

An Investigation of the Relationship between EFL Young Arab Learners' Literacy Skills and their Cultural Awareness

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Abstract

This study aimed at investigating the relationships between EFL young Arab learners' literacy skills and their cultural awareness. The subjects of the study were 43 EFL second year preparatory stage learners, at Azza Zidan Experimental Language School. They responded to two instruments designed by the researcher: an EFL Literacy Skills Test (EFLST), and an EFL Cultural Awareness Scale (EFLCAS). Findings of the study showed that EFL second year preparatory stage learners generally hold inadequate literacy skills and that they tend to rely more on lower order cognitive strategies

such as memorization and rehearsal than higher order ones such as elaboration and critical thinking. They also tend to adopt traditional teacher-centered practices rather than constructive learner-centered ones and they exhibit low levels of cultural awareness in the EFL classrooms. Univariate and Bivariate analyses of variance were used for data treatment. Results indicated that there was a significant univariate correlation between EFL young Arab learners' literacy skills and their cultural awareness. The study presents some recommendations as English courses should be designed based on an analysis of learners' needs and problems, and young learners should be trained in reading and writing creatively with the awareness of their own culture and other cultures to become active participants in their society. The study also suggests some topics for further research.

Key words: *Literacy Skills, Cultural awareness, EFL Young Arab Learners*

Introduction

Literacy skills and cultural awareness are essential components of effective communication and understanding in our increasingly globalized world. Literacy skills encompass the ability to read, write, and comprehend information. They are fundamental abilities that enable individuals to read, write, and communicate effectively. These skills are crucial for personal development, academic success, and active participation in society. Literacy skills are foundational for lifelong learning and are essential for functioning in a contemporary society. They enable learners to achieve their goals, develop their knowledge and potential, and participate fully in their communities. Cultural awareness involves recognizing and respecting the differences and similarities between cultures. Cultural awareness in educational settings enhances learners' ability to understand and appreciate different perspectives, which is vital for their personal and professional growth. This awareness also promotes better communication and collaboration in multicultural environments, which is increasingly important in today's interconnected

world. Learners' cultural awareness and literacy skills foster stronger relationships, promoting inclusivity and mutual respect in their community, thereby enhancing their engagement with the world.

Pahl, K., & Rowsell, J. (2012) confirmed that when our students write and read, they infuse this practice into their identities. Literacy learners bring their identities into the making of meaning, and as they learn to read, or put marks in their pages. Furthermore, Rowsell added that literacy is probably the single-most important part of education. Without literacy, all other learning is impossible. Literacy involves using reading, writing, speaking, listening, and viewing to gain more knowledge. Without the ability to do any of these skills, there is absolutely no way to acquire more knowledge. Literacy is essential for learning. It is crucial that language arts teachers are not the only ones in the school stressing the importance of literacy. While the language arts teachers may be the only ones truly teaching literacy, it is the job of all educators to facilitate literacy learning. Literacy must come before any other learning can occur, and we cannot grow as a society without literacy.

Literacy is more than having the ability to read and write. It is about helping children to communicate with others and to make sense of the world. It includes oral and written language and other sign systems such as art, sound and sign language. Literacy also acknowledges the nature of information communication technology, and many other forms of representation relevant to children including screen based (NELP, 2009).

Cultural awareness becomes central when we have to interact with people from other cultures. People see, interpret and evaluate things in different ways and something that is considered an appropriate behavior in one culture is frequently inappropriate in another one. It is clear that misunderstandings arise when one uses his/her own meanings to make sense of the meanings of the others (Quappe & Cantatore, 2005). Misinterpretations occur primarily when we lack awareness of our own behavioral rules and project them on others. In

absence of better knowledge, we tend to make assumptions, instead of finding out what a behavior means to the person involved.

The way cultural awareness is identified can vary but is a positive skill and understanding to have. Being culturally aware does not mean that a person knows everything about another culture but is aware of cultural differences. When interacting with someone from a different background it is important to understand people have different experiences, values, and backgrounds from yourself (Discover Corps, 2017).

Within the classroom context, it is possible that certain relationships exist between the EFL young Arab learners' literacy skills and their cultural awareness. Nevertheless, there is no empirical research with statistical output reporting on the relationships between the EFL young Arab learners' literacy skills and their cultural awareness, leaving this area unexplored.

Statement of the Problem

It is obvious from the previous introduction that there is a real need to investigate the EFL young Arabs' literacy skills and find out how far they affect their cultural awareness and the vice versa. Such investigation will be an extension of what has been done in this regard in other cultural contexts. Therefore, this study attempted to address the gap by investigating the relationship between the young Arab learners' literacy skills and their cultural awareness level. Based on this, the following study question was drawn:

1. What are the literacy skills that EFL young Arab learners hold?
2. What aspects of cultural awareness do they undergo in the EFL classroom?
3. What are the relationships between EFL young Arab learners' literacy skills and their cultural awareness?

