Interest in Arabic Culture among Arabic Language Students in Japanese Universities

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日本の大学におけるアラビア語学習者のアラブ文化に対する興味

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アラビア語教育が多くの日本の大学で実施される等、アラビア語学習の機会が増している。おそらく学習者において学習目的の多様化等の変化が生じており、教育のあり方にも見直しが求められよう。しかし、アラビア語教育の改善に必要な学習者の実態が十分把握されているとは言えない。

本研究はアラビア語学習者としての日本人大学生におけるアラブ文化への興味の性質を、質問紙調査から得られたデータの統計的な解析によってあきらかにすることが
目的であった。学習者の興味は学習において重要な機能を果たすものであり、アラブ文化は日本人学習者の学習動機との関係が推定される興味の対象である。あきらかにする性質には、アラビア語専攻学生（専攻）とアラビア語科目を受講する非アラビア語専攻学生（非専攻）の相違を考慮しつつ、各文化要素への興味や、アラビア語学習に関する学習結果との関連を含めた。

調査対象者である専攻及び非専攻の、それぞれ291名及び371名から有効な回答を得た。分析対象とした主な質問項目は、アラブ文化興味を評価する12項目と、学習満足感、学習意欲、努力感、主観的理解度、主観的成果、成果満足感、学習の自己効力感、学習を通じた自己実現感、習得目標、学習不安、習得難易感といった11のアラビア語学習結果を評価する32項目であった。

結果として、アラブ文化の12要素中、6要素への興味で、専攻群が非専攻群よりも統計的に有意に高かったが、残りの要素に差は認められなかった。群内における各要素に関する得点の高さについて、群間の差を検討すると、イスラームへの興味は専攻群で比較的高く、非専攻群で低かったといえる不一致が認められたものの、他の要素は両群ではほぼ同程度であった。この12要素への興味の得点を分析した結果、両群に单一因子が認められた。アラブ文化興味は非専攻より専攻がやや強いものの、性や学年による差はほとんど確認されなかった。アラブ文化興味が示す学習結果との関係について、各学習結果との相関係数と、アラブ文化興味尺度の得点群と低得点群における学習結果の比較から、アラブ文化興味が強いほど学習満足感、努力感、主観的理解度が強く、特に学習意欲、学習の自己効力感、学習を通じた自己実現感、習得目標が強いが、他の学習結果はアラブ文化興味とはほとんど関係が認められなかった。また、こうした関係は専攻と非専攻でほぼ同様であった。

本研究結果は、あきらかとされたアラブ文化興味の性質から、アラビア語学習におけるアラブ文化興味の重要性を改めて示すものであった。最後に、専攻と非専攻に認められた結果の共通性について、アラビア語教育の改善を視野に入れた考察を行った。

I. Introduction

1. The Present Condition of Arabic Instruction in Japanese Universities

Arabic instruction at university level began more than 90 years ago in Japan [Sumi and Sumi 2015: 1]. Currently, although two universities have Arabic major programs, more than 40 universities offer Arabic courses without offering a major program. According to survey results of the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports,
Science and Technology of Japan [2014: 44], 43 out of the 766 universities in Japan offered Arabic courses in 2012 (i.e., one for every 17.8 universities). Based on the same survey data for an earlier period [1999: 2008], the number increased from 37 universities in 1997 to 50 in 2006. Since 2006, the number has remained relatively stable at between 43 and 50 universities.

Takashina [2007: 18] stated that this growth of Arabic teaching in Japan reflects the Japanese people’s desire to know about the Arab world and its society, and their desire to encounter Arab-Islamic culture through Arabic instruction. Prior studies found that Arabic instruction in Japanese universities was once mainly intended to train future scholars, and focused on grammar and translation. Now, however, with the increase in opportunities to learn Arabic, there can be various purposes for students to study Arabic [Kadoya 2006: 3], including the practical use of Arabic, especially speaking and listening. As a result, students’ needs are often different than in the past. This situation requires a shift in the direction of Arabic education to respond to these changes.

2. Research on Arabic Instruction and Learning in Japanese Universities

Despite the stable growth of Arabic instruction in Japanese universities, an insufficient number of studies on Arabic instruction and learning have been conducted in Japan. There has been research on the individual experience in Arabic instruction and on the development of the evaluation system for learning achievement [Mohamed 2006; Takeda 2007]. However, there is a particular need for an objective assessment of the present situation of Arabic students in Japan for the following reasons: to accurately count enrollment in Arabic courses; to identify students’ reasons and goals for studying Arabic; and to study students’ beliefs and attitudes concerning Arabic learning.

One existing study did investigate the present conditions of Arabic instruction in Japanese universities in 2006; however, the questionnaire was administered to university administrators and teachers, not to students [Kadoya 2006]. Some studies of Arabic students in Japanese universities have focused on the roles of Arabic culture in Arabic instruction and learning, on skills and knowledge acquisition in Arabic courses, on the difficulty of acquiring Arabic, and on the measurement of interest in Arabic culture (see I. 5.). These studies suggest that Arabic instruction in Japan is characterized by teacher-centered rather than student-centered instruction because they indicate that there are discrepancies between what students desire to learn in class and what the teachers emphasize in class [Sumi and Sumi 2010; 2012]. Therefore, it is necessary to further
investigate the current situation from the viewpoints of students.

3. Interests and their Role in Learning

One of the factors that has a notable and important function in learning is students’ interest [Hidi and Renninger 2006: 111; Krapp 2007: 6; Renninger and Hidi 2011: 169; Schiefele 2009: 209-214]. The literature on the relationship between interests and learning has focused on three types of interest: individual, situational, and topic interest [Ainley, Hidi, and Berndorff 2002: 545; Schiefele 2009: 197-209; 2012: 1623-1625]. Individual interest is defined as a relatively stable affective-evaluative orientation toward certain subject areas or objects. Situational interest refers to a more temporary interest that is elicited by certain features of the environment (e.g., objects, conditions, activities). Topic interest refers to an interest triggered by a specific topic, assuming the aspects of both individual and situational interests.

Despite a growing body of knowledge concerning how interests influence learning, interests are still conceptualized in a variety of ways [Krapp, Hidi, and Renninger 1992: 5; Renninger and Hidi 2011: 170-175; Schraw and Lehman 2001: 28-41]. These varied conceptualizations may be attributed to the multifaceted nature of interests [Renninger and Hidi 2011: 170-175; Schraw and Lehman 2001: 24]. In addition, most previous studies have been conducted with the assumption that interests emerge solely from the interaction of an individual with his or her environment [Ainley, Hidi, and Berndorff 2002: 545; Krapp, Hidi, and Renninger 1992: 5]. In other words, interests tend to be conceived as object or content (or topic) specific, and not as concepts that are generated without reference to influences from the subject’s environment [Krapp 2005: 382; Krapp 2007: 6-7].

