

Intercultural Communication Competence and Cultural Elements in Arabic Tourism and Hospitality Textbooks for Non-Native Learners in Malaysia Public University

Adhanawati Abdul Rapa^{1*}, Lai Yuh Ying^{2*}

^{1,2}Academy of Language Studies, Universiti Teknologi MARA, Malacca Branch

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2026.100800941>

Received: 07 September 2026; Accepted: 12 September 2026; Published: 21 September 2026

ABSTRACT

With the growing number of Arabic tourists visit Malaysia has highlights the need for language education to develop not only linguistic proficiency but also intercultural communicative competence (ICC) in Arabic language. However, limited research has been carried out to examine how Arabic tourism and hospitality textbooks represent culture and support ICC development, particularly in Malaysian higher education. This study addresses this gap by analysing cultural elements and intercultural dimensions in three Arabic tourism and hospitality textbooks used in Malaysian higher education. Using Krippendorff's content analysis, 21 cultural units were examined through the lenses of Knowledge Culture (KC), Communicative Culture (CC), Big "C" and Small "c" culture, and Cortazzi and Jin's Source Culture (SC), Target Culture (TC), and International Culture (IC), with Intercultural Interaction (ICI) interpreted in relation to Byram's ICC framework. The findings revealed that the sampled textbooks are predominantly oriented toward cultural knowledge and source-culture representation, while international culture and intercultural interaction remain comparatively limited. Although the textbooks provide substantial exposure to Malaysian and Arabic cultural contexts, cultural content is predominantly knowledge-oriented and offers limited opportunities for intercultural interpretation, negotiation, reflection, and critical awareness. One of the textbooks demonstrates stronger intercultural potential through greater international cultural representation and explicit cultural comparisons. The study contributes to Arabic-for-tourism research by identifying specific cultural and intercultural gaps and recommending ICC-oriented textbook development through international perspectives.

Keywords: Teaching Arabic as a Foreign Language, Cultural Elements, Intercultural Communication Competence, Tourism and Hospitality Textbooks

INTRODUCTION

In the era of globalization, tourism has become one of the fastest-growing industries, requiring professionals to communicate effectively with people from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds. In the tourism and hospitality sector, successful communication extends beyond grammatical accuracy and vocabulary knowledge to include the ability to understand cultural values, social norms, communication styles, and behavioral expectations of international visitors. Consequently, Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) has emerged as a core objective of foreign language education, enabling learners to communicate both effectively and appropriately across cultures (Byram, 1997). Language learning is therefore no longer

confined to the acquisition of linguistic competence but is increasingly recognized as a process of developing intercultural awareness, cultural sensitivity, and the ability to negotiate meaning in authentic intercultural encounters.

The importance of intercultural competence is particularly evident in Malaysia's tourism industry. The Star reported that the Middle East remains one of Malaysia's strategic tourism markets, with 194,440 visitors from the region arriving in Malaysia in 2024. To further strengthen this market, Malaysia officially launched the Visit Malaysia Year 2026 campaign during the Arabian Travel Market (ATM) 2025 in Dubai, highlighting the country's multicultural heritage, natural attractions, and hospitality while setting an ambitious target of attracting 45 million international visitors according to Malaysia Official News Broadcast. These initiatives demonstrate Malaysia's increasing engagement with Arabic-speaking countries and create a growing demand for tourism professionals who possess not only Arabic language proficiency but also intercultural communication skills and cultural understanding necessary for serving Arab tourists effectively.

Against this backdrop, Arabic has become an increasingly important foreign language in tourism and hospitality education. Arabic language programmes are expected to prepare future tourism practitioners to interact successfully with Arabic-speaking visitors in culturally appropriate ways. However, language competence alone is insufficient for professional communication. Since language serves as a carrier of culture, Arabic language textbooks should also introduce learners to the beliefs, values, customs, etiquette, communication norms, and everyday practices of Arab societies. Cultural competence, therefore, has become the third pillar of language education after linguistic competence and communicative competence, enabling learners to understand the cultural meanings embedded in language and to use the language appropriately in intercultural contexts.

The inseparable relationship between language and culture has long been acknowledged in foreign language education. Textbooks are not merely instructional resources but also function as cultural mediators, ideological carriers, and representations of the target society. They shape learners' understanding of both their own culture and the cultures associated with the target language. Cortazzi and Jin (1999) argue that language textbooks may represent source culture, target culture, and international culture., while Chao (2011) further emphasizes the importance of intercultural interaction and universal cultural themes in promoting intercultural learning. Likewise, scholars distinguish between Big "C" culture, including history, literature, religion, arts, festivals, and geography, and small "c" culture, which encompasses everyday lifestyles, values, communication styles, etiquette, beliefs, and social norms. Furthermore, Zhang (1990) and Chen (1992, 1997) classify cultural content into knowledge culture and communicative culture, highlighting that effective intercultural communication depends not only on cultural knowledge but also on learners' understanding of pragmatics, semantics, and culturally appropriate language use. These frameworks suggest that language textbooks should balance linguistic instruction with cultural learning to support learners' intercultural communicative competence. Recent studies have increasingly examined cultural representation in foreign language textbooks. A study of Malaysian Mandarin textbooks found that although locally relevant vocabulary and cultural references were included, the textbooks remained predominantly language-oriented and contained limited integration of intercultural elements. Cultural information was mainly presented through illustrations and isolated vocabulary, while communicative and intercultural dimensions were insufficiently developed. The study concluded that textbooks should incorporate a wider range of source, target, and international cultural elements to foster learners' intercultural understanding in multicultural societies.

Similar findings have been reported in Arabic language education. Studies examining Arabic textbooks indicate that cultural content often emphasizes religious heritage, historical knowledge, and traditional

cultural practices while paying less attention to everyday communication, workplace interactions, and authentic intercultural situations. Although some textbooks, such as Modern Standard Arabic, successfully integrate Islamic history, religious traditions, and aspects of Arab civilization, researchers have noted the limited representation of contemporary Arab societies, practical communication contexts, and diverse cultural perspectives. Likewise, studies of Arabic language textbooks in Iran reveal that many materials emphasize linguistic competence while providing inadequate opportunities for learners to develop intercultural knowledge, attitudes, skills, and critical cultural awareness. Learners consequently have limited exposure to authentic intercultural communication and pragmatic language use.