Purpose of the Study: This study aimed at investigating the relationship between EFL young Arab learners' literacy skills and their cultural awareness.

Significance of the Study

EFL young Arab Learners receive their foreign language instruction in a very challenging environment where the target language is practiced only within the walls of classroom. The current study draws attention to the relationship between literacy skills and cultural awareness that may represent likely importance for foreign language learning and teaching. Thus, it may provide additional guidelines for EFL teachers' education programs to harness students' awareness to better attain their goals. Further, it may guide curricula and instructional practices, as when educators are informed by what students need and be aware of, and when these needs are to be taken into account, the way to educational reform is cleared and obstacles are removed. Therefore, it may provide some additional insights into the social reality within the classroom. The study may also present a new perspective justifying what other skills required for foreign language classroom instruction.

Hypothesis of the study

- There are significant univariate effects of EFL young Arab learners' literacy skills on their cultural awareness.

Delimitations of the study

The current study is delimited to a sample of students enrolled in the second year preparatory stage at Azza Zidan experimental language school, Fayoum Governorate.

Definition of terms

The following definitions were adopted in the current study:

1- Literacy Skills:

Matthews, et al (2003 , p. 19) refer to literacy skills as those skills which enable a Learner to read and write with independence,

comprehension and fluency. In other words, the main elements in literacy skills are reading and writing that represent the focus of attention especially in EFL contexts.

According to UNESCO (2004, p. 13), literacy is the ability to read and write with understanding a simple statement related to one's daily life. It involves a continuum of reading and writing skills, and often includes also basic arithmetic skills (numeracy).

2- Cultural Awareness

Understanding culture and cultural differences and recognizing how these differences may affect personal and group communication and collaboration (G. L. Murray & Bollinger, 2001: 63).

Cultural awareness is the acceptance of one's personal culture and the cultures of others, allowing a heightened understanding of and ability to value beliefs, characteristics, traditions, and histories of other cultures (Nieto & Bode, 2012).

Golden (2007:11) defines cultural awareness as understanding, valuing, and respecting differences. These differences include but are not limited to race, age, religion, ability, gender, culture, socioeconomic background, or gender. Being aware of and acknowledging these differences help to dispel acts of discrimination, marginalization, disenfranchisement, and racism. Being culturally aware also means the ability to address and interact with those who are different without passing judgment and accepting others who are different.

Review of Literature

1- Literacy Skills

Hall, K. (2010) stated that lacking vital literacy skills holds a person back at every stage of his life. As a child, they won't be able to succeed at school, as a young adult they will be locked out of the job market, and as a parent they won't be able to support their own child's learning. This intergenerational cycle makes social mobility and a fairer society more difficult. People with low literacy skills may not be able to read a book or newspaper, understand road signs or price labels, make sense of a bus or train timetable, fill out a form, read instructions on medicines or use the internet.

Teachers need to encourage learners to practice their literacy skills as often as possible. They must ensure that learners are making sense of what they read (Pretorius, E., Jackson, M., McKay, V., Murray, S., Spaul, N. 2015). Learners should be able to summarize the main ideas in a text and respond using appropriate language. According to Mudzielwana *et al.* (2012), children need to write answers to questions on what they have read; teachers must also ensure that children can demonstrate their understanding of new concepts taught. Another fundamental role of teachers is to encourage learner-centered learning by allowing learners to share decisions (McCarthy, 2015). Learner-centered teaching generally involves teaching methods that move instruction from the teacher to the learner (Du Plessis, 2020). Teachers are expected to promote literacy development with various resources such as games, audiobooks, classroom and literacy programs.

Literacy is a mainstream and basic path to the progress. Literacy is a main element to communicate all over the world. It is the capability to translate data and helps to understand the data. Literacy is an art and proficiency (Karis, 2014). It is concern about the achievement of reading, writing and numeracy skills, and it's helped the growth of healthy nation, living standards, and gender equality. The purpose of literacy should be easy to understand (UNESCO, 2006).

Kocoglu, E. (2021) added that the balance of skills and factual information is important for cultural literacy. Teaching skills in

context and combining critical thinking with content is particularly important in education. Being literate about culture, however, requires more than knowledge and skills in the humanities and other sciences: It requires the ability to critically evaluate popular culture. Because gaining knowledge about how to behave in a cultural setting involves learning a complex set of values and beliefs (Riecken & Court, 1992). Rosen (2000) stated that with cultural literacy, differences can be grasped and benefited from, which can enable a person to fulfill the following key roles:

- Values one's cultural heritage, shortcomings, and strengths,
- An investigative internationalist who looks beyond his own culture for job opportunities,
- A respectful modernist who best preserves his culture and uses the knowledge and resources of others
- Cultural bridge building cross-cultural alliances and coalitions,
- It is the global capitalist who brings global resources to local problems and local resources to global opportunities.