In addition to this common view, most of the studies in the literature are concerned with the connection between interests and motivation to learn [Harackiewicz1 and Hulleman 2010: 42-43; Schiefele 2009: 197]. Interests have been treated as motivational constructs, that is, as psychological states that are characterized by persistent effort [Ainley, Hidi, and Berndorff 2002: 545; Krapp 2007: 6-7]. Moreover, the individual’s psychological state exerts a substantial effect on his/her cognitive and affective functioning [Ainley, Hidi, and Berndorff 2002: 545; Hidi and Renninger 2006: 111-113; Schiefele 2012: 1623]. Based on these characteristics of interests, it seems reasonably certain that interests are closely correlated with effective learning and higher achievement; therefore, they should play a significant role in

4. Learning Arabic and Arabic Culture

Like the importance of interests, familiarization with the associated culture is also considered important in foreign language learning [Brooks 1971; Valdes 1986; Fantini 1997; Lange and Paige 2003]. The study of Arabic is no exception. In Standards for Foreign Language Learning in the 21st Century (abbreviated as Standards), which provides guidelines for foreign language instruction in the USA, education in culture is listed as one of the five goals of foreign language learning [National Standards in Foreign Language Education Project 2006: 31-32, 47-52]. The purpose of learning about culture is to attain the ability to more successfully communicate by studying the cultural contexts in which the language occurs [National Standards in Foreign Language Education Project 2006: 11-15, 47-52].

The role of Arabic culture in learning Arabic seems to have begun to attract teachers’ attention in the 1980s. Mahmoud al-Batal claimed that Arabic culture must be situated at the nucleus of a curriculum [Al-Batal 1988: 443-453]. Considerable efforts were subsequently made to provide cultural proficiency for students. Suleiman [1993: 61-111] offered a model for learning about culture, which can be applied to Arabic learning. Rammuny [1990: 49-74] added the understanding and application of culture to four skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing as communication activities), which teachers should include in their instruction. Having recognized the importance of Arabic culture in teaching and learning Arabic, Ryding [2013: 219-229] also devoted one chapter of her book on teaching Arabic to teaching Arabic culture. These researchers and practitioners stressed the importance of teaching and learning Arabic culture primarily because they believe that cultural competence is essential if one wishes to communicate effectively with native speakers and grasp meaning from multicultural perspectives.

5. Interest in Culture and Foreign Language Learning

Most prior studies investigated the effects of interests relating to the object of learning. However, some studies have examined the effects of interests in matters that surround the object of learning or that are closely related to it. Two articles reported that promoting and stimulating students’ interest in the culture associated with a foreign
language while they learn the language can beneficially support language acquisition [Howe, Gordon, and Willman 1969; Dechert and Kastner 1989]. Others have found that teaching cultural and social contexts associated with a target language increases the student’s motivation to learn the language [Matsumoto and Obana 2001; Nakamichi 2006].

In studies related to the inclusion of Arabic culture, some researchers surveyed the interests and motivations of university students studying Arabic in the USA. Belnap [2006: 172-174] surveyed 641 students and found that the primary reason underlying their desire to study Arabic was to better understand Arab culture. While investigating the orientation (i.e., the initial motivation) of students of Arabic at a large US university, Husseinali [2006: 401] indicated that almost all of the respondents agreed that they wished to learn Arabic in order to meet and converse with more varied people and to travel to Arab countries. Both scholars asserted that instruction in Arabic language must be relevant to the students’ needs [Belnap 2006: 177; Husseinali 2006: 398].

Interest in Arabic culture is one of the primary motivations for Japanese students to learn the language. This has been empirically shown by some of the previous studies. The main results from the studies in which the subjects were university students in Arabic courses and/or teachers of Arabic are as follows: (a) the students indicate strong interest in Arabic culture [Sumi and Sumi 2008; 2009]; (b) many students began learning Arabic because they were interested in Arabic culture [Sumi and Sumi 2009]; (c) interest in Arabic culture is closely related to the motivation and orientation of the students learning Arabic [Sumi and Sumi 2008; 2009; 2010; 2014]; (d) students desire to learn about Arabic culture while learning the Arabic language, but they feel that their teachers do not emphasize the culture in class [Sumi and Sumi 2009; 2012]; and (e) both teachers and students feel that learning about Arabic culture while acquiring the language is important [Sumi and Sumi 2008; 2010].

Based on these findings, Sumi and Sumi [2015] has developed a self-rating scale for assessing interest in Arabic culture for students learning Arabic in Japanese universities. This scale is called the Interest in Arabic Culture Scale (IACS) and is composed of 12 items that assess the degree to which the learners are interested in the Arabic cultural elements. A sample of students who were taking Arabic class(es) in Japanese universities was used to develop the IACS. The factor analysis of the 12 items supported one factor model. To evaluate the construct validity of the IACS, correlations with scores on scales of three Arabic learning outcomes were examined. It was found
that interest in the Arabic culture was positively related to Arabic learning motivation, subjective effort, and learning satisfaction.

Taking into account the importance of students’ interest in Arabic culture in acquiring the Arabic language, it is necessary to further understand the properties of their interest. Above all, in order to increase the students’ motivation by fulfilling their expectations, their perspective must be further clarified. Little empirical research has been conducted on this topic within the Japanese university system.

### 6. Purpose of this Study

The goal of this study was to explore students’ interest in Arabic culture within Japanese universities. The focus was mainly on the characteristics of their interest: the extent and factor structure of their interests in Arabic cultural elements, the extent of their interests in Arabic culture, and the relationships between their interests and various Arabic learning outcomes. In addition, we also focused on differences in these characteristics between Arabic majors and non-Arabic majors, because students’ major may be a significant factor to consider among Arabic language students. Students’ interest in Arabic culture was assessed using the IACS [Sumi and Sumi 2015]. Since Sumi and Sumi [2015] did not analyze for the two majors separately or examine the extent of each Arabic cultural element, the present study included these analyses.

There are four compelling reasons for this study. First, one of the most meaningful and useful factors in Arabic instruction and learning is understood: this is the students’ interests. In particular, their interest in Arabic culture seems to be closely related to their desire to learn Arabic. This topic is therefore important for Arabic language education in Japan. Second, we currently have data concerning the relationships between students’ interest in Arabic culture and Arabic learning outcomes. These data should help us to determine ways to improve Arabic learning outcomes. Third, differences in the characteristics of interests between Arabic majors and non-Arabic majors have also been examined. The students’ major is a major demographic variable that may influence learning attitudes toward a specific subject and provide available information to improve the teaching and learning of Arabic. Arabic majors are those who take Arabic courses as their major, whereas non-Arabic majors tend to take Arabic course(s) as electives, often to complete their general liberal arts program. Fourth, the present situation concerning Arabic students in Japanese universities is only partially understood. A fuller understanding is important, to improve Arabic teaching.
and to create more appropriate pedagogic strategies.