More recently, a study entitled "Cultural Representation in Arabic Textbooks: Unveiling Intercultural Gaps and Pedagogical Implications in Indonesian Islamic Higher Education" further demonstrated these limitations. Examining six Arabic textbooks used in Indonesian Islamic universities, the study found that cultural representation was imbalanced: cultural products were heavily emphasized, whereas cultural practices and perspectives were considerably underrepresented. Moreover, the textbooks primarily represented source culture and target culture, while international target culture received comparatively little attention. These findings suggest that Arabic textbooks remain largely oriented toward developing linguistic competence rather than intercultural communicative competence. The authors therefore recommend integrating authentic intercultural materials, comparative cultural activities, and reflective learning tasks while strengthening lecturers' roles as cultural mediators to enhance students' intercultural awareness.

Despite the growing body of research on cultural representation in Arabic language education, several important gaps remain. First, existing studies have primarily examined general Arabic language textbooks, whereas Arabic textbooks designed specifically for tourism and hospitality programmes have received little scholarly attention. Second, previous research has largely focused on describing cultural content without examining how these materials contribute to the development of Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC) required in professional tourism settings.

Although the importance of integrating culture into foreign language education has been widely acknowledged, existing studies reveal several limitations in the representation of culture and intercultural communicative competence (ICC) in Arabic language textbooks. Previous research has shown that many Arabic textbooks primarily emphasize linguistic competence, grammar, and vocabulary, while cultural content is often confined to religious traditions, historical knowledge, or isolated cultural facts. Such an orientation provides learners with limited opportunities to develop intercultural knowledge, attitudes, skills, and critical cultural awareness required for authentic intercultural communication.

Recent studies have further demonstrated an imbalance in the presentation of cultural elements. For example, research conducted in Indonesian Islamic higher education found that Arabic textbooks predominantly represent cultural products, whereas cultural practices and cultural perspectives, which are essential for understanding how members of Arab societies communicate and interpret social behaviour, remain insufficiently represented. Moreover, the textbooks mainly emphasize source culture and target culture, with limited inclusion of international target culture, thereby reducing learners' exposure to the cultural diversity of the contemporary Arab world and intercultural interactions beyond national boundaries.

Therefore, this study aims to examine the cultural representation and intercultural communicative competence embedded in Arabic tourism and hospitality textbooks used in higher education. Specifically, it investigates the distribution of cultural elements and evaluates the extent to which these textbooks promote the development of intercultural communicative competence. The findings are expected to contribute to the improvement of Arabic teaching materials for tourism and hospitality programmes, provide practical recommendations for curriculum developers and textbook writers, and support the preparation of graduates

capable of engaging effectively with Arabic-speaking tourists in increasingly multicultural tourism environments.

Furthermore, empirical studies in Saudi Arabian EFL contexts indicate that although educators recognize the importance of intercultural communication, classroom implementation remains constrained by curriculum requirements, limited teacher preparation, and insufficient instructional materials. Learners continue to experience difficulties in pragmatic communication, including politeness strategies, speech acts, and culturally appropriate language use, suggesting that textbooks rarely provide explicit opportunities to develop intercultural communicative competence through authentic communication tasks.

However, several important research gaps have been detected and can be filled in this study. First, most existing studies have examined general Arabic language textbooks used in schools or universities, whereas Arabic textbooks specifically designed for tourism and hospitality education have received little scholarly attention. Given that tourism professionals regularly interact with visitors from diverse cultural backgrounds, vocational Arabic textbooks should prepare learners for authentic intercultural communication rather than merely language acquisition. Second, previous textbook studies have mainly analysed the frequency and distribution of cultural elements or types of culture without examining how these cultural representations contribute to the development of learners' Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC). Consequently, little is known about whether Arabic tourism textbooks provide sufficient opportunities for learners to acquire intercultural knowledge, interpret cultural differences, develop appropriate communication strategies, and engage in critical cultural reflection. This limits understanding of the pedagogical effectiveness of textbooks in preparing learners for real intercultural encounters.

Thirdly, there is a significant contextual gap. Most previous studies have been conducted in countries such as Iran, Saudi Arabia, Indonesia, or in general Arabic language education contexts. Very limited research has investigated Arabic textbooks developed for tourism and hospitality programmes in Southeast Asia, particularly in Malaysia, where the tourism industry has become increasingly connected with Arabic-speaking markets.

With Malaysia's growing emphasis on attracting Middle Eastern tourists through initiatives such as Visit Malaysia Year 2026, tourism graduates require not only Arabic language proficiency but also intercultural competence to communicate effectively with Arab visitors. Whether existing Arabic tourism textbooks adequately support these professional needs remains largely unexplored. Finally, previous studies have generally recommended incorporating more cultural content into textbooks but have offered limited evidence regarding which cultural elements and ICC components are absent and how textbook design can be improved to enhance intercultural learning outcomes. Consequently, curriculum developers and textbook writers continue to lack an evidence-based framework for designing Arabic tourism materials that integrate linguistic competence with intercultural communication competence.

Therefore, this study seeks to address these gaps by investigating not only the cultural content is included, but also how effectively the textbooks prepare learners for authentic intercultural communication in tourism and hospitality settings. The findings are expected to provide practical implications for textbook development, curriculum design, and Arabic language teaching in vocational and higher education contexts.

Research Objectives

The objectives of this study are to examine the cultural elements and intercultural communicative competence embedded in Malaysian Arabic tourism and hospitality textbooks. Based on the research objectives, the research questions (RQs) are as follow:

RQ1: What are the types of culture and cultural elements integrated in the Malaysian Arabic tourism and hospitality textbook?