2- Cultural Awareness

In the field of education, cultural awareness is vital for creating an inclusive learning environment. Baker (2015) emphasized the role of cultural and intercultural awareness in foreign language teaching. The study found that incorporating cultural awareness into the curriculum helped students understand the dynamic relationship between language and culture, leading to a more effective communication and a deeper appreciation of cultural diversity. This approach not only improved language skills but also prepared students to navigate a multicultural world.

In the business sector, cultural awareness can enhance teamwork and productivity, which in turn is essential for EFL teaching as well. A report from Northeastern University (2023) indicated that companies prioritizing cultural awareness experienced better collaboration among employees and a more inclusive workplace. This, in turn, led

to a higher employee satisfaction and improved overall performance. The study underscores the importance of cultural awareness in fostering a positive and productive work environment.

In healthcare, cultural awareness is essential for providing quality care to diverse patient populations. A study conducted by Kaihlanen et al. (2019) found that cultural competence training for nurses improved their awareness of their own cultural biases and enhanced their ability to communicate effectively with patients from different cultural backgrounds. This training led to better patient outcomes and increased satisfaction with care, highlighting the importance of cultural awareness in healthcare settings.

Related to the concept of culture is “cultural awareness”. Tomalin and Stempleski (2013) defines the concept of cultural awareness as a development regarding the understanding of other people’s cultures and your own culture, growing positive interests in how cultures can both differ and connect. Cortazzi and Jin (1999) explains it as a concept about becoming aware of the members of other cultural groups, this includes their behaviours, expectations, perspectives and values.

There are multiple ways of working with culture and cultural awareness in the classroom. In the Swedish curriculum for upper secondary school (Skolverket, 2011), the importance of using variations of methods in the classroom is emphasized and this can be essential in order for students to stay interested and attentive. Tools such as textbooks, literature, films and the internet are merely a selection of materials that can be used when approaching cultural awareness in the classroom.

Introducing the students to problems that are important and that need to be addressed can be tackled through literature (Lázár, 2007). It is stated that literary texts and literature, such as different types of fiction and nonfiction should be used in teaching. Literary text often offers explorations of culture through the stories told. Studying and

discovering literary works can provide a chance to practice cultural relativity, the idea that beliefs, values and practices are relevant to a person based on that person's own culture and social context. This can influence students to become more aware of the cultural differences that various contexts offer.

Otwinowska-Kasztelanic (2011) mentions at least five different perspectives on culture in connection with foreign or second language teaching, and those are functional, structuralism, phenomenological, poststructuralist and social-constructionist. Traditionally, foreign or second language teaching has been concerned with mostly the transmission of information about people in the target country, their worldviews and attitudes. According to Kramsch (1993) the dominating perspective was then that one's own culture and the cultures of others could be objectively observed and resulted in the fact that culture could be a social construction or the idea that culture should be an outcome of ones own and others perceptions. Today, however, the view of what culture in foreign language teaching is about has changed. Language is now understood as a social practice, which has led to new ways of understanding and perceiving culture and language. A term that is now associated with foreign language teaching is interculturalism and the term implies that one's own culture is understood in comparison with others. Furthermore, one has to reflect on both the culture of the target language and on its own, this is also evident in the curriculum for English at upper secondary school.

One of the teachers' goals for learners should be to develop a greater complexity of thinking and one way for creating an opportunity for that is through the identification of similarities and differences between the learner's background culture and the target culture (Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013). The significant aspect is what the student's previous knowledge is regarding the target culture and similarities/differences that can be noticed between the students' own culture and the target culture. Comparisons can lead to reflection and the core element for developing interculturality is in fact reflection as

argued by Liddicoat & Scarino (2013). Getting the opportunity to see something from multiple perspectives can lead to the student making sense of experiences and developing an understanding regarding it. Already existing knowledge should be taken into account since it can be used as a base to create new knowledge.

Materials and Method

The current study used undertook the procedures detailed below to investigate EFL young Arab learners' cultural awareness and their impact on their literacy skills and the vice versa. The literature reviewed helped in enlightening the researchers in conducting the various procedures and designing the instruments of the study.

