

Frontiers: The Interdisciplinary Journal of Study Abroad

© Zakaria Fahmi, Dakota Liska

The work is licensed under the [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/).

Volume 36, Issue 1, pp. 384-417

DOI: 10.36366/frontiers.v36i1.792

[www.frontiersjournal.org](http://www.frontiersjournal.org)



# Promoting Arabic as a Foreign Language in the Middle East and North Africa: Host-Grounded Study Abroad Discourses

Zakaria Fahmi<sup>1</sup>, Dakota Liska<sup>1</sup>

## Abstract

Following the 9/11 tragedies, the interest in Arabic language and culture in non-traditional destinations such as MENA (Middle East & North Africa) has become vastly obscured with sociocultural and political issues. The mandate to maintain national security served to designate the language and its destinations critical, producing the hegemony of a political rationality that thrives on the globalist commodification of language and risks the homogenization of world cultures. To interrogate these essentialist discourses and others, we examine the ideologies underlying MENA host-grounded discourses to discern the valorization of the language in those destinations, as steered by the needs of globalization and power relations. Drawing upon an adapted, complementary multimodal critical discourse analysis (MCDA) approach, the current study analyzes the linguistic and visual resources of three study abroad (SA) programs' websites. We argue that the orientalist gaze is bidirectional within the host and U.S. based discourse for matters of sociopolitical and economic interdependencies and that joint constructions of global hierarchies and economic inaccessibilities remain prevalent.

---

<sup>1</sup> UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH FLORIDA, TAMPA, FL, UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

**Corresponding author:** Zakaria Fahmi, [zakariaf@usf.edu](mailto:zakariaf@usf.edu)

Accepted date: March 1<sup>st</sup>, 2024

## ملخص الدراسة:

أصبح الاهتمام باللغة والثقافة العربية في الوجهات غير التقليدية مثل منطقة الشرق الأوسط وشمال أفريقيا في أعقاب مآسي الحادي عشر من سبتمبر محجوباً إلى حد كبير بالقضايا الاجتماعية والثقافية والسياسية. وقد ساهم تفويض الحفاظ على الأمن القومي في اعتبار اللغة العربية ووجهات دراستها على نحو الحرج، بما عزز هيمنة العقلانية السياسية التي تزدهر بالتسليع العولماتي للغة، وبما يهدد في نفس الوقت بتجنيس ثقافات العالم. لتحري هذه الخطابات التأصيلية وغيرها نقوم هنا بتحليل الأيديولوجيات الكامنة وراء الخطابات المرتكزة على المدارس المضيفة في منطقة الشرق الأوسط وشمال أفريقيا لتمييز قيمة اللغة في تلك الوجهات وفقاً لمتطلبات العولمة وعلاقات القوة. نقوم بذلك عبر الاعتماد على منهج مكثف ومتكامل لتحليل الخطاب النقدي متعدد الوسائط الذي نحلل عبره في هذه الدراسة الموارد النصية والبصرية لثلاثة مواقع إلكترونية لبرامج الدراسة بالخارج، ونبني على ذلك في جدالنا أن النظرة الاستشراقية ثنائية الاتجاه داخل الخطاب الأمريكي وخطاب الجهة المستضيفة للطلاب فيما يتعلق بمسائل الترابط الاجتماعي والسياسي والاقتصادي، وأن البناء المشترك للتسلسلات الهرمية العالمية وصعوبة وجود الوصول الاقتصادي لا يزال سائداً.

## Keywords

Arabic, cultural representation, MENA, promotional discourse, study abroad

## 1. Introduction

The September 11<sup>th</sup> events in the United States (U.S.) generated unprecedented interest in Arabic language and culture. This heightened interest resulted in the inception and expansion of numerous language programs, such as the National Security Language Initiative (NSLI), the Critical Language Scholarship (CLS), the Benjamin A. Gilman International Scholarship, and the Boren Awards by the Defense Language and National Security Education Office (NSEA) to promote intercultural awareness and compensate for the failure of foreign policy (Bale, 2010). This renewed interest has revealed an underlying political rationality that problematically links language learning with political interest related to issues of national security from threats in areas deemed *critical* for world peace (Allen, 2007; Edwards, 2004; Scollon, 2004). Advertised within a discourse that privileges the native-speaker ideology and language socialization models, the promotion of study abroad (SA) in non-traditional destinations such as the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) has uncovered a politicized designation of criticality of language and culture, which subjects the latter to the hegemonic system of globalist commodifications (Diao & Trentman, 2016; Trentman & Diao, 2017; Zemach-Bersin, 2009). This hegemony fosters the U.S. expansion of its influence in these regions, proposing the transformation of provincial learners into unique world citizens to advance America's political and economic interest, upholding liberal values of entitlement, individualism, and consumerism (Zemach-Bersin, 2009, 2020).

Deeming Arabic and its destinations critical is the product of a political ideology that seeks via transnational mechanisms a way to execute its directives and meet its goals (Fairclough, 2006). Under this rationale, language learners are presumed to become globally competent through internationalized educational programs that channel and instill new ways of knowing across borders to serve the national interest. As Diao and Trentman (2016) explain, the politicized interest in language learning links Arabic with a political urgency, enabling power asymmetries through the U.S. geopolitical hegemony over regions deemed critical. The learning of Arabic language and culture in these destinations has been motivated by a national mandate that distorts the value of language and intercultural learning, abstracting the wider historical, geopolitical, and cultural issues (Kramsch, 2005).

Although several studies have addressed the SA experience in MENA (i.e., Al Masaeed, 2016; Diao & Trentman, 2016; Lane-Toomey & Lane, 2012; Shiri, 2013; Trentman, 2012, 2013; Trentman & Diao, 2017), research on the topic from a multimodal critical discourse analysis (MCDA) perspective remains scant. The existing SA discourse studies have mostly relied on U.S. based discourses, which attend to the (re)production of home discourses, yet discount relevant (counter)discourses abroad, if any. Given the commodified constructs associated with SA (e.g., global citizenship) (see Zemach-Bersin, 2007, 2009) and the increasing interdependence of world's sociocultural, economic, and political systems under the workings of globalization, it becomes equally important to address host-grounded discourses.

The decision to examine the host-grounded discourses of SA programs in MENA aims to contribute to the literature of SA discourses in non-traditional destinations to interrogate the valorization of SA as a globalized educational model along with the existing power relations between host and home institutions. For instance, the discourse literature shows that the promotion of the SA experience as pedagogical and sociocultural capital risks the reproduction of colonial mappings, by assigning such globalist values to the SA student while denying them for the destination (Caton, 2011; Caton & Santos, 2009; Doerr, 2012; Woolf, 2006). Considering this, the present study contributes to the limited literature by taking interest in the host-based construction of the cultural self and other, examining the language ideologies that inform the promotion of SA in MENA from the host perspective. By so doing, the study attempts to address three important gaps: (1) the dearth of (critical) SA discourse

studies, (2) the focus on Arabic and MENA as a critical language and destination, and (3) the lack of host-grounded discourse studies.

Exploring the promotional discourses of Arabic in these destinations is fundamental to furthering our understanding of the promotional mechanisms employed by host institutions to sell their SA experience and the underlying ideologies at work. Specifically, we analyze the host-grounded discourses of select non-traditional, critical regions of MENA, and unpack the ways in which they (dis)join the globalist rhetoric by discursively constructing (1) their SA experience in representing host cultures and societies to appeal to a global audience, and (2) the identity work involved in the representational practices of the cultural self and other. Guided by an adapted, complementary multimodal critical discourse analysis (MCDA) framework (Kress, 2010; Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006; van Dijk, 2001), the study analyzes the discourses of the SA experience as conveyed in the website data of three host institutions in MENA. The following research question direct the study:

- i. How do host institutions in MENA discursively construct their SA experience in their online promotional materials?
- ii. What do these materials reveal about the (mis)alignments with the U.S. grounded discourses in the literature?