RQ2: How are these type of cultures and cultural elements being presented in the textbook in order to prepare learners for intercultural communication in tourism and hospitality setting?

LITERATURE REVIEW

The relationship between language and culture has been widely recognized in foreign language education, particularly in the development of Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC). Language learning involves more than the acquisition of grammatical structures and vocabulary because effective communication requires learners to understand the cultural meanings, social norms, values, and communicative conventions embedded in language use. Byram (1997) conceptualizes ICC as comprising knowledge (*savoirs*), attitudes (*savoir-être*), skills of interpreting and relating (*savoir-comprendre*), skills of discovery and interaction (*savoir-apprendre/faire*), and critical cultural awareness (*savoir s'engager*). From this perspective, successful intercultural communication requires learners not only to possess knowledge about another culture but also to interpret cultural differences, interact appropriately, and critically reflect on their own and others' cultural assumptions. This perspective is particularly relevant to tourism and hospitality education, where communication frequently occurs between individuals from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds. Tourism professionals therefore require cultural and pragmatic competence to manage interactions involving greetings, politeness, requests, explanations, and culturally appropriate service encounters. The development of ICC consequently provides an important pedagogical foundation for evaluating whether foreign language learning materials adequately prepare learners for authentic intercultural communication. Textbooks play an important role in developing such competence because they function not only as sources of linguistic input but also as cultural mediators through which learners encounter representations of societies and cultural practices. Cortazzi and Jin (1999) distinguish among source culture (SC), target culture (TC), and international culture (IC). Source culture refers to the learners' own cultural environment, target culture represents the culture associated with the language being learned, while international culture introduces cultural perspectives beyond the source and target contexts. Chao (2011) further emphasizes the importance of intercultural interaction and universal cultural themes in facilitating intercultural learning. Cultural content can also be examined through the distinction between Big "C" culture and small "c" culture. Big "C" culture generally encompasses visible and institutional aspects such as history, geography, literature, arts, festivals, and significant cultural achievements, whereas small "c" culture includes everyday practices, values, beliefs, lifestyles, communication patterns, etiquette, and social norms. In addition, Zhang (1990) and Chen (1992, 1997) distinguish between knowledge culture (KC) and communicative culture (CC), highlighting the difference between knowing cultural information and knowing how language should be used appropriately in particular social contexts. Taken together, these frameworks indicate that effective textbook design should provide a balanced representation of cultural knowledge and communicative practices, while also creating opportunities for learners to compare cultures and engage with culturally diverse perspectives.

Previous empirical research, however, suggests that cultural representation in foreign language textbooks is often uneven. Studies of Malaysian Mandarin textbooks, for example, have found that although local vocabulary and cultural references are incorporated, textbooks remain predominantly language-oriented, with cultural information frequently presented through illustrations and isolated vocabulary rather than through meaningful communicative and intercultural activities. Similar patterns have been identified in Arabic language education. Research on Arabic textbooks has reported a strong emphasis on religious heritage, historical knowledge, and traditional cultural practices, while everyday communication, workplace

interaction, contemporary Arab societies, and diverse cultural perspectives receive comparatively less attention. Studies of Arabic textbooks in Iran have likewise indicated that linguistic competence is often prioritized over intercultural knowledge, attitudes, skills, and critical cultural awareness. More specifically, research in Indonesian Islamic higher education found an imbalance in the representation of cultural elements, with cultural products receiving greater attention than cultural practices and cultural perspectives. The same research reported that source culture and target culture were more prominent than international target culture. These findings suggest that simply including cultural information in textbooks does not necessarily guarantee the development of ICC; rather, learners need opportunities to interpret cultural meanings, compare perspectives, and engage in meaningful intercultural communication. Despite the growing literature on culture in Arabic language education, several gaps remain particularly relevant to Arabic for tourism and hospitality. First, much of the existing research has focused on general Arabic language textbooks used in schools, universities, or religious education, while textbooks specifically developed for tourism and hospitality programmes have received comparatively limited attention. Second, previous studies have tended to examine the presence and distribution of cultural content without sufficiently investigating how such representations contribute to learners' development of ICC in professional contexts. Therefore, the present study addresses these limitations by examining both the cultural elements represented in Arabic tourism and hospitality textbooks and their potential contribution to ICC, thereby moving beyond identifying what cultures are presented to considering how textbook content can prepare learners for authentic intercultural communication in tourism and hospitality settings.

METHODOLOGY

Content Analysis

This research utilized a qualitative content analysis method to investigate cultural and intercultural elements within the selected textbooks. Drawing on prior empirical studies, an analytical framework was established to categorize cultural types, which were then numerically summarized through frequency and percentage distributions. Rather than focusing solely on surface-level text, this latent content analysis approach sought deeper interpretive insights into contextual meanings (Dörnyei, 2007). Grounded in the works of Mayring (2000) and DeWitt et al. (2013), content analysis allows for the systematic investigation to explain the issue clearly. Thus, blending qualitative thematic interpretation with quantitative measurement ensured a comprehensive analysis of the dataset (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005; Weber, 1990).

Sample

This study has purposely selected three Tourism and Hospitality Arabic Textbooks, which two of the textbooks are currently used at local universities in Malaysia. Communicative Arabic Language for Tourism and Hospitality (Part 1) al-Kauthar 1(الكَوْتَر 1) coded as AT1 and Foundation Arabic for Tourism Level 1 al-Rahhālatt 1

(الرَّحَالَة 1) coded as AT 2, both were published by Ibrahim Publisher and UiTM Press Publisher respectively. Communicative Arabic Language for Tourism and Hospitality (Part 2) al-Kauthar 2(الكَوْتَر 2) was coded as AT 3, published by UiTM Press Publisher. The Hotel and Tourism Management Arabic Textbooks are published for students in the tourism and hospitality major who are required to master Arabic language skill relevant to travel services, hotel management and operation, customer service and cross-cultural communication within the sector. These textbooks are also written for professionals who working in tourism and hotel management industry.