Subjects

Forty-three EFL young Arab learners enrolled in the second year preparatory stage were involved in the study. They were enrolled in one of Fayoum public official language schools, namely Azza Zidan Official Language School. Their age ranged from twelve to thirteen years old. The rationale for choosing second year preparatory stage students is that learners in this age need to be able to read more and get more experience about their culture and the other foreign cultures then write about that. Thus, participants were trained using the study program for enhancing their literacy skills and cultural awareness.

Instruments of Study

The present study made use of the following instruments: a test to measure EFL young Arab learners' literacy skills, a writing scoring rubric to assess the test answers, and a scale to measure learners' cultural awareness.

1.1. An EFL Literacy Skills Test (EFLST)

1.1.1. Purpose of the EFL Literacy Skills Test

A pre-post literacy skills test was prepared and administered to the two groups by the researcher. It was used as a pre- and post- one. It aimed at:

- Assessing second year official language preparatory stage students' literacy skills before teaching the training program; the pre- literacy skills test
- Investigating the effectiveness of the suggested program in enhancing the selected literacy skills after applying this program; the post- literacy skills test.

1.1.2. Design of the EFL Literacy Skills Test

The researcher constructed the pre-post literacy skills test based on:

- Reviewing literature related to testing EFL young Arab learners' literacy skill.
- Reviewing literature related to testing EFL young Arab learners' writing skill.
- Reviewing literature related to testing EFL young Arab learners' reading skill.
- Re-examining the instructional program, its objectives and activities in order to identify the skills included.

The pre-post literacy skills test was designed to be a pre-post test. It consisted of four questions to assess second year official language preparatory stage students' reading and writing skills.

The reading questions ask the students to

- Read the provided passage then answer the questions by filling in the blanks.
- Answer four-multiple choice questions.
- Provide answers to critical reading questions representing higher thinking levels.

- 1- In the first reading question, students are asked to read an application about joining the university library then fill in the blanks of five questions and choose the correct answer of other five multiple- choice questions.
- 2- In the second reading question, students are asked to read a passage about the best football players in history then choose the correct answer of eight multiple-choice questions and answer two critical thinking questions.

The writing questions ask the students to use pictures and guiding ideas/ questions to compose an advertisement and a paragraph of at least seven sentences.

- 3- In the first writing question, students were asked to write an advertisement of at least 7 sentences to their colleagues at school to announce for a school trip to the pyramids and the amusement park using the guiding pictures and ideas.
- 4- In the second writing question, students were asked to write a paragraph of at least 7 sentences about how international companies make successful advertisements using the guiding pictures, ideas and questions.

The test total score is 100 graded 25 marks for each question; 50 for reading and 50 for writing based on the writing scoring rubric.

1.1.3. Validity of the EFL Literacy Skills Test

To ensure the validity of the pre- posttest, the initial version of the test items was submitted to a group of specialized jury members in

the field of EFL curricula and instruction to be read and judged regarding the following criteria:

- Suitability of the test items to learners' linguistic level.
- Clarity and linguistic correctness of the test instructions and items.
- Suitability of the test items to measure the specified literacy sub-skills.
- Suitability of the test as a whole to its intended goal; i.e., assessing EFL young Arabs learners' literacy skills.

Some modifications were done on the test according to the recommendations of the jury members.

1.1.5. Time of the EFL Pre-Literacy Skills Test

During piloting the literacy skills test, the researcher estimated the average time needed for answering the test items. In order to do so, the researcher calculated and added the time spent by each examinee in the classroom and divided them by the number of the students. The time accredited for answering the test items was (60) minutes, (15) minutes for each question to be answered, which would provide ample time for students to respond to the test. No one needed an extension of time to complete the test.

1.1.6. Instructions of the EFL Pre-Post Literacy Skills Test

Test instructions are clear and simple so that students can understand them easily. The instructions ask students to read each question carefully before they start to answer. In writing questions, students are asked to write down their paragraphs in the provided spaces. Moreover, they are asked to write at least seven sentences for each question. The time assigned for the test is 60 minutes. The total mark assigned for the test is 100 marks, 25 marks for each question.

1.1.7. EFL Literacy Skills Test Administration:

1.1.7.1. Post- Administration of the EFL Literacy Skills Test

The post- literacy skills test was administered to both groups two days after the implementation of the instructional program. The post- test conditions were relatively the same as those of the pre-test in terms of place and time. Students' answers were assessed by two raters using the writing performance scoring rubric. The data were collected, recorded, and statistically analyzed in order to investigate the effect of the instructional program on the students' literacy skills level.

1.1.8. EFL Literacy Skills Test Scoring

1.1.8.1. Reading Skill Test Scoring

Students' reading answers were assessed by the researcher and an another rater of the same qualifications and expertise, assessments were taken according to the answer key provided by the researcher for the multiple choice questions while essay questions were assessed by taking the average of the two raters. In turn, the reading test was scored too. The total score of the reading test became 50 marks because each question including 10 questions: multiple choice and essay questions 2.5 marks per each question.