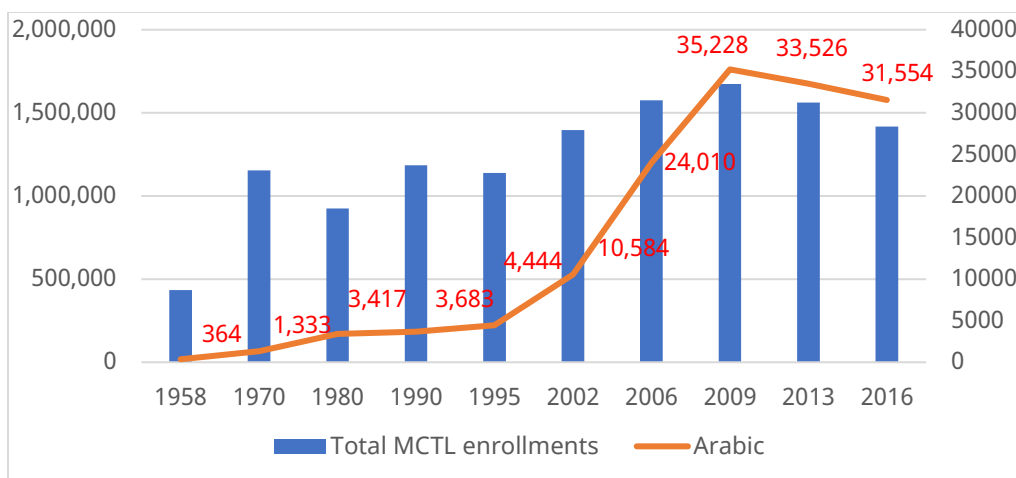
## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1. Arabic as a Critical Foreign Language**

The promotion of Arabic as a critical language reflects a political investment that serves U.S. hegemony in areas deemed critical for world peace (Bale, 2010; Diao & Trentman, 2016; Scollon, 2004; Zemach-Bersin, 2020). When the U.S. congress passed the 1958 National Defense Education Act (NDEA) and its Title VI to support the development of foreign language (FL) teaching and learning materials, the bill, as its title suggests, was motivated by critical concerns related to national security and defense. Arabic, like other critical foreign languages under this policy (e.g., Russian), has greatly benefited from Title VI in terms of academic fellowships and research (e.g., Foreign Language and Area Studies – FLAS), material design and development, professional development and training, departmental budget, and study abroad programs. Despite these advances in national multilingual and intercultural education, the 9/11 events heightened the tensions between FL education and political interest.

In 2007, the American Council on Education (ACE), informed by the bipartisan Iraq Study Group Report of 2006, exposed a shortage of proficiency in Arabic, both in modern standard Arabic (MSA) and Iraqi Arabic, asserting that linguistic and intercultural competence was too low to serve the U.S. interests abroad (Bale, 2010). The shortage in Arabic resources was documented in several reports including the U.S. International Security, Proliferation, and Federal Services Subcommittee in September 2002, the U.S. House of Representatives Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence in July 2002, and the General Accounting Office (GAO), which probed the linguistic readiness in federal agencies in January 2002. These investigations revealed a dire political yearning for Arabic as a foreign language (AFL) education to advance political and military action, which nonetheless exposed the U.S. arrogance in discounting linguistic and cultural awareness of regions it sought to control (Bale, 2010; Edwards, 2004). As such, funding for government language programs received record-high increase whereas other programs such as the Foreign Language Assistance Program (FLAP), which supports elementary and secondary FL education under Title VI were still neglected (Bale, 2010). The federal crisis in Arabic was key in rendering the learning of the language *critical*, suggesting an outcome of a political advocacy that unveiled a new language market for the post 9/11 FL education and intercultural learning (see Allen, 2007; Bale, 2010; Edwards, 2004; Kramsch, 2005; Scollon, 2004).

More than any other time in U.S. history, the interest in AFL proliferated in the wake of the 9/11 events. According to the 2016 MLA report, Arabic enrollments in U.S. universities grew by almost 200% between Fall 2002 and Fall 2016, marking a significant spike from 10,584 students to 31,554 students. This ranked Arabic amongst the top eight most commonly taught languages (MCTLs) in U.S. universities for 2016. However, such efforts never proposed long-term, productive strategies to ameliorate the conditions of Arabic and FL education, but rather merely focused on a circumstantial, reactive policy of the post 9/11 urgencies (Al-Batal, 2007). The increased enrollment in Arabic programs and the total number of MCTL enrollments in U.S. higher education is outlined in Figure (1). The selected years represent the only available data provided in the 2016 MLA report at the time of the data collection.



**FIGURE (1):** FALL ENROLLMENTS FOR THE MOST COMMON TAUGHT LANGUAGES (MCTL) AND ARABIC IN SELECTED YEARS. DATA ADAPTED FROM THE 2016 MLA REPORT

Four main reasons sum up the demands of ACFL in post 9/11 America, namely political, military, family, and professional-academic reasons (Abu-Melhim, 2014). As discussed earlier, political and military reasons are parallel, which, as informed by the national mandate, tend to answer the call of the U.S. Department of Defense for a military workforce of teachers, combat translators and interpreters joining army bases overseas. Family reasons concern a minority of speakers with interest in Arabic as a heritage language, especially those of Arab descent living in the U.S. seeking to use the language with members of their family at home and abroad to cultivate their linguistic and cultural bonds. Professional-academic reasons involve the efforts of professionals in academia, such as linguists and orientalist with interest in Arabic, to assist with the political and military urgencies. Most importantly, the post 9/11 designation of Arabic as a politically laden language has rendered Arabic more demands than ever, inculcating the belief that knowledge of Arabic ensures patriotic accomplishment, promising professional prospects in diplomacy, intelligence, and defense (Abu-Melhim, 2014; Diao & Trentman, 2016; Dillon, 2003).

## 2.2. The SA Discourses of Critical Languages

Though scarce, the review of SA research on the discourses of critical languages has uncovered alarming issues. For instance, addressing the discursive links of critical language learning, such as Arabic or Mandarin, and their national ideologies, Diao and Trentman (2016) decry the orientalist gaze (Said, 1978) shaping SA public discourse in non-traditional destinations and the

way such processes impact the perception of the SA subject. Steered by power dynamics, this colonial view assumes the dire need of the 'political East' for restructuring and conforming to Western standards and expectations (Diao & Trentman, 2016; Said, 1978). This political rationality underscores the U.S. hegemonic practices, which confine the potential of FL education to the enterprise of crisis, exacerbating the paradox in the rhetoric of intercultural dialogue and national defense. The dissemination of the public discourses pertaining to U.S. hegemony, however, has led to socialization issues of students abroad, as certain members of host societies perceive SA students as representatives of a political ideology, rather than enthused cultural informants interested in cultural exchange (Diao & Trentman, 2016; Kinginger, 2004; Kubota, 2016). Inspired by neoliberal gains, these students often reflect "the children of the empire" (Ogden, 2008, p. 39), as they continue to access unfamiliar territories and transfer their cultural experience to their communities.

The discourses of critical languages in non-traditional destinations tend to reproduce colonial mappings, which perpetuate global inequities and generate new political elites (Trentman & Diao, 2017). Relying on the promotion of peace in regions designated critical, such discourses situate the SA learners as global citizens, endeavoring to serve a national mandate of geopolitical and economic interest. Partly, these goals are made possible via the advertised incentives aimed at critical language learners to secure jobs in diplomacy and defense for the sake of national security. Conjoined with the designation of MENA and its languages as critical, these assumptions encapsulate the status quo of post 9/11 Arabic language and culture learning, which seeks in global emergencies the valorization of language learning contexts and marketization (Bale, 2010; Trentman & Diao, 2017; Zemach-Bersin, 2020).

The colonial presuppositions become evident in the globalist rhetoric, which others host cultures and debases their knowledge and experience (Ramírez, 2013). Globalization comes with its own colonial ramifications and power asymmetries, which exaggerate the authority of those in position of power, as ideal epistemological systems of viewing the world. The critical languages and their cultures are not only restricted to such political ideologies, but they are also subject to the suspicious demands of globalization, which accelerate progressive values at the expense of other cultures, merging the latter into a single, predominant global village that often blurs the lines between

cultural difference and multiplicity (Shohat & Stam, 1996). Falk and Kanach (2000) warn against the uncritical adoption of globalization, which might entail decadent values and lifestyles, and more critically the U.S. veneered cultural enterprise of SA for global dominance.

While many scholars have voiced their concerns regarding the colonial implications of the globalist discourse of SA (see Hoult, 2018; Kubota, 2016; MacDonald, 2014; Ramírez, 2013; Trentman & Diao, 2017), the globalist ambitions of SA remain obscured with stereotypical and biased generalizations, which should be challenged for their inconsistencies. SA seeks to ensure sociocultural immersion, oftentimes celebrated within transnational, consumerist transaction and shallow socialization processes, which work in tandem with the commodification of global citizenship as an exclusive trait of the mobile learner-explorer but rarely the stagnant host (Doerr, 2012; Ogden, 2008; Zemach-Bersin, 2009). Further insight is needed to grasp the ideological workings of the evolving sociocultural and political structures guiding the promotion of SA language learning. More specifically, accounting for both home and host SA discourses will not only help to gauge the instrumentalized globalist commodification; it will also illuminate the prevalent mutual and distinctive discursive practices and trace their links with the wider historical, cultural, and geopolitical contexts.