Defining the categories

Table 1 Cultural Elements in textbooks

Code	Sub-categories	Intepretation	Themes or examples
Knowledge culture (Zhang, 1990)	Big C culture (Tomalin& Stempleki, 1993, Kramsh, 2013)	Was coded using synonymous terms like “classics: for literature and “governmental bodies” for institutions.	Literature, education, institutions, geography, history, art and economy
	Small c culture (Byram, 1993; Risager, 1991)	“norms” for value and “nonverbal cues” for body language.	Everyday practices and social norms, values, beliefs, attutudes, everyday living, interpersonal relations, body language, living conditions, social conventions and ritual behaviour.
Communicative Culture (Zhang, 1990)	i. Cultural elements in language structure (Chen 1992, Liu, 2002; Xia, 2013),	Cultural elements that are embodied in the structure of vocabulary, phrases and sentences. (Ang, 2020)	Form of names, dates, and times, greetings in Arab.
	ii. Cultural elements in meaning (Chen, 1992; Liu, 2002; Xia, 2013).	Cultural elements that are contained in lexis and idioms. (Ang, 2020)	Family kinship titles in Arabic
	iii. Cultural elements in pragmatics (Chen, 1992; Shi, 2009; Xia, 2013).	refers to the language used in cultural protocol, social context, custom, and interpersonal relationships	Linguistic taboos of a particular country
	B. Intercultural Elements (Byram, 1997; Paige et al., 2003)	Exploration in target culture and learner’s own culture towards the development of intercultural knowledge, skills, attitudes and awareness through activities and tasks, such as discussion on comparison of the similarities and differences between target culture and learners’ own culture, intercultural problem-solving tasks, etc.	Comparison of the differences or similarities between two cultures, such as comparison on formal greetings, non-verbal behaviors in greetings, appellations in greetings, address forms, kinship titles, name and student’s own name, gift-giving etiquette, family values, connotation of numbers, traditional festivals, cuisine, etc. Discussion or problem solving of intercultural issues which causes stereotypes or misunderstanding, such as greetings behavior between different cultures. Interactive tasks which involve target culture and students’ own culture.

Adapted from the study <https://dx.doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2025.910000636>

Table 2 Types of Culture in textbooks

Categories of culture (Cortazzi & Jin, 1999)	Description
Source Culture (SC)	It provides information about Malaysian society, including the cultures of its various ethnic communities.
Target Culture (TC)	It contains both Malaysian culture and Arabic culture.
International Culture (IC)	It includes all cultures around the world except Malaysian culture and Arabic culture.
Intercultural Interaction (ICI)	It connects to the comparison, and critical reflection on the similarities and differences between the local culture (source) and the international culture (target).

Adapted from the study <https://dx.doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2025.910000636>

Coding Procedure

Prior to coding, the units of analysis were established in alignment with the research questions (Cavanagh, 1997; Cohen et al., 2007; McCain, 1988). To analyse cultural elements and intercultural elements, words, phrases, and sentences within dialogues and texts served as the units of evaluation. For Little c and Big C cultural elements, entire dialogues or texts were analyzed. Overall, each chapter across the textbooks was designated as one analytical unit, yielding 21 units in total. Data were systematically examined and coded using a predefined categorization matrix shown as in table 1 and table 2 (Polit & Beck, 2004). The presence of each category per unit was recorded to calculate descriptive statistics which presented in the form of frequencies and percentages. Subsequently, a qualitative interpretation was conducted, utilizing contextual examples from the text to explore the nature of cultural representations. Credibility was established by clearly defining the target sample: three elementary Arabic textbooks written by Malaysian authors for ethnically diverse public university learners. Dependability was supported through the use of stable, publicly available print textbooks with full bibliographic documentation.

FINDINGS

The findings related to the two research questions are discussed in this section. The findings related to the two research questions are presented in this section. The two cultural dimensions were analyzed across three Mandarin for specific purposes textbooks, designated as MT1, MT2 and MT3. Each textbook was developed for use over the course of a single academic semester. Collectively, the textbooks comprised 21 units, encompassing a range of thematic content, including warm welcoming to the country, call for Grab, shopping, hotel room services, accommodation booking, local festivals and traditions, . Based on the analysis of all 21 units (refer to the appendix for comprehensive evidence), the findings are summarized in Table 3.

Table 3 Percentage of Cultural Elements and Types of Culture in Sample Textbooks

Sampled textbooks	Total units	Cultural elements			Type of culture			
		KC (%)		CC (%)	SC (%)	TC (%)	IC (%)	ICI (%)
		Big 'C'	Small 'C'	CC-i				
AT 1	6	50% (3/6)	33.33% (2/6)	50% (3/6)	50% (3/6)	16.66% (1/6)	-	-
AT 2	6	50%	33.33%	50%	50%	16.66%	-	-

		(3/6)	(2/6)	(3/6)	(3/6)	(1/6)		
AT 3	9	66.66% (6/9)	77.77% (7/9)	66.66% (6/9)	44.44% (4/9)	33.33% (3/9)	33.33% (3/9)	33.33% (3/9)
Total	21	66.66% (12/21)	52.38% (11/21)	66.66% (12/21)	47.61% (10/21)	23.8% (5/21)	33.33% (3/21)	33.33% (3/21)

Percentage (%) is for the total chapters in the sampled textbooks

The table 3 presents the distribution of cultural elements across three sampled Arabic tourism textbooks (AT1, AT2, and AT3), comprising a total of 21 identified cultural units. Overall, the findings indicate that Knowledge Culture (KC) is more strongly represented than Communicative Culture (CC). KC accounts for 66.66% (12/21) of the total units, compared with 52.38% (11/21) for CC. This suggests that the textbooks place considerable emphasis on providing learners with cultural information and knowledge, while communicative aspects of culture are somewhat less prominent. The relatively high KC percentage indicates that learners are exposed to cultural facts and information, whereas the lower CC percentage suggests comparatively fewer opportunities to understand how cultural knowledge is enacted through communication and social interaction.

