprised all the 12 items, and was called the Interest in Arabic Culture Scale (IACS). The IACS exhibited good internal consistency ($\alpha = 0.90$). Further, as expected, the IACS scores were positively correlated with scores on all of the three learning outcomes scales. Finally, the construct validity of the IACS was found acceptable.

Keywords Measure; Interest; Arabic culture; Arabic learner; Arabic learning; Japanese student; Reliability; Validity

Introduction

Arabic instruction began in Japanese universities in 1925, and it has been developing since then [1]. Since the turn of this century, 40 to 50 universities have been offering Arabic courses. In Japanese universities, Arabic is mostly opted for as one of the foreign languages. In other words, students choose Arabic out of several foreign language options. With an increasing demand for Arabic teaching in Japan, research on Arabic teaching and learning has also gradually improved [2]. However, it is necessary to fully grasp the present condition of Japanese students learning Arabic, including the number of enrollments in Arabic courses, and the students' purpose for learning Arabic [3].

Previous studies reported that one of the chief reasons for Japanese university students to learn Arabic is their interest in the Arabic culture [1-4]. In the field of foreign or second language learning, the reasons for learning the language have often been termed as "orientation," and two types of orientation, instrumental and integrative orientations, have attracted considerable research attention [5,6]. The concept of orientation has been directly related to learning motivation, which has an impact on language learning success [7-9].

It has also been found that familiarization with the culture related to a target language has a significant function in foreign language learning [10-12]. Likewise, in Arabic instruction, understanding the culture is considered important for attaining proficiency in the language [13]. Scholars also emphasize the importance of learning

about the Arabic culture to communicate effectively with native speakers [14-17].

It is generally assumed that interests appear only from the interaction between an individual and his or her environment [18,19]. Namely, interests are considered as objects or contents specific to the subjects' environment [20,21]. Moreover, most studies have pointed out the link between interests and motivation to learn, which indicates that interests play an important part in meaningful language acquisition because they result in better achievement [18,22-24].

Some studies in the field of language education have explored the effects of interest in association with the object of learning, such as an exploration of the effect of interest in English itself, including the linguistic aspects like phonetics and grammar, among learners of English [25,26]. Other studies have investigated the effect of interest on matters that are intimately linked with the object of learning, and that surround it. For instance, such studies examine the effects of interest in the German culture among learners of German. These studies found that learners' interests in the cultural and social contexts related to a target language promote language acquisition and heighten the motivation to learn the language [27-30]. Therefore, it is necessary to understand learners' interest in the culture of a target language, which is important for achieving successful language learning. Japanese students of Arabic wish to study Arabic owing to their interest in the Arabic culture. Therefore, it is necessary to improve the understanding of learners' interests in the Arabic culture, specifically in relation to Arabic learning. To this end, it is necessary to develop a scale to assess learners' interests, which has not yet been done.

The purpose of this study was to develop a measure of interest in the Arabic culture for Arabic learners in Japanese universities. This measure was called as the Interest in Arabic Culture Scale (IACS). In this study, the Arabic culture was considered as the sum total of 12 Arabic cultural elements: Middle Eastern and Arab regions, Islam, history and archaeology, literature and cinema, architecture and art, music and dance, politics and conflicts, economy and petroleum resources, tourist resources, women's issues, society and life, and behavior and thinking. The 12 elements were selected based on the Arabic cultural elements that are viewed as the objects of learning Arabic culture, which in turn, is closely associated with Arabic language learning [13]. There 12 elements were also identified based on the results of the following studies: (1) two interview surveys with five Japanese students [1] and 22 Japanese students [2] of Arabic in Arab countries, (2) a questionnaire survey with 79 students of Arabic in Japanese universities [4], and (3) an unpublished questionnaire survey with 28 Japanese students of Arabic in Japanese universities. The construct validity of the measure was assessed by examining the correlations between the scores on the measure and learning outcomes scales. It was expected that higher interest in Arabic culture would be related to better learning outcomes.

Method

Participants

The participants included 662 students who were taking more than one class per week, of Arabic as a foreign language, in Japanese universities (age range 18–39 years, mean age 20.87 years). They consisted of 291 Arabic majors (204 women and 87 men) and 371 non-Arabic majors (280 women and 91 men) from 16 universities.

Measures

Interest in Arabic culture: Twelve questionnaire items corresponding to interests in each of the 12 Arabic cultural elements were created (e.g., “I am interested in the politics and conflicts in the Arab world” and “I am interested in understanding the behavior and thinking of the Arabs”). Each item was rated on a 7-point scale that ranged from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree), with higher scores indicating greater interest in the Arabic cultural elements.