### 2.3. Globalist Commodifications and Representational Practices

SA promotional discourse capitalizes on the commodification of global competence and universal citizenship by maintaining the hierarchies of home and host cultures. Examining the discourse of adventure in SA guidebooks, Doerr's (2012) analysis highlights the power asymmetries constructing home societies and learners as mobile adventurers and forward-thinkers, inspired by their transnational quest for knowledge, while situating host societies as unexplored destinations, stagnated in their past epochs. Such inconsistencies mark the effects of the exaggerated adventure discourse, which provides the social space for the SA student as a special type of learner-explorer (Zemach-Bersin, 2009). Importantly, this globalist commodification operates in conjunction with the exoticization of the cultural other, presenting the SA endeavor with numerous contradictions that expose its merit.

The promotion of SA also celebrates aspects of consumerism through the appeal of its packaged rewards (Adkins & Messerly, 2019). The globalist rhetoric



deploys the commodification of global competence as a strategic promotional tool, which tends to be a complex offer and not merely a condition accessed through the purchase of the experience (Zemach-Bersin, 2007, 2009). The issue stems from the deliberate amalgamation of simplification, obfuscation, and exaggeration, which abstracts the discourse of SA education “with aspirations that can rarely be met, and with concepts that, at best, lack intellectual coherence and, at worst, create obscure fields of jumbled discourse” (Zemach-Bersin, 2009, p. 15).

While this internationalized education model is believed to socialize students into wider global citizenship, immersion limits its availability only to a few beneficiaries. Doerr (2013) contends that the discourse of immersion produces hierarchies within the globalist ambitions, allowing mobility and access to some while denying them to others. Mainly, the commodification of global citizenship relies on American exceptionalism, exclusively accessible to privileged students, who seem advantaged by systemic deficiencies (Zemach-Bersin, 2007). For instance, several studies have reported the gap of minority students in this so called ‘globalist’ experience, being typically accessible to white, middle-, and/or upper-class female students (e.g., Du, 2018; Goldoni, 2017; Lincoln Commission, 2005; Quan, 2018; Sweeney, 2013). As issues of educational inequity become increasingly prevalent, privileged global citizens continue to serve the interest of power structures, blazing the imperial trail of a strategic global hegemony (Zemach-Bersin, 2009).

Moreover, studies examining SA promotional materials reported numerous contradictions in the valorization of immersion (e.g., Caton and Santos, 2009; Doerr, 2013; Michelson & Álvarez-Valencia, 2016). For example, in their examination of Arcadia University’s promotional website contents, Michelson and Álvarez-Valencia (2016) contend that the website’s semiotic display of blended patterns of globalization, capitalism, and tourism create uncertainty about the program’s real educational mission. SA students are constructed as citizens of mobility, who seem continuously preoccupied with the capitalistic provider-customer transactions of their destinations. The study suggests that the success of this educational enterprise rests on the presentation of a “packaged experience” that generates capital in specific locations, with learners purchasing services associated with them (Michelson & Álvarez-Valencia, 2016, p. 250). The same type of educational tourism is captured in Caton and Santos’s (2009) study of the Semester at Sea (SAS) promotional

materials. The study explains that the program materials maintain hegemonic formations activated by colonialist stereotypes of the destinations. Such discursive practices point toward an imperialist Western ideology that seeks to polarize home and host societies and cultures into modern-exotic, vital-peripheral, and master-servant binaries (Caton & Santos, 2009). The interpretation and interaction with the cultural other continue to be primarily informed by power dynamics to justify the so-called exploration, liberation, or more evidently the subjugation of the cultural other to Western standards.

Altogether, the discussed literature shows an alarming paradox in the globalist rhetoric and its commodifications. The SA valorization risks the deployment of a colonial, exoticist gaze that continues to produce local and global hierarchies. To this end, Reilly and Senders (2009) propose a model of critical study abroad (CSA), grounded in profound understanding of the shared risks of globalization, acknowledging that “our crises are not local, not national, not even hemispheric – they are global” (Reilly & Senders, 2009, p. 248). CSA rejects the hyperbolic language in the globalist discourse and offers a broader critical insight into the shared areas of crises, shifting the attention to the environmental, political, sociocultural, and geo-economic issues of globalization (Reilly & Senders, 2009).

### **3. Data and Methods**

#### **3.1. Data**

The data for this study stem from three websites of SA programs in MENA: Qalam Wa Lawh Center (QWL) in Rabat (Morocco), Al-Diwan Center (ADC) in Cairo (Egypt), and Qasid Institute (QI) in Amman (Jordan). The schools represent locally designed programs that cater to international institutions interested in AFL, offering intensive and regular language courses that cover a wide array of concentrations (e.g., Classical Arabic, Modern Standard Arabic, Colloquial Arabic, Diplomat and Corporate Studies, and other customized faculty-led language courses). While these language schools implement distinctive assessment and evaluation frameworks pertaining to student, curricula, and instruction, together they promise unique language and cultural immersions, committed to ensuring learners’ linguistic proficiency and intercultural awareness abroad.

We selected the aforementioned schools for two main reasons. First, the three countries are representatives of major Arabic colloquial varieties

presented in AFL curricula, namely North African Arabic (i.e., *Maghrebi*), Egyptian Arabic (i.e., *Masri*), and Levantine Arabic (i.e., *Shāmī*). Considering the diglossic nature of Arabic, the integration of these varieties in AFL curricula beside MSA is imperative for students' sociolinguistic competence and cultural awareness (Al-Batal, 2017; Al Masaeed, 2022; Younes, 2014), and hence AFL students view their SA in Arab societies an unparalleled experience to enrich their colloquial repertoire. Second, the three countries have hosted more U.S. SA students than any other country in MENA (Dept. of State, 2020; Lane-Toomey & Lane, 2012). According to Open Door reports (2023), Morocco represents the most attractive destination in MENA, hosting 712 students for the 2021-2022 academic year, marking 3,460% increase from the previous year. Jordan emerged second with 618 students for the same academic year, showing 505.9% compared to 2020-2021, whereas Egypt received 227 students, with 467.5% increase compared to the previous year.

The data in the study consist of the schools' websites' textual and visual resources, attending to the rationale that argues for SA learning in these institutions, representations of the host societies and cultures, program and activity descriptions, and SA student identity statements. The analysis draws upon an adapted, complementary multimodal critical discourse analytic (MCDA) (Kress, 2010; Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006; van Dijk, 2001). This framework is fundamental in the context of globalization and power relations, for it interrogates subjects' discursive production and positionality in the macro-political and economic systems, as informed by ideology (Kroskrity, 2000). Discourses in the SA literature are ideological in that not only do they reflect and reproduce belief systems pertaining to the purported benefits of the globalist commodifications (e.g., immersion, global citizenship), but they also establish relationships of home and host cultures and societies, maintaining structures of privilege and inequality, as evidenced in exoticist gaze of educational tourism (e.g., Caton & Santos, 2009; Doerr, 2012, 2015; Kubota, 2016; Wolf, 2006). As such, the present study examines the host-grounded SA discourses of the cultural self and other, against the backdrop of the wider globalized processes of economic and knowledge interdependencies and political bargain.

### 3.2. Analysis

The analysis of the textual component of the data utilizes van Dijk's (2001) analytic categories to discern the critical sociocultural and political online

discourses. In these categories, we focused on (1) semantic macrostructure, including overall topics and themes; (2) local meanings as suggested by lexicalization and word choice; (3) subtle formal structures, such as syntactic structures as in the use of adjectival incentives, repeated use of superlatives, comparatives or passive forms; and (4) context models examining domains, social roles, and overall performatives, which reflect the argumentative framework for valorizing and promoting SA. We examined these categories contextually, tracing the development of macrostructures in relation to their sub-elements (i.e., local meanings, formal structures, and context models). Table (1) below illustrates a brief example of the discourses of immersion and diplomacy examined using the analytic categories.

Analytic Categories	Discourse	
Semantic macrostructures	Immersion	Diplomacy
Local meanings	"The heart of Morocco's capital; the beauty and magic of Morocco; exotic gardens; magic fantastic natural tourist places; openness and hospitality; the kasbah; city of the 1000 Minarets; old medina; camel rides; Sahara desert; adventure; touristy trinkets; the holy lands; UNESCO World Heritage site"	"Critical language; promote peace and coexistence; global awareness; international relations; future leaders; global citizens."
Subtle formal structures	"One of the most beautiful countries in the world; walking distance is one of the most well-known malls; one of the largest mosques in the world; the most touristic city; the oldest Islamic university in the world"	"A higher percentage of Ivy League students; delicate diplomatic negotiations in the Holy Land"
Context models	"Offers a host of cultural activities that contribute to Arabic language learning; prides itself on having cultivated a "360 degree" review culture; takes students on tours of these sites as part of its cultural immersion excursions"	"Play a part in the cooperation of East and West; the dedication to promote peace and diplomacy through cross-cultural dialogues and understanding; build the bridges of understanding and respect"

TABLE (1): ANALYTIC CATEGORIES AND VERBATIM EXAMPLES FROM THE DATA.