1.1.8.2. Writing Skill Test Scoring

Students' writing answers on the literacy skills test were assessed using the writing scoring rubric described below. Two raters (the researcher and another rater) used the writing scoring rubric to assess learners' writing performance on the test. Hence, according to the rubric each question was scored and, in turn, the whole test was scored too. The total score of the writing test became 50 marks because each question was graded according to four criteria (based on the parameters given in the rubric; accuracy, fluency & generation of ideas, and writing mechanics) with five or six marks each. Then, the

mark of each question was (25). By summing the scores of the writing and reading questions, the total score of the test became 100 marks.

1.2. The Writing Scoring Rubric

The writing rubric included five parameters for assessing and rating the answer of each question. Four levels of students' writing skill were described for each parameter using a five-point rating scale (arranged from 5 to 1) 5 Indicating an excellent and distinguished performance 2 showing that the student's writing is very good 3 Showing that the learner's performance is good 2 Indicating acceptable performance 1 Pointing out that the learner's performance is weak.

1.2.1. Design of the Writing Scoring Rubric

The writing scoring rubric was designed after reviewing literature related to EFL young learners' writing sub-skills, EFL young learners' writing performance assessment, and samples of rubrics designed and used in several research works. It consists of (4) criteria to be measured; i.e., generation of ideas, accuracy, fluency, and writing mechanics. According to the learner's skill, h/she was labeled in one of the (4) criteria mentioned in the rubric. For each criterion, (5) levels of performance were described on a five point rating scale (arranged from 5 to 1). Thus, the total points of the rubric are (20). As the pre-post writing test includes 2 questions of paragraph writing, the overall mark of the test is 50.

1.2.2. The Writing Scoring Rubric Parameters

The rubric included four parameters for assessing and rating the answer of each question; generation of ideas, accuracy, fluency, and writing mechanics; fourteen features of writing performance. Five levels of students' performance were described for each parameter using a five point rating scale (arranged from 5 to 1):

5 indicates 'excellent' performance,

- 4 indicates 'very good' performance,
- 3 means that the student's performance is 'average',
- 2 indicates 'acceptable' performance, and
- 1 indicates 'weak' performance.

1.2.3. Purpose of the Writing-Scoring Rubric

The writing scoring rubric was prepared by the researcher to:

- Identify learners' writing abilities.
- Rate learners' writing performance in paragraph writing
- Identify the progress occurring in these abilities due to the intervention of the LEA.

The writing scoring rubric is based on the checklist of the necessary writing sub-skills for the second year preparatory students.

1.2.4. Validity of the Writing Scoring Rubric

In order to establish the validity of the writing scoring rubric, it was submitted to a group of specialized jury members in the field of EFL curricula and instruction to be read and judged in the light of the following criteria:

- Clarity and relatedness of each level of performance to each writing sub-skill.
- The suitability of the rubric to its intended goal; i.e., assessing writing skill.
- The suitability of the rubric for discriminating between different levels of students' performance.

The writing scoring rubric was modified according to the jury members' comments and suggestions.

2. An EFL Cultural Awareness Scale (EFLCAS).

2.1. Design of the EFL Cultural Awareness Scale

After reviewing a number of studies on students' cultural awareness, the researcher prepared a cultural awareness scale, taking into account the following points:

- Using items that are positively worded and some items that are negatively worded.
- Using clear, simple and direct items.
- Addressing all awareness domains; i.e., knowledge, practice and attitude.

2.2. Content of the EFL cultural awareness Scale

The researcher's cultural awareness scale is based on on Kumlien, C., Bish, M., Chan, E.A. et al (2020) Psychometric properties of a modified cultural awareness scale for use in higher education within the health and social care fields, and a review of literature related to constructing awareness scales as a general e.g. :(Yakar and Duman 2017, Gillihan et al. 2018), but there is a lack of studies related to construction of cultural awareness scale in EFL specifically.

The cultural awareness scale consists of (48) items that aimed at identifying the second year official language preparatory stage students' cultural awareness in terms of knowledge, practice and attitude. Those (48) items were scored on a five-point Likert response scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). A higher score obtained indicated a higher level of cultural awareness and a lower score indicates a lower level of cultural awareness. The (48) items of the cultural awareness scale can be divided into three domains of awareness; i.e., **knowledge** represented by items (1:16), **practice** represented by items (17: 32), and **attitude** represented by items (33: 48).

2.3. Purpose of the EFL cultural awareness Scale

The cultural awareness scale was designed to identify the cultural awareness of second year preparatory stage students prior to and after

the implementation of the language experience approach training program.