Arabic learning outcomes: As learning outcomes for learning Arabic, this study dealt with learning motivation, subjective effort, and learning satisfaction in learning Arabic. These learning outcomes were measured by the Arabic Learning Motivation Scale (ALMS), Arabic Learning Effort Scale (ALES), and Arabic Learning Satisfaction Scale (ALSS) [31]. The ALMS is a 4-item scale used to assess the degree of active engagement while learning Arabic. It examines the wish or intention to learn (e.g., “I am learning Arabic very hard”). The ALES assesses the students' perceived exertion in learning Arabic (e.g., “I am trying hard to learn Arabic”). The ALSS taps the overall satisfaction while learning Arabic (e.g., “I am satisfied with my Arabic lessons”). The ALES and ALSS comprise three items each. All the scales use a 7-point Likert response format ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). Since there are no negative item ratings, higher scores reflect better Arabic learning outcomes.

Procedure

The survey was conducted by a teacher during regular class between December 2008 and February 2012. All students participated voluntarily and agreed to complete the questionnaires.

Results

To examine the dimensionality of the interests, a factor analysis using the principal factor method was performed on the 12 items. The result indicated that one factor should be extracted. A visual inspection of the scree plot suggested a one-factor solution, because the first five consecutive eigenvalues were 5.83, 1.13, 1.00, 0.88, and 0.64. In addition, following a rule of thumb that the ratio of the first to the second eigenvalue should be above 3 for unidimensionality to be considered appropriate [32], the first single factor was retained (the said ratio was 5.14). The first eigenvalue accounted for 51.56% of the variance. As shown in Table 1, the factor loadings ranged from 0.56 to 0.72. Moreover, the corrected item-scale correlations ranged from 0.62 to 0.74 (Table 1).

Item	Factor loading	Corrected item-scale correlation
Middle Eastern and Arab regions	0.72	0.74
Islam	0.61	0.65
History and archaeology	0.64	0.68
Literature and cinema	0.69	0.72
Architecture and art	0.71	0.73
Music and dance	0.70	0.73
Politics and conflicts	0.64	0.69
Economy and petroleum resources	0.56	0.62
Tourist resources	0.63	0.67
Women's issues	0.64	0.69
Society and life	0.71	0.72
Behavior and thinking	0.71	0.73

Table 1: Factor loadings and corrected item-scale correlations for 12 items of interests in Arabic culture (N = 662). **Note:** All the correlation coefficients are significant at $p < 0.01$.

Thus, the final IACS was developed a general measure composed of all of the 12 items. The scale score is the sum of the 12 item scores, which can range from 12 to 84. The mean, standard deviation, range of the scale score, and Cronbach's alpha for the IACS, have been presented in Table 2. Table 2 also presents the Pearson correlation coefficients between scores on the IACS and the Arabic learning outcomes scales. All the correlation coefficients were positive and significant ($p < 0.01$).

Discussion

In this study, a new scale was developed to measure interest in Arabic culture for students learning Arabic in Japanese universities. The developed scale, IACS, exhibited good psychometric properties. The factor analysis of the 12 items revealed that all the items loaded on

one factor, indicating a single scale. The corrected item-scale correlations ranged from high to very high, and were adequate. The IACS showed good internal consistency, with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.90.

	M	SD	Range	α	r		
					1	2	3
1. IACS	62.90	12.42	12-84	0.90			
2. ALMS	16.91	4.53	4-27	0.87	0.38		
3. ALES	12.10	3.98	3-21	0.88	0.19	0.61	
4. ALSS	12.31	4.20	3-21	0.91	0.22	0.41	0.41

Table 2: Means, standard deviations, range of scores, Cronbach's α coefficients and Pearson correlation coefficients between scales scores (N = 662). **Note:** α = Cronbach's α . IACS = Interest in Arabic Culture Scale. ALMS = Arabic Learning Motivation Scale. ALES = Arabic Learning Effort Scale. ALSS = Arabic Learning Satisfaction Scale. All the correlation coefficients (r) are significant at $p < 0.01$.

The scores on the IACS were positively correlated with Arabic learning motivation, subjective effort, and learning satisfaction scores. It was expected that the learners' interests in the Arabic culture was a reason for learning Arabic, which would be positively related to better Arabic learning outcomes. Therefore, construct validity of the IACS was supposed. However, further study is needed to examine the relationship between the IACS and other learning outcomes, including achievement.

In addition, it is necessary to assess the temporal stability of the IACS. It would be desirable that the factor structure of the IACS is confirmed using confirmatory factor analysis. Nevertheless, the IACS is deemed as a promising tool to ascertain the interests of Japanese students learning Arabic.

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