

Title: Inclusivity and Relevance of the Arabic Curriculum in Primary Levels in the UAE: A Multidimensional Analysis of Linguistic, Cultural, and Pedagogical Dimensions

Research Overview:

This qualitative study examines the inclusivity of the UAE's Grade 1-3 Arabic curriculum in a highly diverse educational context. It identifies a paradox between strong national cultural representation and limited support for multilingual learners, highlighting gaps in linguistic accessibility, pedagogical practices, and alignment with global educational demands.

Purpose:

This study aims to critically evaluate the inclusivity and relevance of the UAE Ministry of Education's primary-level Arabic curriculum within a uniquely diverse sociolinguistic context. With expatriates forming approximately 88.5% of the population, classrooms in the UAE represent some of the most linguistically and culturally heterogeneous environments globally. Within this setting, the research investigates the extent to which the Arabic curriculum supports equitable learning opportunities and fosters a sense of belonging among all students.

A key focus of the study is the tension between maintaining Arabic as a core element of national and cultural identity and addressing the practical realities of a multilingual society where English dominates higher education and professional domains. The research also explores how effectively the curriculum addresses Arabic diglossia, particularly the transition between spoken dialects and Modern Standard Arabic (MSA). Ultimately, the study seeks to generate insights that inform curriculum development in alignment with national priorities of inclusion, academic excellence, and social cohesion.

Methods:

The study adopts a qualitative document analysis approach to systematically examine official educational materials. The primary data set includes Ministry of Education Arabic textbooks and activity books for Grades 1 to 3 in public schools. These early primary years are selected due to their critical role in literacy development and identity formation.

The analysis is guided by a multidimensional framework encompassing four key domains: linguistic, cultural, pedagogical, and epistemic inclusivity. To ensure analytical rigor, the curriculum materials are evaluated using a structured thematic framework consisting of seven categories: cultural relevance and representation, linguistic accessibility, linguistic ideology, multilingualism and translanguaging, themes and text types, interdisciplinary integration, and pedagogical orientation.

A three-stage coding process is employed, beginning with open coding to identify initial patterns, followed by thematic grouping to organize key concepts, and concluding with selective coding to refine relationships between categories. This approach enables both descriptive and critical interpretation, allowing the study to assess not only explicit content but also omissions and marginalization within the curriculum.

Results and Discussion:

The findings indicate that the curriculum is strongly grounded in Emirati culture, effectively incorporating local traditions, social contexts, and geographical references. This cultural emphasis supports identity development among Emirati students and reinforces national values. However, the representation is largely national rather than pluralistic, with limited acknowledgment of the diverse cultural backgrounds of non-national students. This imbalance may reduce engagement and inclusivity in classrooms with predominantly expatriate populations.

From a linguistic perspective, the curriculum demonstrates significant limitations in addressing learner diversity. It largely assumes a uniform level of Arabic proficiency and does not adequately differentiate between native speakers, heritage learners, and second-language learners. In particular,

insufficient attention is given to the challenges of diglossia, as students are expected to navigate the transition from spoken dialects to MSA without structured support. This lack of scaffolding may contribute to learning difficulties and reduced confidence among students with limited exposure to formal Arabic.

Pedagogically, although there is some movement toward inquiry-based learning, the curriculum remains largely influenced by traditional, teacher-centered approaches. Assessment practices tend to prioritize grammatical accuracy and formal language structures over communicative competence. Additionally, there is minimal integration of translanguaging strategies that could otherwise leverage students' existing linguistic resources to enhance understanding and engagement.

At the epistemic level, the curriculum reflects a predominantly traditional orientation centered on Arabic-Islamic heritage. While this provides cultural depth, it offers limited connections to contemporary global knowledge systems or interdisciplinary learning. This narrow focus may restrict the development of critical thinking and global competencies required in modern educational contexts.

In conclusion, the study highlights the need for comprehensive curriculum reform that balances cultural preservation with inclusivity and global relevance. Key recommendations include the integration of culturally responsive and multilingual pedagogies, the development of differentiated support for diverse learners, and the expansion of interdisciplinary content. Such reforms would enhance the curriculum's ability to meet the needs of all students while supporting the UAE's broader educational and societal goals.