In terms of the distinction between Source Culture (SC), Target Culture (TC), and International Culture (IC), the results show that Source Culture is the most frequently represented, accounting for 66.66% (12/21) of the cultural units. Target Culture follows at 47.61% (10/21), while International Culture is considerably less represented at only 23.8% (5/21). This pattern indicates that the textbooks give greater attention to Malaysian/local cultural contexts than to Arabic target culture and international cultural contexts. The relatively strong representation of SC may help learners connect Arabic learning with their own cultural environment and local tourism context. However, the substantially lower representation of IC suggests that learners have fewer opportunities to encounter cultures beyond the Malaysian and Arabic contexts. Such an imbalance may restrict learners' exposure to the cultural diversity that characterizes contemporary international tourism. The distribution across the three textbooks also reveals some variation. AT1 and AT2 each contain six cultural units, with KC and SC represented at 50%, CC at 33.33%, TC at 50%, and IC at 16.66%. In contrast, AT3 contains nine cultural units and demonstrates broader cultural representation. KC increases to 66.66%, while CC reaches 77.77%. SC remains relatively high at 66.66%, and TC accounts for 44.44%. Importantly, IC increases to 33.33%, indicating that AT3 provides greater exposure to international cultural content than AT1 and AT2. AT3 also records Intercultural Interaction (ICI) at 33.33%, whereas no ICI is identified in AT1 and AT2. This suggests that AT3 moves beyond simply presenting cultural information and provides comparatively greater opportunities for learners to encounter or compare different cultural contexts.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that the sampled textbooks are predominantly oriented toward cultural knowledge and source-culture representation, while international culture and intercultural interaction remain comparatively limited. The 66.66% representation of KC and SC suggests a strong emphasis on presenting cultural information, particularly knowledge related to the learners' own cultural context. In contrast, the 23.8% representation of IC and 33.33% representation of ICI indicate that opportunities for broader international exposure and intercultural engagement are relatively insufficient. The findings therefore suggest that although the textbooks contain a substantial amount of cultural content, cultural representation does not necessarily translate into opportunities for developing deeper intercultural communicative competence (ICC). In particular, greater integration of international cultural perspectives, intercultural comparison, interaction, interpretation, and reflection could strengthen the textbooks' potential to prepare learners for authentic communication in multilingual and multicultural tourism and hospitality settings.

Table 4 Cultural Elements and Types of Culture in AT1 (TAC201 new)

Type of Culture	Knowledge culture (KC)		Communicative culture (CC)
	Big ‘C’	Small ‘C’	
Source Culture (SC)	Geography: local tourist attractions, pictures of tourist attraction spots. (L1, L2, L3) such as Langkawi Art and history: The architecture of buildings built during colonial era especially in capital city Kuala Lumpur and Melaka state. (L2). The iconic buildings in Kuala Lumpur are National Museum, KL Sentral Train Station, KLCC. Historical buildings in Melaka are A Famosa, Hang Tuah Well.	-Etiquette when enquiring travelling information. (L3)	-Form of local tourists’ name. - Welcome the tourists from Jordan at Malaysia Tourism Center(MaTIC), Ampang (L2)
Target Culture (TC)	-Using Arabic characters in dialogues (L1-L6)		-Form of Arabic names such as Ishap and Tolhar.(L1, L2) - Introduction of tourists from Jordan and Egypt (L1) -Express welcoming guests from Egypt.(L1) -Politeness in asking the purpose of visiting Malaysia. (L1) -Foreign tourist from Syria asks the staff of local travel agency regarding travelling in Malaysia. (L3)
International Culture (IC)	/	/	/
Intercultural Interaction (ICI)	/	/	/

The information indicates in the table 4 that the materials incorporate several dimensions of cultural representation, with a stronger emphasis on Knowledge Culture (KC) and Communicative Culture (CC). For the Source Culture (SC), Malaysian culture is presented through both Big “C” and Small “C” elements. Big “C” culture includes geographical and historical knowledge, such as local tourist attractions in Langkawi and the architecture of colonial-era buildings in Kuala Lumpur and Melaka, including the National Museum, KL Sentral, KLCC, A Famosa, and Hang Tuah Well. Small “C” culture is reflected in practical social behaviours, particularly etiquette when enquiring about travel information. The Target Culture (TC) is mainly represented through Arabic language and cultural practices, such as the use of Arabic characters, Arabic names such as Ishap and Tolhar, and dialogues involving tourists from Jordan, Egypt, and Syria. The materials also introduce communicative aspects of Arab culture, including welcoming guests, introducing tourists, and using polite expressions when asking about the purpose of their visit to Malaysia. However, there is no clear representation of International Culture (IC) or Intercultural Interaction (ICI). Overall, the information suggests that the materials provide learners with exposure to both Malaysian and Arabic cultures, particularly through tourism-related contexts, but they place greater emphasis on cultural knowledge and communicative practices within the source and target cultures rather than on comparing

cultures or developing intercultural understanding.

Table 5 Cultural Elements and Types of Culture in AT2 (TAC201 old)

Type of Culture	Knowledge culture (KC)		Communicative culture (CC)
	Big ‘C’	Small ‘C’	
Source Culture (SC)	Geography: local tourist attractions, pictures of tourist attraction spots. (L1, L2, L3) such as Langkawi Art and history: The architecture of buildings built during colonial era especially in capital city Kuala Lumpur and Melaka state. (L2). The iconic buildings in Kuala Lumpur are National Museum, KL Sentral Train Station, KLCC. Historical buildings in Melaka are A Famosa, Hang Tuah Well.	-Etiquette when enquiring travelling information. (L3)	-Form of local tourists’ name. - Welcome the tourists from Jordan at Malaysia Tourism Center(MaTIC), Ampang (L2)
Target Culture (TC)	-Using Arabic characters in dialogues (L1-L6)		-Form of Arabic names such as Ishap and Tolhar.(L1, L2) - Introduction of tourists from Jordan and Egypt (L1) -Express welcoming guests from Egypt.(L1) -Politeness in asking the purpose of visiting Malaysia. (L1) -Foreign tourist from Syria asks the staff of local travel agency regarding travelling in Malaysia. (L3)
International Culture (IC)	/	/	/
Intercultural Interaction (ICI)	/	/	/