We also extend our analysis to include the multimodal (e.g., visual) components of the websites in combination with the textual aspects for a more comprehensive approach to the way each program contributes to the broader

discourses. We did this with the understanding that websites work as multimodal ensembles that serve distinct functions: writing carries the informational load, while image supplements the writing by showing context and content, color frames, and highlights to emphasize meaning (Kress, 2010). Hence, following Kress (2010) and Kress and van Leeuwen (2006), we approach multimodality from a social semiotic perspective to consider the function of the semiotic resources (e.g., images, writing) to convey cultural and social meaning to the viewer. Specifically, we focused on the ideational (i.e., experiential and logical relationships) and interpersonal (i.e., social relationships) metafunctions of the images included on the websites' homepages. As the homepage is typically the first page that visitors see and offers an overview of the website's content and provides a gateway to access that content (Askehave & Nielsen, 2005), the images therein encompass the general themes and topics of the websites and were deemed appropriate for the objectives of our analysis. Using social semiotics as a framework, we considered vectors, eye gazes, camera angles, illumination, coloration, context, and participants (i.e., meaning-carrying signifiers) to assess the meanings being communicated (e.g., contribution to the broader discourses) and potential viewership in the programs' interests (e.g., ascribed potential study abroad student identities). We then conducted a crossmodal comparison of the images with textual data to determine the constructed experience being presented to viewers of the programs' websites.

## 4. Findings

### 4.1. Immersion: Between Authenticity and Exoticization

The overstated commodification of immersion interposes cultural tradition and authenticity with aspects of tourism and consumerist activity. The schools recurrently reference their proximity to local shops, cafés, restaurants, and malls. For instance, Qalam Wa Lawh (QWL) and Qasid Institute (QI) provide explicit recommendations for local services (i.e., business partners), positioning SA students as monetary potential, which assumes a model of language socialization that assigns linguistic practice to service encounter. While the three schools generally characterize their programs as gateways to unique, localized cultures, authenticity seems accessible via orientalist, consumerist transactions of unique artifacts and services (e.g., touristic trinkets, traditional clothes, hammams, olive harvesting, etc.). Such practices reflect the tourist gaze (Caton & Santos, 2009; Doerr, 2012, 2013; Michelson & Valencia, 2016), which oftentimes reduces SA destinations to stagnant, antiquated reservoirs of exotic

beauty, exacerbating the politics of time or non-contemporaneity in the globalist rhetoric. The capitalized attention to history and tradition situates cultural authenticity in a packaged exoticization of the orientalized self that exposes non-coevalness (see Fabian, 1983).

Immerse yourself in the culture, beauty and magic of Morocco .... Qalam wa Lawh's campus is located in the heart of Morocco's capital, Rabat, within minutes of historic sites, local shops, restaurants, and public transportation.....The ancient, walled city is still home to hundreds of families, shops, cafes, and hotels .... an ancient fortress that now serves as a coastal neighborhood .... the site of Rabat's old Roman ruins, as well as a selection of museums and galleries throughout the city, also attract students and tourists throughout the year. (Qalam wa Lawh, n.d.)

The reproduction of heritage tourism thrives on the orientalist exoticization of Arab historicity. Both QI and QWL propose a definition of immersion heavily invested in local tradition, believed to offer exposure to native linguistic practice and cultural authenticity that often lie in uncharted territories. Through the proposed activities of the program, immersion presumes the cultivation of a 'global citizenship,' in which the mobile SA student can benefit from social bonding with peripheral, indigenous actors to ensure linguistic and cultural awareness, and maintain long-term interpersonal relations. Appealingly, such endeavors are made possible by the hosts' cultural receptiveness and generosity.

Qasid creates intimate immersion through events where they (students) will connect with local Bedouin families' daily lives, learn how to cook local cuisine, assist in farm cultivation, and learn regional customs and traditions such as handicrafts and olive harvesting ... With Jordan being the site of ancient ruins such as Petra (one of the New Seven Wonders of the World), Ottoman architecture in the town of Salt, or burial sites of religious figures dear to Jewish, Christian, and Islamic traditions, Qasid students never exhaust the possibilities that Jordan has to offer. (Qasid Institute, n.d.)

The commodification of historicity constitutes a critical layer of QI and QWL programs' promotion. Excursions and visits to historical sites are a common thread. In this respect, SA students are often portrayed as learner-explorers with an orientalized itinerary that enables socialization with Bedouins and Sahrawi people either on the outskirts of the host societies (i.e.,

Moroccan Desert, remote Kasbahs), or around the medieval walls of the Old Medina (i.e., old quarters of town). In the following, Picture (1) models an immersion activity that shows students wearing Sahrawi turbans and riding camels following a guide in the desert. The image invites the viewer to imagine movement as the participants are shown close-up then fading further away, suggesting potential participation of the viewer. Some students are shown smiling and looking at the viewer while others, including the guide, seem to be looking at something beyond the frame of the photo. This detaches the viewer from the image's context and encourages them to engage as an 'other,' someone not part of the world being shown to them but could be. This space is being offered as an exploratory experience, to which students have access, by studying at QWL. With this program, students are immersed into Arab culture under the guidance of locals that are there to assist them in their mobile discovery.



PICTURE (1): EXCURSION ACTIVITY IN THE SAHARA DESERT (QALAM WA LAWH, N.D.)

For Al-Diwan Center (ADC), immersion underscores the significance of religious capital. The program highlights accessibility to sacred Muslim sites in Cairene society and other neighboring countries, engaging religion as a rewarding tourism industry (see El-Gohary et al., 2017; Ladki et al., 2020). Presented as *the city of the thousand minarets*, Cairo serves as a prominent hub of religious scholarship, with the presence of Al-Azhar as a prestigious leading Islamic institution. ADC also invites students to engage with religious culture for educational leisure (Olsen, 2018), providing a special type of immersion that draws attention to religious historicity and engenders a model of heritage tourism characteristic of such destinations. The recurrence of religious sites

and rituals suggest an exposure to local tradition where religious tourism is encouraged both locally and abroad.

Cairo is well known as ‘The City of 1000 Minarets’... Wherever you go, there will be a mosque and congregational prayer (Jamaah) not more than five minutes from wherever you be... Most Cairo big mosques have religious educational lessons every night, between Maghreb and Isha prayers... Egypt is located in the heart of the Arab World, so if you wish to make Hajj or Umrah, you can easily reach Saudi Arabia in an hour only. (Al-Diwan Center, n.d.)

The discursive practices of heritage tourism marketability not only engender the exoticized commodifications of the orientalist gaze, but also maintain the myth of the unchanged (Echtner & Prasad, 2003), in which host societies are represented as stagnant structures, stranded in their past grandeurs that invite exploration and consumption. The attention to history and aesthetics, foregrounding iconic landmarks and cultural artifacts as formative of the destination’s *beauty and magic*, juxtaposes the traditional and the exotic. In effect, the sporadic engagement with contemporary settings blurs the links to global society, entailing a commodification of historicity that prompts a self-denial of coevalness through self-exoticization for the sake of profit. Noteworthy, such discursive instantiations occur in the valorization of immersion, which entails self-exoticization as a concomitant of authenticity, annulling the globalist attributes that the SA rhetoric purports to promote. It should be noted that the division of the ancient and the modern has always been an ideological resource of colonialism (Said, 1978), which nonetheless continues to generate global hierarchies to serve those in position of power.

#### 4.2. Political/Elite Internationalism and Criticality

In line with the U.S. grounded discourse of politicization (Trentman & Diao, 2017), the study of Arabic as a foreign language in MENA recognizes issues related to peace and diplomacy. Such discursive instantiations reassign the designation of criticality, which treats Arabic as the language of the political East; an indispensable tool to maintain national security (Allen, 2007; Bale, 2010; Taha, 2007). QWL, for instance, recurrently stresses its location *in the heart of Rabat* the capital, drawing attention to government agencies, embassies, and the official residence of the monarch. Surrounded by the capital’s diplomatic community, QWL aims to offer access to diplomacy and safety aboard, crafting an international profile of elite internationalism to appeal to students interested



in foreign policy. It should be noted that the promoted exposure to the capital's diplomatic community does not inherently equate to immersion into the country's multiculturalism but essentially reflects a political ideology that prioritizes the role of the language in solving geopolitical conflicts. Such political implications are also reinforced via references to U.S. funding programs and scholarships available to students, such as the Boren Scholarship, Critical Language Scholarships (CLS), and National Security Language Initiative (NSLI). In this sense, Arabic is reduced to its renowned potential for political gain, aligning with the promoted criticality of the language in U.S. grounded discourses (Bale, 2010; Diao & Trentman, 2016; Taha, 2007).