It was expected that compared to non-Arabic majors, Arabic majors would tend to possess a greater and broader interests in Arabic culture. It has been reported of foreign language learners that higher level students are more interested in the target culture than lower level ones [Matsumoto and Obana 2001: 76]. The higher and lower level learners here generally correspond to the Arabic majors and non-Arabic majors, respectively. It is not surprising that students who choose to study Arabic as a main subject should be more interested in Arabic culture than students who simply take an Arabic course.

In this study, a questionnaire survey was conducted among students who were taking Arabic courses in Japanese universities. The data obtained were analyzed using appropriate statistical methods.

II. Method

1. Participants and Procedure

Data were collected from 662 undergraduate students who were learning Arabic as a foreign language in Japanese universities. The participants could be divided into two groups: Arabic majors (291 students) and non-Arabic majors (371 students). Students in the Arabic major group were enrolled in two universities that had Arabic major programs, and usually took Arabic courses as compulsory required. These required courses include more than five classes of Arabic per week, though this frequency varies depending on their program and academic year. Their intention to major in Arabic was declared when they submitted their applications to their universities. The students in the non-Arabic major group were enrolled in various majors within 21 universities that do not have an Arabic major program. Most of these non-Arabic majors took an Arabic course that required them to attend one class of Arabic per week; however, some students had two classes of Arabic per week because of their universities’ module system. The non-Arabic majors usually do not take the same Arabic class as the Arabic majors. Modern standard Arabic was taught in all classes. In the case of Arabic majors, however, some additionally took a course in a regional dialect of Arabic, such as the Egyptian dialect. The demographics of the participants are provided in Table 1.

The data collection was conducted between December 2008 and February 2012.
The questionnaire was administered by a teacher in the various classes. The participants were informed that the information collected would be anonymous and that participation was voluntary. The data were collected from different students; i.e., each student provided unique responses.

2. Questionnaire Items

The questionnaire contained items concerning interests in Arabic culture, Arabic learning outcomes, and demographic items such as age, sex, and academic year.

(1) Interest in Arabic Culture

The IACS [Sumi and Sumi 2015] was used to assess the learners’ interest in Arabic culture. The IACS is composed of 12 items that assess the degree to which learners are interested in the 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. A sample item is “I am interested in politics and conflicts in the Arab world.” Each item was rated on a 7-point scale that ranged from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree).

These items refer to general cultural elements in the so-called Arab world. The elements were examined and chosen by two scholars based on the following reference and survey results [Sumi and Sumi 2008; 2010]:

A. Arabic cultural elements as the objects of learning Arabic culture, which is closely associated with Arabic language learning.

Arabic cultural elements concerning Arabic learning are classified in the

Table 1: Demographics of the Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Age Mean (Range)</th>
<th>Sex Women</th>
<th>Sex Men</th>
<th>Academic year 1st</th>
<th>Academic year 2nd</th>
<th>Academic year 3rd</th>
<th>Academic year 4th</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>662</td>
<td>20.87 (2.20)</td>
<td>484</td>
<td>178</td>
<td>164</td>
<td>195</td>
<td>140</td>
<td>163</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arabic major</td>
<td>291</td>
<td>20.74 (1.85)</td>
<td>204</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Arabic major</td>
<td>371</td>
<td>20.97 (2.44)</td>
<td>280</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>108</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>101</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Note) Values in parentheses are standard deviations. N: the number in the sample.
(Source) Made by the authors.
B. The results of an interview survey with Japanese students in Arab countries [Sumi and Sumi 2008; 2010].

The respondents in this study were 22 Japanese students enrolled in an Arabic language program in various Arab countries. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to examine the relationship between the students’ interest in Arabic culture and Arabic language learning. A sample interview question is “What kind of Arabic cultural elements are you interested in?” The students showed great interest in Arabic culture and named several cultural elements.

C. The results of a questionnaire survey with Arabic majors and non-Arabic major students [Sumi and Sumi 2009].

The participants in this study comprised 38 Arabic majors and 41 non-Arabic majors in four Japanese universities. An open-ended question was used to examine the relationship between triggers for learning Arabic and learning motivation. The students were asked for three answers to the trigger question: “What made you start learning Arabic?” Like the preceding results in B, the students showed great interest in Arabic culture and named several cultural elements.

D. The results of an unpublished questionnaire survey.

The participants were 15 Arabic majors and 13 non-Arabic majors in four Japanese universities. A questionnaire containing open- and close-ended questions was administered to investigate the students’ interests in Arabic cultural elements. The majors were asked: “What are you interested in concerning the Arab world?” The non-majors were asked to choose from among 23 Arabic cultural elements, which were selected based on the studies in A to C (above). The results of this study also yielded several cultural elements, which were of interest to the Arabic language students.

(2) Arabic Learning Outcomes

Learning satisfaction, learning motivation, and subjective effort were assessed using the scales used by Sumi and Sumi [2015]. Each item was rated on a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). Higher scores reflect greater learning outcomes. Table 2 shows the meaning of each Arabic learning outcome and the
main scholarly references used to produce the questionnaire items. The definitions were established using many previous studies, including the reference studies in Table 2. The scales were found to have satisfactory psychometric properties [Sumi and Sumi 2015: 2].

Furthermore, questionnaire items were newly constructed for the eight Arabic learning outcomes: subjective comprehension, subjective achievement, satisfaction with achievement, self-efficacy for learning, self-actualization through learning, goal of acquisition, learning anxiety, and subjective difficulty of acquisition. These psychological constructs were selected partly due to their importance as learning-related variables, and partly from a list of self-reported outcomes elicited from Arabic students, including a wide range of general learning outcomes. Items of the following three Arabic learning outcomes were primarily based on the general learning outcome scales developed by Sumi [2013]: self-efficacy for learning, self-actualization through learning, and learning anxiety. The meaning and main scholarly references of these learning outcomes are also contained in Table 2.

Two scholars who fully understood the definitions created the questionnaire items concerning the eight learning outcomes based on the references. The questionnaire items were then inspected by several graduate students, and carefully adjusted according to their comments. We desired the number of questionnaire items for each learning outcome to be as low as possible in order to reduce the load on participants. A careful and repeated examination of the items chose four questionnaire items for learning motivation, one item for subjective difficulty of acquisition, and three items for the others. A sample item for each of the learning outcomes is included in Table 2. Each item (except for subjective difficulty of acquisition) was rated on a 7-point scale that ranged from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). Since there are no negative item ratings, higher scores reflect greater Arabic learning outcomes.