2.4. The EFL cultural awareness Scale Validity

The validity of the cultural awareness scale was established using two ways as follows:

2.4.1. Content Validity

The scale was designed based on a review of the literature. It was composed of three domains; **knowledge, practice and attitude** while the cultural aspects covered in the scale were; **language, religion, art, values, fashion, marriage, food and entertainment.**

The first version of the scale was submitted to a group of specialized jury members in the field of EFL curricula and instruction. The jury members were asked to:

- Check the suitability of the scale as a whole for identifying EFL preparatory stage students' cultural awareness level.
- Check the clarity and relatedness of the scale domains to the cultural awareness.
- Check the clarity and relatedness of each item to each domain.
- Check the clarity of the statements.
- Check the clarity of the scale instructions.
- Check the relative importance of each domain to the cultural awareness.
- Make any modifications to the scale items.

The scale was modified according to the jury members' comments and suggestions.

2.4.2. Internal Consistency

The internal consistency was tested by calculating the correlation between the score given to each statement and the total score given to the domain under which this statement is categorized. Also, the correlation between the score given to each of the three domains

(**knowledge, practice, and attitude**) and the total score of the scale was calculated.

2.4.4. Pre-Administration of the EFL Cultural Awareness Scale

After establishing the validity, ensuring the reliability and specifying the time of the cultural awareness scale, it was pre-administered to the non-treatment and the treatment groups prior to the implementation of the instructional program. Students' responses were analyzed and data were collected, recorded, and statistically analyzed in order to identify students' cultural awareness level prior to the introduction of the instructional program.

2.4.5. Post-Administration of the EFL Cultural Awareness Scale

After the implementation of the instructional program, the scale was post-administered to the two groups. Post-cultural awareness scale conditions were relatively the same as those of the pre-cultural awareness scale. Students' responses were marked and data were collected, recorded, and statistically analyzed in order to investigate the effect of the instructional program on students' cultural awareness level.

2.4.6. Calculation of EFL Cultural Awareness Scale

The first version of scale was 60 items while the final version consisted of 48 items, 12 items were excluded upon the jury members recommendations, for each item, participants were given a mark out of 5 according to their response as follows:

Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	2	3	4	5

The overall cultural awareness was calculated through summing students' scores of three domains (knowledge, practice, and attitude). The highest score a student could get was (240) and the lowest score was (48) and the neutral score was (120). In addition, the mean scores

of the three components of cultural awareness among the respondents were also calculated separately. The highest score a student could get each domain (**knowledge, practice , and attitude**) was (80) and the lowest score was (16) with (40) as the neutral score.

Procedures

The study was conducted during the first semester of the academic year (2022- 2023). All the instruments were group administered to the participants in a classroom setting over a period of three months. The students were informed that their participation would be entirely voluntary and were assured that the information they provided would be confidential and would be used for research purposes only. The instruments were administered by the researchers. The students were given as much time as they needed to complete the measures.

Findings

The current study aimed to examine the relationship between the EFL young Arab learners' literacy Skills and their Cultural awareness. For this purpose, quantitative analysis of data was used for finding out whether they are related.

1. Statistical Analysis

To analyze the data collected through administering the instruments before and after introducing the training program, the current study made use of:

- Descriptive statistics (such as means and standard deviation)
- Inferential statistics (such as t-test correlations) –
- The statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS, v.22) was used to calculate the t-test value that points out the difference between mean scores of the study participants in the pre and

post administration of the literacy skills test and the cultural awareness scale.

- The effect size was calculated using *Eta Squared* formula: $t^2 / t^2 + df$

Where,

t = Calculated t value

df = Degree of freedom

Students' responses to the instruments of the study were scored and tabulated to provide answers to the study questions as follows:

EFL young Arab learners' literacy skills

The mean scores and standard deviations obtained by the subjects of the study as measured by the EFL literacy skills test in its eight dimensions indicated a wide variety of skills about linguistic knowledge and the process of knowing. The mean score on the "Identifying the main idea" dimension is (10.07) which denotes that they tend to understand and focus on the basic information presented in the text. Their mean score on the "Guessing the meaning" dimension is (11.01) indicating that they are aware of wide range of vocabularies. Their mean score on the "Reading for details" dimension is (11.36) indicating that they tend to concentrate more to find the information. Their mean score on the "Critical reading" dimension is (10.08) showing a good higher level of thinking. Their mean score on the "Generation of Ideas" dimension is (9.09) exhibiting a reasonable degree of creating new ideas to write about. Their mean score on the "Accuracy" dimension is (9.78) indicating the learners' grammatical and word choice skills. Their mean score on the "fluency" dimension is (8.25) represents sing appropriate transitions and ensuring the logical sequence of sentences. Their mean score on the "Mechanics of Writing" dimension is (8.43) denotes that the young learners can Apply punctuation and

capitalization rules correctly, Using correct word spelling and Write a readable handwriting. A summary of the data is presented in table (1).