As the capital, Rabat is generally considered the safest city in Morocco .... Because the king, politicians, and diplomats from all over the world reside in Rabat, there is constant police and security presence .... As the capital of Morocco, Rabat is home to many NGOs, government organizations, embassies, and multinational corporations. (Qalam wa Lawh, n.d.)

The discursive patterns of elite internationalism also emerge from the QI data. Located in the capital city of Amman, the institute names its classrooms after world capitals such as Cairo, Istanbul, Baghdad, designed to formulate a dynamic international profile committed to a global cooperation where students can strengthen the bonds of the East and West through the promise of cultural diversity. Images on the program's homepage often portray these students studying or learning together with others from varying backgrounds, suggesting the program's ability to broaden students' perspectives to create *future leaders* with promising skills for their communities and the world. In Picture (2), on the following page, for example, the two most prominent participants' eye gazes create vectors that lead to a pen and paper, signifiers of a scholarship at work. The lack of gaze towards the viewer presents them with an offer for participation or engagement, to imagine joining these students in their studies. Should the viewer join them, they would become part of this globalized community of a diverse, collaborative student body that is there to study, learn, and thrive.



PICTURE (2): STUDENTS IN A CONFERENCE SETTING (QASID INSTITUTE, N.D.)

Part of the illuminated *global atmosphere* in QI's data also emphasizes the selection of European and American faculty, representing Ivy League schools and prestigious international institutions (e.g., MIT, Harvard, London School of Economics). The program features a fine-grained familiarity with the world's top-notch teaching practices, and it promotes a definition of international education as *uncompromising excellence*, grounded in the scholarly and professional eminence of Western epistemologies and organizational culture. Similarly, ADC also underscores this elitist international ambiance, praising its prestigious Ivy League partners, mostly from America and the UK. The attention to Ivy League partnerships in the data serves to legitimize local scholarships and construct a rewarding reputation of the schools that is based on selectivity and desirable outcome. Such ideological practices seek to exploit the Ivy mystique, conforming to the power structures of a globalized education system that manufactures prestige and meritocracy, while generating local and global hierarchies (Allen, 2017; Mullen, 2009; Thelin, 1976).

### 4.3 Volunteering as Social Commitment

Volunteering emerges as a prevalent component of the service activities that are aimed at experiential language learning. Such activities recur as a tool to enhance language socialization and foster a culture of service where students can make a social impact and contribute to the welfare of their host societies via service projects focused on global issues. For instance, QWL proposes volunteering opportunities that expose SA students to Moroccan culture and help develop the groundwork for linguistic and intercultural awareness while combating illiteracy, assisting with local nursing homes, or offering translation services. More precisely, the institute considers three main benefits underlying

service activities: “making a difference, gaining new skills, and building lasting connections and friendships” (Qalam wa Lawh, n.d.). Through individual placement or organized group activities, the volunteer clubs allow SA students to partner with local and regional non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and interact with members of the local community while making a difference in the lives of those vulnerable.

Take advantage of immersion and volunteer activities which introduce them to Arab and Moroccan culture ... The volunteer club at Qalam wa Lawh is available for students interested in making a difference, gaining new skills and building lasting connections and friendships ... Students can practice their Arabic while simultaneously giving back to the local Rabat community through our Volunteering Club. (Qalam wa Lawh, n.d.)

Making connections with the local community is at the center of these service activities. Next, in Picture (3), students are sitting with locals (older women in *hijab*). In this non-transactional reaction, multiple reactors (i.e., participants) are looking towards an unseen phenomenon beyond the camera’s view. As no eye gazes are directed towards the viewer, this creates a joint attention of a shared interest of SA students as social participants in local matters. Together with a slightly angled down camera, given the participants’ seated arrangement, the image is designed to elicit the viewer’s curiosity and invite him or her to join the social commitment to connect with members of the community and contribute to their social and economic wellbeing as a form of immersive activity. The image offers a traditional representation of Moroccan culture, which suggests cultural awareness via social service that enables interaction with hospitable and welcoming locals.



PICTURE (3): COMMUNITY MEETING (QALAM WA LAWH, N.D.)

Though relatively less prevalent, QI also identifies the sociocultural significance of community service, contending that partnerships with pre-qualified NGOs and local non-profits add value to the language and cultural immersion the program offers. QI promotes volunteering as a tool for language learners to enhance their understanding of Jordanian society through social interaction, professional growth, and community development. Like QWL, QI's volunteering opportunities range from social and relief services to diplomacy and international relations. Both programs engage in a claimed *give-back* discourse (something notably missing in ADC data), which stresses the benefits of social commitment and community development for SA students to experience language and culture firsthand while developing their social networks. These assignments aim to expand learners' professional prospects and increase their moral reasoning vis-à-vis shared risks of globalization (Boss, 1994; Reilly & Sanders, 2009). Volunteering in these SA programs is a part of the socialization processes, designed to enrich learners' linguistic and cultural experience abroad by providing access to communities of practice that adds a symbolic capital to the experience.

Put your Arabic language skills to work by adding valuable, community development experience and references to your CV. We encourage you to get involved in the positive work happening in and around Jordan. By serving and connecting with others, you will enhance your understanding of the culture and of the region itself. (Qasid Institute, n.d.)

#### 4.4 Language pedagogy and tradition

Language pedagogy and tradition emerge in the data as another major discourse trend in the branding practices of the schools' programs. The three institutes feature the introduction of colloquial Arabic (QA) or *Ammiya*, promoting the latter as a special way to ensure social interaction and communication, especially for learners who wish to participate in local opportunities such as volunteering or internships. As "a necessary facet of any student's progression towards the coveted, native-like language proficiency" (Qasid Institute, n.d.), the proposition of QA appears to build on the foundation of modern standard Arabic (MSA), focusing on conversation skills that cultivate learner's sociolinguistic competence and cultural awareness. The inclusion of QA in addition to MSA is designed to cater to the hybrid linguistic performances of the first-language (L1) Arabic speaker in the Arab world, which account for

situational and transactional accommodations to ensure communicational flow. In their promotion of QA, the institutes align their programs with the communicative approach of Arabic language teaching, aiming toward native-like proficiency, sociocultural knowledge, and intercultural communication. QI, for instance, underscores the importance of communication and promotes a comprehensive approach that entails immersion in “an intimate, and yet holistic social context that has presented itself as a contemporary imperative” (Qasid Institute, n.d.). QWL pays similar attention to oral proficiency and proposes activities that prioritize social interaction with native speakers in authentic contexts.

This will compliment one’s studies in Modern Standard Arabic by teaching how to frame structured arguments mixing between Ammiya and MSA to support opinions, construct hypotheses, and discuss matters of particular interest on specialized topics ... When Ammiya is effectively blended with one’s Fusha or Modern Standard Arabic training, there is a real depth and a higher level of Ammiya proficiency, hence complimenting each other. (Qasid Institute, n.d.)

These Arabic programs also display an interest in foreign languages, underscoring the linguistic and cultural influences of these languages in host societies. To varying degrees, these host societies enjoy unique sociocultural and ethnic tapestries, in which foreign languages such as French, English, or Spanish, reflect the traces of colonialism in the region, rendering foreign language utility indisputable. These foreign languages are argued to assist SA students in their socialization processes and access cultural capital. For instance, QWL promotes French courses available to students interested in extended sojourns and development opportunities in domains of business and technology. Given the ubiquitous colonial legacy of French language and culture in Moroccan society, QWL recognizes the engendered language contact of French and Arabic in Moroccan Arabic and the naturalized diglossic practices, which make French indispensable for navigating and engaging with Moroccan speakers. The multilingual repertoire of the host societies also features in ADC and QI’s data, which similarly illustrates French and English linguistic and cultural influences in Egyptian and Jordanian society; that is, while English is presented as *a second language of many speakers* in Amman, French is also *widely understood by the educated classes* in Cairo, the programs note.

French language courses are available for students wishing to take advantage of their stay in Morocco to improve their French. In Morocco, French is widely used in science and business, and many students find it useful to study French during their stay.... Originally created as the personal gardens of a French lawyer living in Morocco, the gardens are now open to the public.... At the end of 2018, Morocco also added the TGV, a French high-speed train. (Qalam wa Lawh, n.d.)

The promotion of Arabic abroad also captures a traditional attitude that evidently incorporates religious and literary scholarship as a part of the learning experience. Tradition is most prevalent in ADC data, as evidenced with the emphasized proximity to Al-Azhar and observance of Islamic practices, suggesting cultural immersion concomitant of religious culture (e.g., drawing attention to lectures at nearby mosques, and noting how the holy month of Ramadan ay affect students' schedule at ADC). On the other hand, literary scholarship is highlighted in the images on the center's homepage, which illustrate the literature available via representational signs of antiquarian books, and the school's location on a street named after the Egyptian Nobel Laureate in literature Naguib Mahfouz. As such, ADC views its efforts as a part of the purist scholarly network that prides itself on Arabic literary and religious legacy, catering in particular to Arabic learners with equal interest in the links between the language and Islam.