The subjective difficulty of Arabic acquisition was rated using a visual analogue scale (single item) with scores ranging from 0 (very easy) to 100 (very difficult). The respondents were asked to rate the difficulty of Arabic language acquisition for themselves. Higher scores indicate that the respondents perceived more difficulty in acquiring the Arabic language.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Arabic learning outcome</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
<th>Main reference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Learning satisfaction</td>
<td>Overall satisfaction while learning Arabic. (I am satisfied with my Arabic lessons.)</td>
<td>Andres [2006], Hostetter and Busch [2006], Richardson and Swan [2003], Yashima [1995]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning motivation</td>
<td>The degree of active engagement while learning Arabic, with a wish or intention to learn. (I am learning Arabic very hard.)</td>
<td>Dörnyei [1990], Ehrman [1996], Ely [1986], Gardner [1985], Gardner et al. [1997], Husseinaini [2006], Nakata [2001], Noels et al. [2001], Schmidt et al. [1996], Wen [1997]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subjective effort</td>
<td>The students’ perceived exertion of learning Arabic. (I am trying hard to learn Arabic.)</td>
<td>Karakawa [1993], Shaaban and Ghaith [2000], Sumi [2013], Nakata [2001], Wen [1997]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subjective comprehension</td>
<td>General understanding of the content of Arabic, which is evaluated by the students. (I understand Arabic well.)</td>
<td>Leslie and Caldwell [2009], Ryan et al. [1990], Schmeck [1980]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subjective achievement</td>
<td>General achievements or grades on tasks and tests in the Arabic class, which are evaluated by the students. (I think my grade in Arabic is good.)</td>
<td>Barrick et al. [1994], Dipboye et al. [1979], Keijsersa et al. [1995], Worrell [2006]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satisfaction with achievement</td>
<td>The student’s own overall satisfaction with his/her achievement or grade in Arabic. (I am satisfied with the degree of my Arabic acquisition.)</td>
<td>Andres [2006], Hostetter and Busch [2006], Pike [1993], Richardson and Swan [2003], Sumi [2013], Yashima [1995]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-efficacy for learning</td>
<td>The students’ beliefs about their capabilities and willingness to acquire Arabic. (I can master Arabic if I try hard.)</td>
<td>Ehrman [1996], Ito and Shinto [2003], Mori [2004], Nakata [2001], Sumi [2013]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-actualization</td>
<td>The student’s experiences or expectations concerning whether their learning of Arabic can help them to reach their own potential. (Learning Arabic makes me grow.)</td>
<td>Cote [1997], Jones and Crandall [1986], Murayama et al. [1982], Sumi [2013]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goal of acquisition</td>
<td>The student’s goals in acquiring Arabic. (My goal is to acquire Arabic.)</td>
<td>Nakata [2001], Karakawa [1993], Shaaban and Ghaith [2000], Wen [1997]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subjective difficulty of acquisition</td>
<td>The actual level of difficulty that the students experience when trying to acquire Arabic.</td>
<td>DeKeyser [2003], Ellis [2006]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Note) The sentences in parentheses are samples of the questionnaire items.
(Source) Made by the authors.
III. Results

1. Interests in Arabic Cultural Elements

First, to clarify interest in Arabic cultural elements, the scores for each item of the IACS were examined. The results are presented in Table 3. All of the mean scores of the items were statistically significant (p < 0.01) above the center (score of 4) of the 7-point scale for both the Arabic majors and non-Arabic majors. Compared to the non-Arabic major group, the Arabic majors statistically had significantly higher mean scores for six Arabic cultural elements: Middle Eastern and Arab Regions, Islam, History and Archaeology, Politics and Conflicts, Economy and Petroleum Resources, and Behavior and Thinking. For the other Arabic cultural elements, there were no statistically significant differences in means between the two groups.

In each group, the overlap between the 95% confidence intervals of the means for

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Arabic cultural elements</th>
<th>Arabic majors Mean</th>
<th>95% CI</th>
<th>Non-Arabic majors Mean</th>
<th>95% CI</th>
<th>Difference in mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Middle Eastern and Arab Regions</td>
<td>6.04 (1.12)</td>
<td>5.92 - 6.17</td>
<td>5.68 (1.28)</td>
<td>5.55 - 5.81</td>
<td>***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Islam</td>
<td>5.57 (1.40)</td>
<td>5.41 - 5.74</td>
<td>4.84 (1.65)</td>
<td>4.67 - 5.00</td>
<td>***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>History and Archaeology</td>
<td>5.39 (1.39)</td>
<td>5.23 - 5.55</td>
<td>4.97 (1.66)</td>
<td>4.80 - 5.14</td>
<td>***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literature and Cinema</td>
<td>4.73 (1.59)</td>
<td>4.55 - 4.92</td>
<td>4.58 (1.55)</td>
<td>4.42 - 4.74</td>
<td>ns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Architecture and Art</td>
<td>5.22 (1.50)</td>
<td>5.05 - 5.39</td>
<td>5.16 (1.51)</td>
<td>5.01 - 5.32</td>
<td>ns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Music and Dance</td>
<td>5.09 (1.47)</td>
<td>4.92 - 5.25</td>
<td>4.92 (1.59)</td>
<td>4.76 - 5.09</td>
<td>ns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Politics and Conflicts</td>
<td>5.76 (1.37)</td>
<td>5.60 - 5.92</td>
<td>5.23 (1.54)</td>
<td>5.07 - 5.38</td>
<td>***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economy and Petroleum Resources</td>
<td>5.22 (1.62)</td>
<td>5.03 - 5.41</td>
<td>4.75 (1.61)</td>
<td>4.59 - 4.92</td>
<td>***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tourist Resources</td>
<td>5.55 (1.42)</td>
<td>5.39 - 5.72</td>
<td>5.61 (1.38)</td>
<td>5.47 - 5.75</td>
<td>ns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women’s Issues</td>
<td>4.85 (1.63)</td>
<td>4.66 - 5.04</td>
<td>4.64 (1.56)</td>
<td>4.48 - 4.80</td>
<td>ns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Society and Life</td>
<td>5.72 (1.32)</td>
<td>5.57 - 5.87</td>
<td>5.52 (1.39)</td>
<td>5.38 - 5.66</td>
<td>ns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Behavior and Thinking</td>
<td>5.86 (1.31)</td>
<td>5.71 - 6.01</td>
<td>5.33 (1.50)</td>
<td>5.18 - 5.49</td>
<td>***</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Note) The values in parentheses are standard deviations. 95% CI: 95% confidence interval. Difference in means: The results of a t-test for difference in mean scores between the two groups. ns and ***: the observed statistically significant levels are more than 0.05 (non-significant) and less than 0.001, respectively.
(Source) Made by the authors.
the items scores yielded a statistically non-significant difference between these means. On the basis of the confidence intervals, the Arabic cultural elements that more strongly interested students in both groups seemed to be Middle Eastern and Arab Regions, Society and Life, and Behavior and Thinking. Literature and Cinema, Music and Dance, Economy and Petroleum Resources, and Women’s Issues seemed to be cultural elements in which both groups showed the least interest. History and Archaeology, and Architecture and Art were rated as moderate interests in both groups. Politics and Conflicts, and Tourist Resources had moderate to strong interest ratings in both groups. Additionally, the Arabic major group was more strongly interested in Islam, whereas the non-Arabic majors were less interested in this element.