The information presented in the table 5 indicates that the Source Culture (SC) is represented mainly through Malaysian cultural knowledge, particularly in the areas of geography, art, history, and local tourism. The textbooks introduce learners to Malaysian tourist attractions such as Langkawi, as well as historical and colonial-era architecture in Kuala Lumpur and Melaka, including the National Museum, KL Sentral, KLCC, A Famosa, and Hang Tuah Well. These elements reflect Knowledge Culture (KC) and predominantly Big “C” culture, as they focus on tangible cultural products, historical sites, and geographical features. At the same time, Communicative Culture (CC) and Small “c” culture are represented through practical cultural practices, such as etiquette when enquiring about travel information, forms of local tourists’ names, and welcoming Jordanian tourists at the Malaysia Tourism Centre (MaTIC).

In contrast, the Target Culture (TC) is strongly represented through Arabic linguistic and cultural elements. The use of Arabic characters in dialogues, Arabic names such as Ishap and Tolhar, and references to tourists from Jordan, Egypt, and Syria provide learners with exposure to Arabic-speaking people and contexts. The textbooks also incorporate communicative practices associated with the target culture, including welcoming

Egyptian guests, politely asking about visitors' purposes for travelling to Malaysia, and interactions between Syrian tourists and Malaysian travel-agency staff. Thus, TC encompasses both Big "C" cultural knowledge and Small "c" communicative culture, although the latter appears particularly important in the dialogues.

However, the table reveals a significant absence of International Culture (IC) and Intercultural Interaction (ICI), both of which are marked with "/". This suggests that the textbooks provide opportunities for learners to encounter Malaysian and Arabic/target cultural elements separately, but offer limited opportunities to explore multiple international cultural perspectives or genuine comparisons and interactions between different cultures. The representation therefore appears to be largely source-culture- and target-culture-oriented, with little attention to international cultural diversity and intercultural negotiation.

Although learners encounter situations involving Malaysian and Arab individuals, these interactions are mainly functional, such as greeting, asking for information, and discussing travel, rather than encouraging learners to compare cultural values, interpret cultural differences, negotiate misunderstandings, or reflect critically on their own and others' cultural perspectives. Consequently, the materials provide a foundation for cultural awareness but appear less effective in developing deeper intercultural communicative competence, particularly the ability to interpret, compare, and mediate across cultures.

Table 6 Cultural Elements and Types of Culture in AT3 (TAC251 old)

Type of Culture	Knowledge culture (KC)		Communicative culture (CC)
	Big 'C'	Small 'C'	
Source Culture (SC)	Geography: -Local festivals: Eid Mubarak, Aidiladha, National Independent Day. (L4) -Local costumes. (L5) - Malay traditional games such as gasing, wayang kulit.(L6) -Local musical festival. (L8) -Local cultural festival such as traditional dance, Zapin and traditional custome. (L9) -Languages speak by the local Malaysian. (L9) -Local Arts and Handicraft Fair. (L7)	-Etiquette while log a report in police station. (L1)	-Form of local names.
Target Culture (TC)	-Using Arabic characters in dialogues. (L1-L9) - Costumes in Arabic countries. (L5) - Arabic traditional games such as sword dance and Hobakak.(L6) -Musical performance by international famous singer from Syria. (L8)	-Etiquette when enquiring information. (L7) - Etiquette when asking for direction. (L3 & L7)	-Form of Arabic names. -Politeness in asking direction. (L3 & L7) -Politeness in asking for travelling package in travel fair. (L7)
International Culture (IC)	-Costumes in China, India. (L5) - Martial arts of China and India which are Kung Fu and Silambam respectively. (L6) -Western film.(L8)	/	/

Intercultural Interaction (ICI)	-The different of the costumes in local and Arabic countries.(L5) - The different of traditional games.(L6)	/	/
---------------------------------	--	---	---

The information in the table 6 demonstrates that the textbooks provide a broader and more balanced representation of cultural elements across Source Culture (SC), Target Culture (TC), International Culture (IC), and Intercultural Interaction (ICI), although some dimensions remain underdeveloped. Source Culture (SC) is strongly represented through both Knowledge Culture (KC) and Big “C” culture, particularly through Malaysian festivals such as Eid Mubarak, Aidiladha, and National Independence Day, traditional costumes, traditional games such as gasing and wayang kulit, musical and cultural festivals, traditional dance such as Zapin, local languages, and arts and handicrafts. These elements provide learners with substantial knowledge of Malaysian cultural heritage and tangible cultural products. SC also includes Communicative Culture (CC) and Small “c” culture, as demonstrated by etiquette when making a police report and the forms of local Malaysian names, although these communicative aspects are less extensively represented than cultural knowledge.

The Target Culture (TC) is also represented relatively extensively. At the level of Big “C” culture, the textbooks introduce Arabic characters, customs in Arabic countries, traditional games such as sword dance and Hobakak, and musical performances by a famous Syrian singer. At the Small “c” culture level, learners are exposed to communicative practices such as etiquette when requesting information and asking for directions, as well as politeness when requesting travel packages at a travel fair.

The inclusion of Arabic names further strengthens the representation of target-culture identity. Importantly, the presence of International Culture (IC) indicates an attempt to move beyond a simple SC–TC dichotomy. References to customs in China and India, Chinese Kung Fu, Indian Silambam, and Western films expose learners to cultural practices and products from a wider international context. However, the IC representation appears more limited than SC and TC because it mainly introduces international cultural products and practices without extensive exploration of their underlying values or perspectives.

The most significant finding concerns Intercultural Interaction (ICI). Although ICI is present, it is limited primarily to comparisons between local Malaysian and Arabic customs and differences between traditional games. This indicates that the textbooks provide some opportunities for learners to recognise and compare cultural differences, which is an important foundation for intercultural awareness.