#### 4.5 Diversity and student identity

Our findings also reveal the pursuance of diversity in study abroad student population within these programs. To further assess these concepts and address our second research question, we analyzed the images specifically for participant representation to determine ascribed student identities depicted on the programs' homepages. Mainly, the findings show that the three schools display representative student body of diverse male and female demographics in different settings. Particularly, QWL stands out as the only school that praises diversity on their mission statement presented on the home page. However, pictorial analysis shows the predominance of female students, which though textually embraces diversity as a core value of the school's educational imperative, it accounts for 78% of white female students compared to 21% of female minority students. ADC, on the other hand, compared to QWL or QI tends to have more Asian students, which might represent countries other than the U.S. However, pictorial representations still maintain the prevalence of white

female students, accounting for 41% of Asian female students and 58% of white female students on the school's home page. Further, student diversity in QI data is not as salient as in QWL or ADC, though the program textually recognizes the construct in terms of perspective, but not necessarily in terms of ethnic, racial, or sexual variables. Our analysis of the images on QI homepage shows the predominance of white male student identity, though white female identity is still present, constituting 65% for the former as opposed to 34% for the latter.

Our mission is to empower learners from diverse backgrounds to embrace the Arabic language and culture. Through our immersive and innovative programs, we strive to foster a deep understanding of Arabic, enabling our students to communicate effectively and appreciate the rich heritage of the Arab world. (Qalam wa Lawh, n.d.)

In line with the aforementioned findings, closer examination of the images using our social semiotics framework, entailing pictorial composition and subject positioning equally suggest the emphasis on ascribed white female student identity. For instance, Picture (4), on the following page, from ADC depicts multiple participants (i.e., students and staff) with vectors from eye gazes towards the viewer, laying out the geospatial context of the program, in which participants appear to be standing by the entrance of the school's building, with a conspicuously elevated board sign displaying the school's contact information (i.e., telephone number and branch addresses). The image portrays eight participants, in which two groups of four participants can be discerned due to standing distance between participants and the seemingly friendly embrace of the arms around their friends. Arguably, the outward grouping may reflect two different classes or cohorts, which can further explain social, and hence the depicted spatial distance between participants. More importantly, while each group includes a local female teacher (i.e., the two ladies in *hijab*), they both capture prevalent white female students, who occupy the center of the image, drawing the viewer's attention by standing out more prominently than the minority students positioned toward the outer edge. Together, the photos project student identities that are seemingly diverse, friendly, and enjoying their sojourn, but concurrently underscore the prominent white female identity that pervades the broader study abroad discourse (e.g., Picture 2).



**PICTURE (4):** STUDENT AND STAFF REPRESENTATION (AL-DIWAN CENTER, N.D.)

Despite offering diverse representations of their study body and textually accentuating diversity (i.e., QWL, QI), such representations align in part with the home grounded discourses, which reveal the predominance of white female student identity (Du, 2018; Goldoni, 2017; Lincoln Commission, 2005; Quan, 2018; Sweeney, 2013). Though our analysis attends only to visual representations of these schools' websites, without accounting for numbers of student enrollment, visual identity construction tends to uphold member homogeneity in SA participation, being predominantly a privileged commodity of white female students.

The focus on white female student identity represents another gap in the expectations and the realities of the globalist rhetoric, which overtly preaches diversity, yet in practice restricts its mission to privileged demographics. Despite the noted commitment to diversity, such contradictions attest to the underlying racialized ideologies of SA as a predominantly 'white' endeavor, which continues to restrict global citizenship for minority students. The underrepresentation of minority students in the host-grounded discourse echoes the globally institutionalized mechanisms, which discount the experience of students who might be burdened by numerous systemic shortcomings (Doerr, 2020). Although a number of issues have been identified in the literature pertaining to the low enrollment of minority students in SA programs, such as the lack of financial support or concerns over discrimination (see Salisbury et al., 2011; Sweeney, 2013; Talburt & Stewart, 1999), host-grounded discourses recognize the value of subject diversification, but such efforts remain prone to the globalized neoliberal paradigm and its capitalist deficiencies, which engender racial hierarchies and economic disparities both at home and abroad despite (Doerr, 2020; Trentman, 2022).



## 5. Discussion and Conclusion

In the present study, our analysis of linguistic and pictorial features of three websites of SA programs located in MENA (i.e., Qalam Wa Lawh, Qasid Institute, and Al-Diwan Center) shows that the host-grounded discourses rely on a self-orientalist gaze, which, for promotional purposes, equates immersion to exotic exploration and celebrated consumerism of historicity. The reduction of Arab culture to nomadic artifacts, ruins of past glories, and the conscious deviation from modern-day Arab society suggest an economic and political conformity to the orientalized discourses prompted by capitalist ambitions. These discursive traits continue to perpetuate the global asymmetries that exert the politics of non-contemporaneity, immobilizing the destination in its fixed, parochial legacies (Doerr, 2013; Said, 1978). Such lopsided ideological workings contradict the purported promise of global citizenship, which tends to thrive in a packaged exoticization of the cultural-self, in which both spatial and temporal mobility is granted solely to the mobile learner-explorers and their quest for consumption and possession. That is, the paradox in the globalist rhetoric generates the non-coevalness of the host cultures, prompted by the hyper-commodification of historical aesthetics in heritage tourism, which reduces their membership to modern-day global society, revealing the power asymmetries in the one-way logic of globalization in the meantime.

Meanwhile, the host-grounded discourses capture a sense of political/elite internationalism and language criticality, which serves the U.S. geopolitical interest. The 9/11 events have rendered Arabic more demands than ever, promoting the language within a rhetoric of *bridging the gap* with the East via critical language initiatives. The demands to for intercultural awareness with the political-East became indispensable specifically following the failed policy, which lead to global conflicts (i.e., post 9/11 wars). As such, critical language initiatives were designed to compensate for these shortcomings and optimize linguistic and cultural capital in U.S. governmental workforce to ensure the national interest abroad. Normalized within a public discourse, Arabic learning becomes intertwined with the political imperative to serve the interest of national security, which nonetheless situate the language and its cultures as a stagnant object of study that perpetuates colonial mappings (Diao & Trentman, 2016; Said, 1978). In effect, the valorization of the language as 'critical' due to political urgencies reiterates the state mandate that not only captures the pragmatic expediency that seizes the opportunity of political

events for language program infrastructure and development, but problematically coalesce into a common sense for the promotion of the language as a tool of hegemony (Bale, 2010).

More specifically, the politicized gaze in the promotional material reflects major language policies that underscore the instrumentalization of Arabic for geopolitical affairs. The attention to diplomacy and critical language scholarships for instance suggests the leveraging of government initiatives to attract language learners with a special interest in politics and diplomacy. While such opportunities allow the language learners to study critical languages in non-traditional destinations such as MENA and embark on rewarding professional prospects, such a politicized interest positions the language learners aboard as servants of U.S. hegemony; a view that oftentimes makes them subject to criticism in ordinary social interaction, despite their non-orientalist efforts to offset the exerted ideological politicization (Fahmi, forthcoming). The political ideology rooted in the urgency of national security hinders the learners' socialization processes and jeopardies their access to the authentic cultural repositories of their destinations, not just due to the orientalist homogenization prompted by the politicization of the language, but also given the native speaker's resentment toward American intervention and dominance in the region (Diao & Trentman, 2016). To gain further insight into the local perception of these students abroad, more research is needed to address the role of critical language initiatives in cultivating shared interest between the U.S. and regions deemed critical in light of the ongoing ideological polarization and regional conflicts. Specifically, attending to the perspectives of host institutions and enrolled students under such initiatives would offer in-depth understanding of the valorization of language and cultural immersion as a political tool that claims geopolitical cooperation and guarantees mutual benefits.

To disrupt the micro-discourses of criticality, program administrators, practitioners, and learners might want to consider revisiting the capitalized rhetoric of Arabic as a language of national security and diplomacy and rethink the ideologies underlying the links with the national ambitions that sustain U.S. hegemony in a shifting geopolitical landscape. The political ideology guiding the choice of critical languages restricts the ability to look beyond the hegemonic priorities of the state. Such ideological underpinnings often tend to militarize the language, rendering the latter a part of the 'critical' apparatus for conflict.