Second, to examine the dimensionality of interest, an exploratory factor analysis (principal factor method) was performed for each group. The results indicated a single factor structure, which included all of the 12 cultural elements, with an eigenvalue greater than 1.0 for both groups. For both the Arabic majors and non-Arabic majors, the contributions rated for the first factor were 46.24 and 49.83, respectively. The ranges of factor loadings were 0.31 to 0.58 and 0.37 to 0.59 for Arabic majors and non-Arabic majors, respectively.

2. Interest in Arabic Culture

The Cronbach $\alpha$ of the IACS, which are an important indicator of the reliability of measurement, were 0.89 and 0.91 for the Arabic majors and non-Arabic majors, respectively. This result indicated that the IACS had good internal consistency reliability in both groups.

To present additional information on the IACS, the differences in means of the IACS scores between demographic groups were statistically tested. Groups were formed by dividing the sample by major, sex, and academic year. The differences between academic years in each major were tested by multiple comparisons, using the Scheffé method. The other differences were measured by a t-test. Compared to the non-Arabic major group, the Arabic majors reported significantly higher IACS scores (Table 4). Women in the Arabic major group reported significantly higher IACS scores than those in the non-Arabic major group. In addition, the 1st-year students in the Arabic major group reported significantly higher scores than those in the non-Arabic major group.

Among the two groups, there were no statistically significant differences in the mean scores on the IACS between the sexes. Although in the Arabic major group, the
Interest in Arabic Culture among Arabic Language Students in Japanese Universities

Sumi M. Akiko and Sumi Katsunori

1st-year students had the highest mean of all academic years, the differences in mean scores compared to the other years were statistically non-significant. On the other hand, the non-Arabic major group did not have statistically significant differences in mean scores between academic years.

Although some statistically significant differences in mean scores on the IACS were found, there were no remarkable differences between sexes or students in different academic years. For this reason, in further examinations the variables of sex and academic years were omitted from consideration.

3. Interest in Arabic Culture and Arabic Learning Outcomes

(1) The Arabic Learning Outcome Scale

To construct measures for 10 Arabic learning outcomes (excepting the subjective difficulty of acquisition scale), first, the questionnaire items for every learning outcome were subjected to exploratory factor analyses (principal factor method) for each group. It was expected that the factor analysis would indicate a single factor structure. The results indicated that all of the Arabic learning outcomes had a single factor structure with an eigenvalue greater than 1.0 for both groups. Table 5 shows the contribution rates and factor loadings for the first factor. All of the contribution rates and factor loadings were sufficiently high. Therefore, the items corresponding to each Arabic learning outcome
formed an independent measure. Cronbach $\alpha$ was calculated for the questionnaire item scores corresponding to each Arabic learning outcome. As shown in Table 5, all Cronbach $\alpha$s were adequate for the two groups. Accordingly, these Arabic learning outcome scales had good psychometric properties. Because the subjective difficulty of acquisition scale consists of a single item, factor analysis was not conducted on that scale, and a Cronbach $\alpha$ for the scale was not calculated.

Each Arabic learning outcome measure was labelled with a capitalized title of the

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Arabic learning outcome</th>
<th>First factor</th>
<th>Cronbach $\alpha$</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Difference in mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Learning Satisfaction</td>
<td>82.72</td>
<td>0.96 - 0.94</td>
<td>0.90</td>
<td>10.96 (4.11)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning Motivation</td>
<td>77.39</td>
<td>0.78 - 0.93</td>
<td>0.90</td>
<td>13.69 (4.41)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subjective Effort</td>
<td>83.65</td>
<td>0.88 - 0.94</td>
<td>0.90</td>
<td>12.16 (4.46)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subjective Comprehension</td>
<td>81.72</td>
<td>0.88 - 0.92</td>
<td>0.89</td>
<td>12.89 (4.12)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subjective Achievement</td>
<td>80.41</td>
<td>0.89 - 0.91</td>
<td>0.88</td>
<td>12.56 (3.80)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subjective Achievement with Satisfaction</td>
<td>93.18</td>
<td>0.88 - 0.92</td>
<td>0.96</td>
<td>8.90 (4.79)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goal of Acquisition</td>
<td>85.63</td>
<td>0.82 - 0.78</td>
<td>0.92</td>
<td>9.40 (5.78) ns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Efficacy for Learning</td>
<td>86.34</td>
<td>0.82 - 0.78</td>
<td>0.92</td>
<td>14.11 (4.11) **</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning Anxiety</td>
<td>77.08</td>
<td>0.86 - 0.90</td>
<td>0.91</td>
<td>13.24 (3.77)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goal of Acquisition</td>
<td>85.63</td>
<td>0.90 - 0.84</td>
<td>0.85</td>
<td>13.04 (3.45)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Actualization</td>
<td>83.20</td>
<td>0.87 - 0.95</td>
<td>0.85</td>
<td>13.68 (3.45)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goal of Acquisition</td>
<td>77.29</td>
<td>0.86 - 0.81</td>
<td>0.85</td>
<td>14.38 (3.45)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subjective Difficulty of Acquisition</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>81.22 (18.67) ns</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Note) The results for the Arabic major group (n = 291) are presented in the upper side of the row for each Arabic learning outcome, and the non-Arabic major group (n = 371) results are in the lower side of the row. The values in parentheses are standard deviations. Difference in means: The results of a t-test for difference in means between the two groups. Because factor analysis was not conducted on the subjective difficulty of acquisition scale, and Cronbach $\alpha$ for the scale was not calculated, “-” are placed in the relevant cells. ns, **, and ***: the observed statistically significant levels are more than 0.05 (non-significant), less than 0.01, and 0.001, respectively. (Source) Made by the authors.
outcome (e.g., the subjective effort scale was named “Subjective Effort.”). The Arabic learning outcome scales were labelled with the general term “Outcome(s).” Table 5 contains the means and standard deviations of the Arabic learning outcome scales for the two groups. The possible range of Outcomes, with the exception of Learning Motivation and Subjective Difficulty of Acquisition, was 3 to 21. The Learning Motivation range was 4 to 28.