Nevertheless, the absence of ICI in other categories suggests that learners have relatively few opportunities to engage in deeper intercultural processes, such as interpreting cultural perspectives, negotiating differences, reflecting on cultural assumptions, or resolving potential intercultural misunderstandings. Overall, the table suggests that the textbooks demonstrate a strong emphasis on cultural knowledge and cultural products, with meaningful representation of both SC and TC and some inclusion of IC. However, intercultural interaction remains comparatively underdeveloped, indicating that the textbooks may be more successful in presenting cultures than in helping learners interact across cultures and critically reflect on cultural differences.

DISCUSSION

The findings demonstrate that the three Arabic tourism and hospitality textbooks provide a substantial amount of cultural content, but the representation is uneven across the different cultural categories. Of the 21 identified units, Knowledge Culture (KC) accounts for 66.66% (12/21), whereas Communicative Culture

(CC) represents 52.38% (11/21). This finding indicates that the textbooks place greater emphasis on transmitting cultural information than on developing culturally appropriate communicative behaviour. The dominance of KC is evident in the inclusion of geographical locations, historical sites, festivals, traditional games, costumes, arts, and cultural heritage. Such content provides learners with important background knowledge and can contribute to Byram's (savoirs) dimension of ICC by increasing learners' knowledge of their own and other cultural contexts. However, knowledge alone does not necessarily enable learners to communicate appropriately in intercultural situations. Byram (1997) emphasizes that ICC also involves attitudes, interpreting and relating skills, interaction skills, and critical cultural awareness. Therefore, although the relatively high KC representation provides an essential foundation for intercultural learning, the lower proportion of CC suggests that learners may have fewer opportunities to understand how cultural meanings are enacted through actual communication, particularly through pragmatics, politeness, social conventions, and culturally appropriate language use. This finding is consistent with previous research indicating that foreign-language textbooks frequently prioritize linguistic and factual cultural knowledge over practical intercultural communication. The present findings therefore suggest a need to move from knowing about culture towards knowing how to communicate across cultures.

A second important finding concerns the distribution of Source Culture (SC), Target Culture (TC), and International Culture (IC). SC is the most strongly represented category, accounting for 66.66% (12/21), followed by TC at 47.61% (10/21), while IC accounts for only 23.8% (5/21). The strong presence of Malaysian source culture is particularly apparent in the representation of local tourist attractions, Malaysian festivals, traditional costumes, gasing, wayang kulit, Zapin, local musical festivals, arts and handicrafts, and historical sites in Kuala Lumpur and Melaka. This emphasis is pedagogically valuable because learners in Malaysian public universities can connect the Arabic language with their immediate social and tourism environment. In other words, Arabic is not presented exclusively as a language associated with Arab countries but is also positioned as a tool for describing and communicating about Malaysian tourism. This is particularly appropriate for tourism and hospitality students whose future professional interactions may involve explaining Malaysian cultural attractions to Arabic-speaking visitors. Nevertheless, the relatively low representation of IC indicates that the textbooks provide limited exposure to cultures outside the Malaysian–Arabic relationship. Cortazzi and Jin's (1999) framework suggests that international culture can broaden learners' perspectives by exposing them to cultures beyond their own and the target culture. The limited IC representation therefore indicates that the textbooks have not fully exploited the multicultural and international nature of tourism communication.

The representation of Target Culture and intercultural content provides a further significant insight. Arabic culture is represented through Arabic characters, Arabic names, tourists from Jordan, Egypt, and Syria, Arab customs, traditional games, Syrian musical performance, and communicative practices such as welcoming guests, asking about the purpose of a visit, requesting directions, and asking for travel packages. These examples demonstrate that the textbooks do not entirely neglect communicative aspects of Arabic culture. In particular, the use of tourism-related situations creates a meaningful connection between target-language learning and the professional contexts in which students may eventually use Arabic. However, the analysis also indicates that target-cultural representation is frequently presented as information about Arabic culture rather than opportunities to critically engage with cultural perspectives. The findings from AT1 and AT2 particularly illustrate this limitation: both contain source and target cultural materials but show no identifiable International Culture (IC) or Intercultural Interaction (ICI). Thus, learners are introduced to Malaysian and Arabic cultural contexts, but the materials provide limited structured opportunities for them to examine relationships between these cultures.

Interestingly, AT3 demonstrates a more developed intercultural orientation than AT1 and AT2. While AT1

and AT2 each contain six cultural units and record 16.66% IC with no ICI, AT3 contains nine units and records 33.33% IC and 33.33% ICI. AT3 introduces cultural practices from China and India, including Kung Fu and Silambam, as well as Western film, thereby expanding the cultural scope beyond Malaysia and the Arab world. More importantly, it introduces explicit comparisons between local and Arabic customs and between traditional games. These examples represent an important movement from cultural presentation to intercultural comparison. Such comparison is consistent with the definition of ICI adopted in the study, which emphasizes comparison, critical reflection, and recognition of similarities and differences between cultures. Nevertheless, the ICI examples remain relatively limited because they primarily involve identifying differences rather than engaging learners in deeper intercultural interpretation, problem-solving, negotiation, or critical reflection. The overall result of 33.33% ICI (3/21) therefore suggests that the textbooks have begun to incorporate intercultural learning, but this dimension has not yet become a systematic feature of the materials. The findings consequently support previous research showing that the inclusion of cultural content does not automatically result in ICC development. What is required is the deliberate design of tasks that encourage learners to compare perspectives, interpret behaviour, negotiate cultural differences, and reflect on their own cultural assumptions.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

This study concludes that the selected Arabic tourism and hospitality textbooks used in Malaysian higher education contain meaningful cultural content and provide learners with exposure to both Malaysian and Arabic cultural contexts. However, the findings reveal an imbalance in cultural representation, with Knowledge Culture and Source Culture each accounting for 66.66%, compared with 52.38% for Communicative Culture, 47.61% for Target Culture, 23.8% for International Culture, and 33.33% for Intercultural Interaction. The textbooks therefore appear more effective in presenting cultural knowledge and cultural products than in systematically developing learners' deeper intercultural communicative competence. AT3 demonstrates greater potential for intercultural learning through its inclusion of international cultures and explicit cultural comparisons, but ICI remains limited across the overall corpus. In relation to Byram's ICC framework, the materials provide a foundation for cultural knowledge but offer fewer opportunities for learners to develop interpreting, interaction, discovery, and critical cultural-awareness skills. Given the professional demands of tourism and hospitality, the findings suggest that Arabic textbooks should move beyond presenting cultural facts towards creating authentic opportunities for learners to interpret, compare, negotiate, and critically reflect on cultural differences.