Departing from the monolithic ideological framework that embeds the language within the presupposed threats of the political East would allow for a renewed value that fosters mutual acceptance of difference and inspires intercultural communication, without underlying orientalist imaginings or quests for hegemony. By unpacking the political designation of criticality, all actors should be able to explore the sociohistorical and cultural nuances of the language beyond political objectives. These reformist processes would allow for the reevaluation of the language status permeated in political discourse, and open new possibilities for the development and expansion of Arabic language programs, which will further facilitate genuine immersion in authentic contexts where SA students are not essentially perceived as fixed representatives of U.S. hegemony (Bale, 2010; Diao & Trentman, 2016; Trentman & Diao, 2017). Until the appeal to abandon America's global hegemony becomes fully envisaged, both home and host-based SA discourses in MENA will continue to reflect the power asymmetries, which are designed to sustain the political and economic interest of the U.S. in those destinations.

However, SA in MENA also offers an opportunity to mitigate global issues such as poverty, illiteracy, and environmental threats. The host-grounded discourses acknowledge the shared risks posed by globalization (Reilly & Senders, 2009), by providing students with the opportunity to volunteer and take part in the positive social changes of their host societies. Such invitations mark a new direction in language learning abroad, which introduces a moral imperative to tackle global risks, suggesting the neoliberal amendments of globalist citizenship. In this context, volunteering abroad suggests a discursive compensation for the structural inequalities inherent in globalization. Such opportunities offer students access to communities of practice, where they can engage in language socialization processes and advance their cultural knowledge, exhibiting the mobile learner-explorer as the catalyst campaigner, and their host society as the service recipient. As such, volunteering aims to mitigate the hierarchy of the global and the peripheral, featuring a commitment to address the shortfall of volunteers in NPOs abroad. However, uncritical engagement in these activities might expose the exploitation of affective attributes of empathy for the needy, which engender another form of othering the destination (Vrasti, 2013). Shallow participation might trigger the appropriation of hardship (see Razack, 2005), and the distraction from the real

structural factors underlying global inequalities at home and abroad (Mostafanezhad, 2013, cited in Doerr, 2020).

The present findings reaffirm Reilly and Senders' (2009) implications for the shared risks of globalization, as they become increasingly prevalent within the neoliberal, capitalist enterprise. On the one hand, those risks unveil the orientalist approach in critical destinations, which seeks in heritage tourism an instrument to optimize the rewards of international education. In such discursive applications, the perception of the SA experience represents an exclusive cultural investment of privileged students with access to temporal and spatial mobility aimed at the exploration of the non-coeval cultural other. The purported diversity in the portrayed student body reflects a sociopolitical condition in home institutions, which, however, transmits into a global recognition of student identity abroad, reproducing the global systems of racial preference that restricts the rewards of global citizenship. That is, the underrepresentation of minority students in SA programs have normalized a biased host expectation of eligibility, which grants access to an exclusive social category. These expectations, in part, bring to mind the concerns of discrimination expressed by minority students in SA programs, attested to inhibit full immersion abroad (Taburt & Stewart, 1999). Offsetting the lack of diversity abroad, minority students might bring valuable insight to their host societies, particularly as such students' preexisting transnational experiences crossing borders to their ancestral homelands are likely to refine their linguistic cultural awareness (Doerr, 2020). If deemed relevant, host institutions might benefit from a number of programs and diversity focused scholarships aimed to boost minority-student participation abroad, which can receive equal representation as that critical language programs.

Finally, our analysis also reveals a multidialectal/multilingual ideology underlying the promotion of Arabic in MENA. Without discounting the groundwork of Modern Standard Arabic (MSA), all three schools recognize the indispensable utility of colloquial Arabic (QA) for social communication and cultural capital. Given the diglossic situation in those destinations, QA tends to offer the communicative resource that facilitates translanguaging practices in immersion (Al Masaeed, 2020). Similarly, the programs also underscore the value of foreign languages (e.g., French, English), leveraging multilingualism to overcome linguistic deficit and issues of unintelligibility in those destinations. Multilingual practices enable accommodation strategies, which allow SA

students to draw from different linguistic repertoires and immerse in their bi/multilingual host societies. The discernment of SA students as multilingual subjects is part of the efforts to annul the restrictive SA monolingual ideologies that confine participation abroad to monolithic communities of practice.

Considering the prevalent inconsistencies in the globalist rhetoric examined in this study, we do not intend to overgeneralize the findings to the actual dynamics on the ground. The present study investigates the host-grounded discourses in the promotion of Arabic SA programs in MENA instantiated solely in digital marketing materials. This online space presents only a single venue to unpack the discourses and ideologies underlying the promotion of Arabic SA programs in those destinations. As such, real world applications of those programs might differ (to varying degrees) from the present discursive idiosyncrasies. We should also acknowledge that while these programs promise unique linguistic and sociocultural experiences informed by the opportunities of their community-based provisions, many individuals and institutions envision different expectations in finding appropriate partnerships abroad, regardless of the broader geopolitical conditions that guide the choice of the destination. We suggest that future research might focus further on these host institutions, by questioning their promotional strategies and online marketability, including any applicable criteria to attract U.S. or international clients. In order to discern the links between rhetoric and action pertaining to Arabic SA programs as a globalist ideological enterprise, research needs to engage directly and inclusively with program designers, coordinators, and students alike, to assess the awareness of the critical ramifications underlying the ongoing language advocacy and the efforts to mitigate the discursive deficiencies. Irrespective of the programs' online promotional strategies, SA language programs, indeed, facilitate immersive activity, intercultural awareness, and authentic dialogue to find meaning in difference, which, nonetheless, should benefit both home and host societies in equitable globalized transactions, barring any ideological forms of othering or hegemony.

## References

- Abu-Melhim, A. R. (2014). The status of Arabic in the United States of America post 9/11 and the impact on foreign language teaching programs. *Advances in Language and Literary Studies*, 5(3), 70-81. <http://dx.doi.org/10.7575/aiac.all.v.5n.3p.70>
- Al-Batal, M. (2007). Arabic and national language educational policy. *The Modern Language Journal*, 91(2), 268-271. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-4781.2007.00543.10.x>

- Al-Batal, M. (Ed.). (2017). *Arabic as one language: Integrating dialect in the Arabic language curriculum*. Georgetown University Press. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv1fj85jd>
- Al-Diwan Center. (n.d.). Retrieved December 17<sup>th</sup>, 2023, from <https://aldiwanarabic.com/>
- Al Masaeed, K. (2016). Judicious use of L1 in L2 Arabic speaking practice sessions. *Foreign Language Annals*, 49(4), 716-728. <https://doi.org/10.1111/flan.12223>
- Al Masaeed, K. (2020). Translanguaging practices in L2 Arabic study abroad: Beyond monolingual ideologies in institutional talk. *The Modern Language Journal*, 104(1), 250-266. <https://doi.org/10.1111/modl.12623>
- Al Masaeed, K. (2022). Sociolinguistic research vs. language ideology in L2 Arabic. In K. Geeslin (Ed.), *The Routledge handbook of sociolinguistic and second language acquisition* (pp. 359-370). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003017325>
- Allen, R. (2007). Arabic: Flavor of the moment: Whence, why, and how?. *The Modern Language Journal*, 91(2), 258-261. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-4781.2007.00543.6.x>
- Allen, R. M. (2017). A comparison of China's Ivy League to other peer groupings through global university rankings. *Journal of Studies in International Education*, 21(5), 395-411. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1028315317697539>
- Askehave, I., & Nielsen, A. E. (2005). Digital genres: a challenge to traditional genre theory. *Information technology & people*, 18(2), 120-141. <https://doi.org/10.1108/09593840510601504>
- Bale, J. (2010). When Arabic is the 'Target' Language: Title VI, national security, and Arabic language programs, 1958-1991. *Tertium Comparationis*, 16(2), 264. <https://doi.org/10.25656/01:24442>
- Boss, J. A. (1994). The effect of community service work on the moral development of college ethics students. *Journal of Moral Education*, 23(2), 183-198. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0305724940230206>
- Caton, K. (2011). Pedagogy and the other: Discursive production in study abroad. *The Journal of Tourism and Peace Research*, 2(2), 1-15.
- Caton, K., & Santos, C. A. (2009). Images of the other: Selling study abroad in a postcolonial world. *Journal of Travel Research*, 48(2), 191-204. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0047287509332309>
- Diao, W., & Trentman, E. (2016). Politicizing study abroad: Learning Arabic in Egypt and Mandarin in China. *L2 Journal*, 8(2). <https://doi.org/10.5070/l28228725>
- Dillon, S. (2003, March 19). Suddenly, a seller's market for Arabic studies. *New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2003/03/19/nyregion/suddenly-a-seller-s-market-for-arabic-studies.html>
- Doerr, N. M. (2012). Study abroad as adventure: Globalist construction of host-home hierarchy and governed adventurer subjects. *Critical Discourse Studies*, 9(3), 257-268. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17405904.2012.688211>
- Doerr, N. M. (2013). Do global citizens need the parochial cultural other? Discourse of immersion in study abroad and learning-by-doing. *Compare: A Journal of Comparative and International Education*, 43(2), 224 -243. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03057925.2012.701852>
- Doerr, N. M. (2015). Learner subjects in study abroad: discourse of immersion, hierarchy of experience and their subversion through situated learning. *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*, 36(3), 369- 382. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01596306.2013.871448>
- Doerr, N. M. (2020). Global competence of minority immigrant students: hierarchy of experience and ideology of global competence in study abroad. *Discourse: Studies in*