Also shown in Table 5 are the results of the test for differences in mean scores on the Outcomes between the two groups. Statistically significant differences in scores were found for six of the Arabic learning outcome scales: Learning Satisfaction, Learning Motivation, Satisfaction with Achievement, Self-Efficacy for Learning, Goal of Acquisition, and Learning Anxiety. Compared to non-Arabic majors, Arabic majors had higher mean scores for Learning Motivation, Self-Efficacy for Learning, Goal of Acquisition, and Learning Anxiety. In contrast, non-Arabic majors had higher mean scores for Learning Satisfaction and Satisfaction with Achievement.

(2) Relationships between Interest in Arabic Culture and Arabic Learning Outcomes

Table 6 presents the Pearson correlation coefficients between scores on the IACS and Learning Outcomes. There were almost no differences between the two groups in the Outcomes that were significantly correlated with IACS scores. Within the Arabic majors, 8 of the 11 Outcome scores were significantly correlated with the IACS scores. Within the non-Arabic majors, of the 8 Outcome scores, only Learning Anxiety was not significantly correlated with the IACS scores. The two groups shared moderate correlations between IACS and four Outcomes scores: Learning Motivation, Self-Efficacy for Learning, Self-Actualization through Learning, and Goal of Acquisition. The other statistically significant correlations were all low. In the Arabic major group, the IACS scores were negatively and weakly correlated with scores for Learning Anxiety. On the other hand, regardless of major, the scores on the IACS were not significantly correlated with three Outcome scores: Subjective Achievement, Satisfaction with Achievement, or Subjective Difficulty of Acquisition. There were no statistically significant differences in any of the correlation coefficients between the two groups.

To examine the differences in means of the Outcome scores, the Arabic majors and non-Arabic majors were each divided into those scoring in the lower 30% (the
lower group) and those scoring in the upper 30% (the higher group) regarding the IACS. The results of the test of differences are presented in Table 7. As expected to some extent from the correlation between scores on the IACS and Outcome, the Outcomes showed that statistically significant differences were almost the same as those that showed statistically significant correlation. In addition, Arabic majors and non-Arabic majors shared a statistically significant difference in seven Outcome scores: Learning Satisfaction, Learning Motivation, Subjective Effort, Subjective Comprehension, Self-Efficacy for Learning, Self-Actualization through Learning, and Goal of Acquisition. Regardless of major, the higher group showed higher scores on all of the seven Outcomes than the lower group. On the other hand, in both groups, there were no statistically significant differences in four Outcomes scores: Subjective Achievement, Satisfaction with Achievement, Learning Anxiety, and Subjective Difficulty of Acquisition.

IV. Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine the characteristics of interest in Arabic
Table 7: Differences in Outcomes Scores between Higher and Lower Groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Arabic learning outcome</th>
<th>Arabic major</th>
<th>Non-Arabic major</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>Difference in mean</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning Satisfaction</td>
<td>9.45 (3.54)</td>
<td>***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>12.37 (4.50)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning Motivation</td>
<td>11.43 (4.59)</td>
<td>***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>15.57 (3.92)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subjective Effort</td>
<td>10.68 (4.57)</td>
<td>***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>13.31 (4.47)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subjective Comprehension</td>
<td>11.51 (4.21)</td>
<td>***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>14.12 (3.78)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subjective Achievement</td>
<td>8.39 (4.93)</td>
<td>ns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8.68 (4.62)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Satisfaction with</td>
<td>7.35 (3.17)</td>
<td>ns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Achievement</td>
<td>7.30 (3.74)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Efficacy for Learning</td>
<td>11.95 (4.23)</td>
<td>***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>15.91 (3.33)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Actualization through Learning</td>
<td>11.45 (3.78)</td>
<td>***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>15.22 (3.09)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goal of Acquisition</td>
<td>14.02 (4.80)</td>
<td>***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>18.46 (3.00)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning Anxiety</td>
<td>14.27 (4.16)</td>
<td>ns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>13.19 (5.07)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subjective Difficulty of Acquisition</td>
<td>78.27 (20.61)</td>
<td>ns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>83.72 (17.37)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Note) The results for the lower group (n = 92 and 112 for Arabic major and non-Arabic major, respectively) are presented in the upper side of the row for each Arabic learning outcome, and the higher group (n = 81 and 111 for Arabic major and non-Arabic major, respectively) results are in the lower side of the row. The values in parentheses are standard deviations. Difference in means: The results of a t-test for difference in means between the two groups. ns, *, and ***: the observed statistically significant levels are more than 0.05 (non-significant), less than 0.05, and 0.01, respectively.
(Source) Made by the authors.

culture for Japanese students who are learning Arabic. The results show a particular trend in the expressions of interest in Arabic cultural elements among Arabic majors and non-Arabic major students. In addition, correlations between interests in Arabic culture and Arabic learning outcomes are clearly discernable. As a whole, the results of this study are more characterized by the similarities, rather than the differences, between these two groups of students.
1. Interests in Arabic Cultural Elements

Since the means for all of the items of interest among the Arabic cultural elements were higher than the center of the scale, both groups of students seem to find every element more interesting. In general, it is not overly surprising that students who major in Arabic or who take an Arabic course would have a stronger interest in various Arabic cultural elements. It appears that all of the students who are learning Arabic are more interested in Arabic culture in general, regardless of whether they are Arabic majors or non-Arabic majors.

While the two groups displayed a relatively strong interest in all of the Arabic cultural elements, the Arabic majors showed a significantly higher interest in six of the elements than the non-Arabic majors. However, significant differences were only found for half of the tested elements. There were no statistically significant differences in six of the elements between the two groups. This suggests that Arabic majors may in fact not be more interested in various Arabic cultural elements than non-Arabic majors.

A common feature between the two groups can also be observed regarding their degree of interest in the elements. Regarding the confidence intervals of the means, the two groups exhibited no notable differences in their degree of interest in each of the elements. For both groups, the characteristics of Middle Eastern and Arab regions, Arab society and life, and the Arab people’s behavior and thinking deeply attract their interest. This is likely due to the fact that these three elements form the basis of the other elements. In addition to these three elements, both groups have a moderate or strong interest in history and archaeology, architecture and art, politics and conflicts, and tourist resources. As interest in Arabic culture is an important factor in learning Arabic, these objects of interest are significant in Arabic education for Japanese students. On the other hand, both groups were less interested in literature and cinema, music and dance, economy and petroleum resources, and women’s issues. Islam is the only cultural element that yielded a difference in the degree of interest between the two groups, attracting less interest among the non-Arabic majors.