Based on these findings, Arabic tourism and hospitality textbook development should adopt a more balanced and explicitly intercultural approach. First, textbook writers should increase the representation of International Culture (IC) so that learners encounter a wider range of cultural perspectives relevant to international tourism. Second, more Intercultural Interaction (ICI) activities should be incorporated through comparison tasks, role plays, intercultural problem-solving activities, case studies, and reflection questions that require learners to examine similarities and differences between Malaysian, Arab, and other international cultures. Third, cultural content should move beyond Big "C" cultural products such as festivals, historical sites, and traditional games to include more Small "c" culture, particularly everyday communication, politeness, hospitality practices, non-verbal behaviour, social expectations, and pragmatic conventions. Finally, these activities should be aligned explicitly with Byram's five dimensions of ICC, enabling learners not only to acquire cultural knowledge but also to develop attitudes, interpreting and relating skills, interaction skills, and critical cultural awareness. Such an approach would strengthen the relevance of Arabic textbooks to the actual communicative demands of tourism and hospitality and better prepare Malaysian graduates for interactions with Arabic-speaking and other international tourists.

REFERENCES

1. Byram, M. (1997). Teaching and assessing intercultural communicative competence. *Multilingual Matters*.
This is the principal source for the five dimensions of ICC used throughout your study.
2. Cortazzi, M., & Jin, L. (1999). Cultural mirrors: Materials and methods in the EFL classroom. In E. Hinkel (Ed.), *Culture in second language teaching and learning* (pp. 196–219). Cambridge University Press.
3. Chao, T.-C. (2011). The hidden curriculum of cultural content in internationally published ELT textbooks: A closer look at New American Inside Out. *The Journal of Asia TEFL*, 8(2), 189–210.
4. Tomalin, B., & Stempleski, S. (1993). *Cultural awareness*. Oxford University Press.
5. Risager, K. (1991). Cultural references in European foreign language textbooks: An evaluation of recent tendencies. In D. Buttjes & M. Byram (Eds.), *Mediating languages and cultures: Towards an intercultural theory of foreign language education* (pp. 181–192). *Multilingual Matters*.
6. Zhang, Z. (1990). On communicative culture and knowledge culture. *Language Teaching and Linguistic Studies*, (3), 15–32.
7. Chen, G. L. (1992). 语言教学中的文化导入 [Cultural introduction in language teaching]. *Language Teaching and Linguistic Studies*, (3), 19–30.
8. Chen, G. L. (1997). 关于对外汉语课中的文化教学问题 [Issues on cultural teaching in teaching Chinese as a foreign language]. *Applied Linguistics*, (1), 23–26.
9. Dörnyei, Z. (2007). *Research methods in applied linguistics: Quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methodologies*. Oxford University Press.
10. Hsieh, H.-F., & Shannon, S. E. (2005). Three approaches to qualitative content analysis. *Qualitative Health Research*, 15(9), 1277–1288. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1049732305276687>
11. Weber, R. P. (1990). *Basic content analysis* (2nd ed.). SAGE Publications.
12. Cavanagh, S. (1997). Content analysis: Concepts, methods and applications. *Nurse Researcher*, 4(3), 5–16. <https://doi.org/10.7748/nr.4.3.5.s2>
13. McCain, G. C. (1988). Content analysis: A method for studying clinical nursing problems. *Applied Nursing Research*, 1(3), 146–147. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0897-1897\(88\)80029-6](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0897-1897(88)80029-6)
14. Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. SAGE Publications.
15. Cohen, L., Manion, L., & Morrison, K. (2007). *Research methods in education*. Routledge.
16. Polit, D. F., & Beck, C. T. (2004). *Nursing research: Principles and methods*. Lippincott Williams & Wilkins.
17. Lin, W. Y., Ang, L. H., Chan, M. Y., & Paramasivam, S. (2020). Analysing cultural elements in L2 Mandarin textbooks for Malaysian learners. *Journal of Language and Education*, 6(4), 121–137. <https://doi.org/10.17323/jle.2020.10332>
18. Sutaman, S., Suja, A., Syarifaturrahmatullah, Bahy, M. B. A., Shobirin, & Marajo. (2026). Cultural representation in Arabic textbooks: Unveiling intercultural gaps and pedagogical implications in Indonesian Islamic higher education. *Multicultural Education Review*, 18(3), 404–423. <https://doi.org/10.1080/2005615X.2026.2705691>
19. Kuraedah, S., Gunawan, F., Alam, S., & Ubaidillah, M. F. (2022). Cultural representation in English and Arabic textbooks endorsed by Indonesian government: What do textbooks tell us about? *Journal of Social Studies Education Research*, 13(3), 229–255.
20. Tourism Malaysia. (2025, April 28). Malaysia showcases Visit Malaysia 2026 campaign at ATM Dubai 2025. Tourism Malaysia. <https://berita.rtm.gov.my/highlights/senarai-berita-highlights/senarai-artikel/tourism-malaysia-targets-45-million-visitors-in-conjunction-with-vmy2026/>

21. Tourism Malaysia / Ministry of Tourism, Arts and Culture Malaysia. (2025). Malaysia welcomed 194,440 tourists from the Middle East in 2024.<https://www.thestar.com.my/news/nation/2026/06/10/tourism-malaysia-eyeing-middle-eastern-tourist>.