Table (1): Mean scores and standard deviations obtained by the subjects in the eight dimensions of the EFL literacy skills test

	Reading Skills				Writing Skills			
	Identifying the main idea	Guessing the meaning	Reading for details	Critical reading	Generation of Ideas	Accuracy	Fluency	Mechanics of Writing
Maximum scores	12.5	12.5	12.5	12.5	12.5	12.5	12.5	12.5
Mean scores	10.07	11.01	11.36	10.08	9.09	9.78	8.25	8.43
Standard deviations	0.56	1.13	0.35	0.71	2.83	2.75	3.42	3.66

On the whole, EFL young Arab learners exhibit naïve literacy skills regarding the nature of English as a foreign language in eight dimensions of the literacy skills test. Yet, they hold relatively sophisticated skills concerning the integration of linguistic knowledge, on the one hand, and the integration of language and culture, on the other hand.

EFL young Arab learners' cultural awareness

The mean scores and standard deviations obtained by the subjects of the study as measured by the EFL cultural awareness scale in its three dimensions indicated a wide range of cultural aspects. The mean score on “knowledge” dimension is (62.93) which denotes that they

tend to know and understand cultural aspects of their own society. Their mean score on “practice” dimension is (64.79) indicating that they are involved the process to learn more about other cultures and how to deal and accept the others. Their mean score on “attitude” dimension is (64.32) indicating that they were affected by the treatment and this effect changed their attitude towards the other cultures.. A summary of the data is presented in table (2).

Table (2): Mean scores and standard deviations obtained by the subjects in the three dimensions of the EFL cultural awareness scale

	Knowledge	Practice	Attitude
Maximum scores	80	80	80
Mean scores	62.93	64.79	64.32
Standard deviations	5.47	4.64	4.06

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This omnibus test was followed by univariate analyses (ANOVAs) for the three dependent variables so as to decide on the partial effects of students’ literacy skills on various clusters of their cultural awareness. As shown in Table (3), there are univariate effects of literacy skills on various clusters of cultural awareness.

Table (3): Univariate analyses of the relationships between EFL

Young Arab learners’ literacy skills and their cultural awareness

Dependent variables	Naïve literacy skills group		Sophisticated literacy skills group		DF	F	η^2
	M	SD	M	SD			
Knowledge	58.21	7.13	62.93	5.47	42	51.26	0.453
Practice	62.57	5.42	64.79	4.64		46.32	0.417
Attitude	60.32	4.91	64.32	4.06		39.24	0.369

Eta - squared coefficients (η^2) reflecting the effect sizes of literacy skills on each of these cultural awareness domains indicate that literacy skills account for a great proportion of variance in students' cultural awareness. They account for .453, .417, .369 of variance in their knowledge, practice and attitude. This hypothesis was intended to find out whether there was a statistically significant correlation between the study subjects' literacy skills and their cultural awareness. This indicates that there is a strong positive statistically significant correlation between the young Arab learners' cultural awareness and their literacy skills. This means that, when learners' cultural awareness increased, their literacy skills increased and the vice versa. This variance, as shown in Table (3), is in favor of prospective EFL young Arab learners with sophisticated literacy skills in three dimensions of the EFL cultural awareness scale. Subjects with naïve literacy skills are more likely to rely on lower order cognitive strategies such as memorization and rehearsal than higher order ones such as elaboration and critical thinking. Those with sophisticated literacy skills show a more strategic approach in using higher as well as lower level cognitive strategies according to the requirements of various language learning situations, as well, literacy skills have a significant impact on their cultural awareness.

Sophisticated literacy skills holders show tendency to be more independent and to act individually trusting their own abilities to do so. They show preference to participate in activities that challenge their individual skills. In the light of such findings, the study hypothesis is accepted.

2. Discussion

The current study aimed to investigate the correlational relationship between the young Arab learners' literacy skills and their cultural awareness. The results revealed that the two variables were positively correlated. This means that as the students' cultural awareness increased, their literacy skills increased as well and the vice versa.

This finding goes also in line with the findings of the study conducted by Robinson-Pant, A. (2005) to investigate the relationship between cultural awareness and literacy. They concluded that a positive relationship has been claimed between cultural awareness and the literacy skills.