Additionally, both groups share a common dimensionality in term of their interest. It was found that all of the 12 items of interest formed a single factor in each group; that is, a single construct underlies their interest in the 12 cultural elements for both groups. The single construct has been supported by the analysis of the combination of the two majors [Sumi and Sumi 2015: 2]. Both groups are likely to have some common features of interest among the Arabic cultural elements.
2. Interest in Arabic Culture

As expected, there was a statistically significant difference in mean scores on the IACS between the two groups. Arabic majors have a slightly greater interest in Arabic culture than non-Arabic majors. However, the difference in scores for interest in Arabic culture between the two groups is smaller than was generally expected.

Female Arabic major students have a stronger interest in Arabic culture than those in non-Arabic majors. First-year students with an Arabic major report the highest interest. In each academic year, the non-Arabic major students have an almost equal degree of interest. This marked high interest may be reflected in the difference between the 1st-year students in the Arabic major and non-Arabic major. An analysis using longitudinal data is required in order to examine whether a specific Arabic major student’s interest decreases between the 1st and the 2nd years. A possible reason for the relatively strong interest among females and 1st-year Arabic majors must also be ascertained by further studies.

3. Arabic Learning Outcomes of Both Groups

It was found that there were differences in 6 of the 11 Arabic learning outcomes between Arabic majors and non-Arabic major students. Arabic majors have greater motivation to learn, self-efficacy for learning, goal for acquiring Arabic, and learning anxiety than non-Arabic major students. In contrast, learning satisfaction and satisfaction with achievement are higher among non-Arabic major students compared to Arabic major students. Both groups reported almost equally regarding their effort to learn Arabic, understanding the contents of the Arabic language, achieving on tasks and tests, and realizing self-actualization through learning Arabic. In addition, both groups perceive the same level of difficulty in acquiring Arabic.

4. Relationships between Interest in Arabic Culture and Arabic Learning Outcomes

The statistically significant correlations between the scores for IACS and Outcomes suggest that for both Arabic majors and non-Arabic majors, an interest in Arabic culture is positively related to their satisfaction with learning, learning motivation, subjective effort, subjective comprehension, self-efficacy for learning, self-actualization through learning, and goal of acquisition. Significant correlations with satisfaction with learning, learning motivation, and subjective effort were also found
by Sumi and Sumi [2015]. However, the strength of their interest in Arabic culture is not related to the degree of subjective achievement, satisfaction with achievement, or subjective difficulty in acquisition. Both majors are almost identical regarding the relationship between their interests in Arabic culture and their Arabic learning outcomes.

The association of learning outcomes and greater interest in Arabic culture was also supported by the results of the tests of mean differences in Outcomes scores between the lower and higher IACS scores groups. Students who take a greater interest in Arabic culture have higher scores in the seven Arabic learning outcomes. This tendency is shown by both Arabic majors and non-Arabic majors.

Although among the Arabic major students, learning anxiety was significantly related to their interest in Arabic culture, the relationship was very weak. In addition, there was no difference in the degree of learning anxiety between students with less and more interest in Arabic culture. Hence, for both groups, learning anxiety is not particularly related to interest in Arabic culture.

Based on the results of the correlations between the IACS and Outcomes scores and the differences between the lower and higher groups, the students in this sample who possessed a greater interest in Arabic culture and were studying Arabic in Japanese universities, regardless of their major, were also likely to possess a variety of positive characteristics regarding Arabic learning: higher degrees of satisfaction with learning, motivation and effort to learn, subjective comprehension, greater self-efficacy for learning, self-actualization through learning, and a higher goal of acquisition. On the basis of the strength of the correlations, in particular, such students were more likely to have high ratings in four of the positive characteristics: learning motivation, self-efficacy, self-actualization through learning, and goal of acquisition. On the other hand, their interests were not significantly connected to any factors related to subjective achievement, satisfaction with achievement, learning anxiety, and subjective difficulty of the acquisition. In addition, there was no significant difference between Arabic majors and non-Arabic majors in the relationships between their interests in Arabic culture and learning outcomes.

Of the outcomes that were significantly related to their interests in Arabic culture, the four outcomes that are closely related are especially notable. This is because it is possible that an increase in their interests could be closely linked to an improvement in the four outcomes: their degree of motivation, degree of confidence in ability to learn
or acquire skills, degree of goal-orientation, and to what extent they will develop in the fulfillment of their needs. These outcomes are connected to positive attitudes about the future and orientation toward Arabic language learning. Therefore, an increase in the students’ interests in Arabic culture should influence positive future attitudes and orientations.

In contrast, the outcomes that have no relation to students’ interests are likely to be perceived as present conditions of their Arabic studies. These perceptions include how much they have achieved, degree of satisfaction with achievement or grades, degree of worry about learning Arabic, and how difficult they feel the acquisition of Arabic is. Hence, even if the degree and range of students’ interests in Arabic culture are modified, these outcomes will probably not be influenced by the modification.

5. Common Features of Students’ Interests in Arabic Culture

The present findings draw attention to the common features of students’ interests in Arabic culture. On the one hand, the common features suggest psychological characteristics shared by students who are studying Arabic, regardless of their major. Students who choose an Arabic major or who simply take a language course in a Japanese university today may have many common interests in Arabic culture. To clarify these common features, additional research is required among other groups of students, e.g., students who do not major in Arabic nor take Arabic courses.

On the other hand, the common interests entailed some surprising results for the Arabic major students. Although their interest in Arabic culture was statistically significantly stronger than that of non-Arabic majors, the difference in their interests seems slight. Additionally, the Arabic major group had stronger interest in only half of the 12 cultural elements compared to the non-Arabic major group.

In general, there are some dissimilarities between the two groups in Japanese universities: (a) Arabic majors enter their universities because they had chosen Arabic as their major, whereas non-Arabic majors had generally chosen Arabic as a second foreign language from among a number of foreign languages after entering university; (b) Arabic majors take Arabic courses as required; therefore, earning Arabic credit hours is necessary for their program, whereas non-Arabic majors take Arabic courses as electives, which are not required for graduation; (c) Arabic majors attend approximately four Arabic classes per week, whereas non-Arabic majors largely attend one Arabic class per week; and (d) Arabic majors usually take Arab-related subjects besides Arabic
courses, whereas non-Arabic majors mostly do not.

Based on some of these dissimilarities, it seems normal that Arabic major students should be more interested in Arabic culture than non-Arabic major students. As described above, our expectation is consistent with the previous findings that higher level students learning foreign languages are more interested in the target culture than lower level students [Matsumoto and Obana 2001: 76]. However, the common features of students’ interest in the present findings do not fully support this expectation.

The lower than expected interest shown by Arabic majors may be due to the current Arabic curriculum for these majors. This curriculum may not provide sufficient Arabic cultural knowledge and may fail to stimulate students’ interest in certain elements of Arabic culture, so that their interest in Arabic culture may not be satisfactorily enhanced and deepened.

It is also possible to interpret the present findings as follows: the non-Arabic majors’ interests in Arabic culture is stronger than generally expected. Arabic majors are probably oriented to study Arabic not only because of their interest in Arabic culture but also due to instrumental motives, e.g., earning credits and building a career. Non-Arabic majors may also be motivated by their interest in Arabic culture and earning credits. However, building a career with the use of Arabic is unlikely to be a chief motive for most non-Arabic majors because, in actuality, it is rare and difficult even for the majors to obtain jobs related to Arabic. Even if jobs can be obtained, they require an advanced level of Arabic. The interest of non-Arabic majors in Arabic culture may be a greater reason for their choice to study Arabic, in addition to earning credits. As a consequence, their interests may be more easily enhanced compared to that of Arabic majors. Therefore, it is possible that the degree of interest among non-Arabic majors is equal to that among Arabic majors. These explanations for the observed degrees of interest in Arabic culture for each of the two groups of students are merely speculations. Further study is required to clarify the reason for their respective degrees of interests.

6. Implications of the Present Findings for Arabic Teaching and Learning

Given the significance of interest in the associated culture to learning Arabic, it is important for effective Arabic instruction and advanced Arabic acquisition to encourage students’ interest in as many Arabic cultural elements as possible. Every cultural element for which a weaker interest was shown in this study would naturally help students to better appreciate and understand Arabic culture, as well as the
significance of their language studies. Enhancing students’ interest in the less-preferred cultural elements would therefore be beneficial. In addition, Arabic cultural elements in which the students indicated higher interest could also be enhanced. In the future, all Arabic cultural elements should be more positively incorporated into curricula for Arabic language students.

When a curriculum for Arabic students is designed to take account of students’ interests, it is necessary to consider methods for interest development [Hidi and Renninger 2006]. One method for developing interests involves student interactions with others in their class, such as teachers, peers, and parents, and with tools such as books, tasks, and software [Renninger and Su 2012: 170-171]. Arabic teachers should adopt new activities and augment their current interactive activities for students when they deal with Arabic cultural elements.

It should be noted that enhancing students’ interest in Arabic culture might not affect all of the Arabic learning outcomes. As mentioned above, greater cultural interest seems to be more closely related to a positive future attitude or orientation, but not to the present conditions concerning their Arabic studies. Thus, enhancing cultural interests may not improve all Arabic learning outcomes.

V. Conclusion

This study provides several interesting results concerning interest in Arabic culture among Arabic language students in Japanese universities. We suggest that interest in Arabic culture is an important factor in learning Arabic, and show that the characteristics of that interest among our sample are similar for both Arabic majors and non-Arabic majors. In addition, our results can usefully be applied to teaching and learning Arabic. Instruction in Arabic should incorporate and continually seek to enhance students’ interests in all aspects of Arabic culture. This will not only broaden and deepen their appreciation for their growing language ability, but also foster and reinforce positive attitudes, which should in turn increase their interest in Arabic culture.

These results should be interpreted with caution for several reasons. First, the causal relationships between interest and learning outcomes could not be confirmed because this study used a cross-sectional design. A longitudinal design is required to clarify these relationships. Second, the non-Arabic majors in this study included both
students who took Arab-related subjects and some who did not. Further research is required to compare several student groups, including these two kinds of students. Third, it is necessary to examine the relationship between cultural interests and variables that were not investigated in this study, such as objective achievement and students’ aims while learning Arabic. Finally, the present results are not absolute because both students’ interests and Arabic education may be affected by various external factors and environmental conditions. A continuous survey of students’ interests in Arabic culture is therefore required.

Despite these limitations, this study clarifies several characteristics of interest in Arabic culture that were expressed by undergraduate students learning Arabic. The study thus represents an important step toward understanding these students’ interests and improving the institutional instruction of Arabic in Japan. We hope that this study will help instructors to obtain a deeper understanding of Arabic language students and how to effectively teach Arabic in Japanese universities.

Notes

(1) This study was supported by JSPS KAKENHI Grant Number 19652060 and 22520599, and was partly presented in the 27th Annual Meeting of the Japan Association for Middle East Studies, held in Kyoto University on May 22, 2011.
(2) The number of universities (43) includes the above-mentioned universities, which offer Arabic courses as part of an Arabic major.
(3) The 1997 data, which were reported in 1999, were obtained by an e-mail request sent by the author to the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology of Japan in August 2014.
(4) The other four goals are communication, connections, comparisons, and communities. The Standards [2006: 47] states that culture is generally understood to include the philosophical perspective, the behavioral practices, and the products (both tangible and intangible) of a society.
(5) This sample is the same as that used by Sumi and Sumi [2015].
(6) The duration of one class is generally 90 minutes in Japanese universities.

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While Arabic is taught at a number of Japanese universities, we must grasp the actual conditions of Arabic instruction and learning as experienced by Japanese students. The purpose of this study is to clarify Japanese university students’ interest in Arabic culture when they seek to learn Arabic. We use Differences in Nine Elements between Desire of Students and Emphasis in Class among Non-Arabic Major Students.” Proceedings of the 2nd Edition Algeria-Japan Academic Symposium, Sustainable Society through Advanced Sciences, Oran, Algeria, 17 May 2012. The 2nd Algeria-Japan Academic Symposium Organizers, University of Sciences and Technology of Oran-MB, Oran, Algeria, 84-88.


ABSTRACT

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Interest in Arabic Culture among Arabic Language Students in Japanese Universities

While Arabic is taught at a number of Japanese universities, we must grasp the actual conditions of Arabic instruction and learning as experienced by Japanese students. The purpose of this study is to clarify Japanese university students’ interest in Arabic culture when they seek to learn Arabic. We use
The data were collected from 291 Arabic major students and 371 non-Arabic major students. The questionnaire included 12 items to assess students’ interests in Arabic cultural elements, such as Islam and Women’s Issues, and 32 items concerning 11 Arabic learning outcomes, such as subjective effort and learning anxiety.

The results indicate that both Arabic majors and non-Arabic major students expressed a high degree of interest in Arabic cultural elements, and that the ratings were almost evenly spread among each of the survey items, except for Islam. In both groups, all 12 items of interest formed a single factor. Additionally, the Arabic major students indicated slightly greater interest in Arabic culture than the non-Arabic major students. The stated interests for each group were closely related to four of the Arabic learning outcomes in particular: learning motivation, self-efficacy, goal of acquisition, and self-actualization through learning. In addition, the results for both groups displayed little relationship between the stated interests and another four of the outcomes: subjective achievement, satisfaction with achievement, learning anxiety, and subjective difficulty of acquisition.

These results suggest the significance of students’ interest in Arabic culture while learning Arabic. The implications of the common characteristics of interest among the two groups, and the significance of cultural interests for Arabic language education are also discussed.

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