However, it has been stated that the area of cultural awareness is greatly ignored; i.e. most textbooks of reading and writing, devote no or little space to it and even when they do so. However, cultural awareness is an area that deserves special treatment, emphasis, and techniques. In addition, the cultural awareness research is relatively new, thus it needs more research for better understanding. Consequently, just a few studies were conducted in this area.

Additionally, the results of the current study shed light on the importance of developing the skills of literacy that in turn will be accompanied by enhancement of the cultural awareness.

Recommendations

In light of the current study results, the researcher recommends the following:

- English courses should be designed based on an analysis of learners' needs and problems.
- Young learners should be trained in reading and writing creatively with the awareness of their own culture and other cultures to become active participants in their society.
- Since there is a strong relationship between cultural awareness and literacy skills, teachers should play a vital role by clarifying the cultural issues included or implied in the textbooks.
- Integrating literacy skills (on which the program is based) into English courses in Egypt as they facilitate developing students' cultural awareness.
- Using different types of practice (e.g. modeling, guided and free practice) is recommended to help young learners benefit from what they study, fully comprehend it and apply what they have learned effectively.
- Teaching literacy skills especially reading and writing should focus on developing both the cognitive aspect (e.g. various reading and writing skills.) and the affective aspect (e.g. cultural awareness etc.). This can be helped by using some tools to identify their cognitive and affective needs (e.g. tests, self-reporting tools) and searching for suitable techniques to address their needs.
- Stakeholders in education should put into consideration and investigate EFL young learners' sense of cultural awareness because it is closely related to their language performance in different daily life situations.
- Interest in the EFL classroom should be shifted from the teacher to the learner; there should be a focus on learner strategies not teaching methods and techniques. This is because the use of learning strategies helps EFL learners to be autonomous and independent learners and users of the language.

Suggestions for Further Study

In light of the present study results, the researcher suggests the following further studies:

- New studies should be conducted that may contribute to provide more investigation of cultural awareness, and literacy skills development in the early years of education for better understanding of these skills in the educational context.
- The relationship between literacy skills and cultural awareness of young children needs also to be investigated.
- More studies to investigate how learners develop cultural awareness are needed.
- Putting into consideration the importance of developing cultural awareness scale for different stages of learning.
- Required more focus on the components of cultural awareness, and their role in formulating learners' perceptions and perspectives.
- A qualitative study for investigating the literacy skills used by the outperformed EFL learners is also needed.
- Examining the interrelatedness of affective factors in EFL learning: cultural awareness in relation to attitudes toward reading can be a good area to investigate.
- The teachers' cultural awareness and its relationship with their teaching practices of reading and writing is an issue that needs to be investigated.
- Required more interest and training for teachers in inserting cultural awareness in teaching English as a foreign language.

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المستخلص

هدفت هذه الدراسة إلى التحقيق في العلاقات بين مهاراتي القراءة والكتابة لدى المتعلمين العرب الصغار للغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية ووعيهم الثقافي. كان موضوع الدراسة ٤٣ متعلمًا في السنة الثانية من المرحلة الإعدادية في مدرسة عزة زيدان التجريبية للغات. استجابوا لأداتين صممهما الباحث: اختبار مهارات القراءة والكتابة للغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية ، ومقياس الوعي الثقافي للغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية. أظهرت نتائج الدراسة أن طلاب السنة الثانية في المرحلة الإعدادية في تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية بشكل عام يمتلكون مهارات قراءة وكتابة غير كافية وأنهم يميلون إلى الاعتماد أكثر على استراتيجيات معرفية من المستوى الأدنى مثل الحفظ والتكرار بدلاً من الاستراتيجيات من المستوى الأعلى مثل التوسع والتفكير النقدي. كما أنهم يميلون إلى تبني الممارسات التقليدية التي تركز على المعلم بدلاً من تلك التي تركز على المتعلم، ويظهرون مستويات منخفضة من الوعي الثقافي في فصول اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية. تم استخدام تحليلات التباين الأحادي والثنائي لمعالجة البيانات. أشارت النتائج إلى وجود ارتباط أحادي متغير كبير بين مهارات القراءة والكتابة لدى المتعلمين العرب الشباب في اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية ووعيهم الثقافي. تقدم الدراسة بعض التوصيات هي أن يتم تصميم دورات اللغة الإنجليزية بناءً على تحليل احتياجات ومشاكل المتعلمين، ويجب تدريب المتعلمين الصغار على القراءة والكتابة بشكل إبداعي مع الوعي بثقافتهم وثقافات أخرى ليصبحوا مشاركين نشطين في مجتمعهم.. توصي الدراسة أيضًا ببعض المواضيع لمزيد من البحث.

الكلمات المفتاحية: مهارات القراءة والكتابة، الوعي الثقافي، متعلمو اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية لصغار العرب