- the Cultural Politics of Education*, 41(1), 83-97.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/01596306.2018.1462147>
- Du, H. (2018). The complexity of study abroad: Stories from ethnic minority American students in China. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics*, 38, 122-139.  
<https://doi.org/10.1017/s0267190518000065>
- Echtner, C. M., & Prasad, P. (2003). The context of third world tourism marketing. *Annals of Tourism research*, 30(3), 660-682. [https://doi.org/10.1016/s0160-7383\(03\)00045-8](https://doi.org/10.1016/s0160-7383(03)00045-8)
- Edwards, J. D. (2004). The role of languages in a post 9/11 United States. *The Modern Language Journal*, 88(2), 268-271. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3588756>
- El-Gohary, H., Edwards, D. J., & Eid, R. (Eds.). (2017). *Global perspectives on religious tourism and pilgrimage*. IGI Global. <https://doi.org/10.4018/978-1-5225-2796-1>
- Fahmi, Z. (2024). Curricula as ideology: A study of cultural representations in Arabic as a foreign language (AFL) textbooks [Doctoral dissertation, University of South Florida].
- Fairclough, N. (2006). *Language and globalization*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203593769>
- Falk, R., & Kanach, N. A. (2000). Globalization and Study Abroad: An Illusion of Paradox. *Frontiers: The Interdisciplinary Journal of Study Abroad*, 6(1), 155-168.  
<https://doi.org/10.36366/frontiers.v6i1.87>
- Goldoni, F. (2017). Race, ethnicity, class and identity: Implications for study abroad. *Journal of Language, Identity & Education*, 16, 328-341.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/15348458.2017.1350922>
- Gore, J. E. (2005). *Dominant beliefs and alternative voices: Discourse, belief, and gender in American study abroad*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203959046>
- Hoult, S. (2018). Aspiring to postcolonial engagement with the other: Deepening intercultural learning through reflection on a South India sojourn. In J. Jackson & S. Oguro (Eds.), *Intercultural interventions in study abroad* (pp. 155-174). Routledge.  
<https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315276595-5>
- Kinginger, C. (2004). Alice doesn't live here anymore: Foreign language learning and identity reconstruction. In A. Pavlenko & A. Blackledge (Eds.), *Negotiation of identities in multilingual contexts* (pp. 219-242). Multilingual Matters. <https://doi.org/10.21832/9781853596483-010>
- Kramersch, C. (2005). Post 9/11: Foreign languages between knowledge and power. *Applied Linguistics*, 26, 545-567. <https://doi.org/10.1093/applin/ami026>
- Kress, G. R. (2010). *Multimodality: A social semiotic approach to contemporary communication*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203970034>
- Kress, G. R., & van Leeuwen, T. (2006). *Reading images: The grammar of visual design*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003099857>
- Kroskrity, V. P. (2000). Regimenting languages: Language ideological perspectives. In P. V. Kroskrity (Ed.), *Regimes of language: Ideologies, politics, and identities*. School of American Research Press.
- Kubota, R. (2016). The social imaginary of study abroad: Complexities and contradictions. *The Language Learning Journal*, 44, 347-357. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09571736.2016.1198098>
- Ladki, S., Abimanyu, A., & Kesserwan, L. (2020). The Rise of a New Tourism Dawn in the Middle East. *Journal of Service Science and Management*, 13(4), 637-648. <https://doi.org/10.4236/jssm.2020.134040>

- Lane-Toomey, C. K., & Lane, S. L. (2012). US students study abroad in the Middle East/North Africa: Factors influencing growing number. *Journal of Studies in International Education*, 17(4), 308-331. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1028315312447572>
- Lincoln Commission. (2005). Global competence and national needs: One million Americans studying abroad. *Final report from the Commission on the Abraham Lincoln Fellowship Program*.
- MacDonald, K. (2014). 11 (De)colonizing Pedagogies: An exploration of learning with students volunteering abroad. In R. Tiessen & R. Huish (Eds.), *Globetrotting or global citizenship?: Perils and potential of international experiential learning* (pp. 209-229). University of Toronto Press. <https://doi.org/10.3138/9781442616707-013>
- Michelson, K., & Valencia, J. A. (2016). Study abroad: Tourism or education? A multimodal social semiotic analysis of institutional discourses of a promotional website. *Discourse & Communication*, 10, 235-256. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1750481315623893>
- Moreno, R. (2021). Disrupting neoliberal and neocolonial ideologies in US study abroad: From discourse to intervention. *Frontiers: The Interdisciplinary Journal of Study Abroad*, 33(2), 93-109. <https://doi.org/10.36366/frontiers.v33i2.529>
- Mostafanezhad, M. (2013). The politics of aesthetics in volunteer tourism. *Annals of Tourism Research*, 43(Oct), 150-169.
- Mullen, A. L. (2009). Elite destinations: Pathways to attending an Ivy League university. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 30(1), 15-27. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01425690802514292>
- NAFSA: Association of International Educators. (2024). Trends in U.S. Study Abroad. Retrieved from <https://www.nafsa.org/policy-and-advocacy/policy-resources/trends-us-study-abroad>
- Ogden, A. (2008). The view from the veranda: Understanding today's colonial students. *Frontiers: The Interdisciplinary Journal of Study Abroad*, 15, 2-20. <https://doi.org/10.36366/frontiers.v15i1.215>
- Olsen, D. H. (2018). Religion, pilgrimage and tourism in the Middle East. In D. J. Timothy (Ed.), *Routledge handbook on tourism in the Middle East and North Africa* (p.p. 109-124). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315624525-9>
- Open Doors, Institute of International Education. (2023). *US study abroad: All destinations*. Retrieved from <https://opendoorsdata.org/data/us-study-abroad/all-destinations/>
- Qalam wa Lawh. (n.d.). *Study Arabic in Morocco*. Retrieved February 15<sup>th</sup>, 2021, from <https://www.qalamcenter.com/>
- Qasid Institute. (n.d.). Program offerings. Retrieved February 15<sup>th</sup>, 2021, from <https://www.qasid.com/>
- Quan, T. (2018). Language learning while negotiating race and ethnicity abroad. *Frontiers: The Interdisciplinary Journal of Study Abroad*, 30, 32-46. <https://doi.org/10.36366/frontiers.v30i2.410>
- Ramírez, G. B. (2013). Learning abroad or just going abroad? International education in opposite sides of the border. *Qualitative Report*, 18(62), 1-11. <https://doi.org/10.46743/2160-3715/2013.1484>
- Razack, N. (2005). Bodies on the move. *Social Justice*, 32(4), 87-104. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/29768338>
- Reilly, D., & Senders, S. (2009). Becoming the change we want to see: Critical study abroad for a tumultuous world. *Frontiers: The Interdisciplinary Journal of Study Abroad*, 18, 241-267. <https://doi.org/10.36366/frontiers.v18i1.265>
- Said, E. W. (1978). *Orientalism*. Pantheon Books.



- Salisbury, M. H., Paulsen, M. B., & Pascarella, E. T. (2011). Why do all the study abroad students look alike? Applying an integrated student choice model to explore differences in the factors that influence white and minority students intent to study abroad. *Research in Higher Education*, 52(2), 123-150. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11162-010-9191-2>
- Scollon, R. (2004). Teaching language and culture as hegemonic practice. *The Modern Language Journal*, 88(2), 271-274. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3588757>
- Shiri, S. (2013). Learners' attitudes toward regional dialects and destination preferences in study abroad. *Foreign Language Annals*, 46(4), 565-587. <https://doi.org/10.1111/flan.12058>
- Sweeney, K. (2013). Inclusive excellence and underrepresentation of students of color in study abroad. *Frontiers: The Interdisciplinary Journal of Study Abroad*, 23, 1–21. <https://doi.org/10.36366/frontiers.v23i1.326>
- Taha, T. A. (2007). Arabic as "a critical-need" foreign language in post-9/11 era: A study of students attitudes and motivation. *Journal of Instructional Psychology*, 34(3), 150-160. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ778783>
- Talbur, S., & Stewart, M. A. (1999). What's the subject of study abroad?: Race, gender, and "living culture". *The Modern Language Journal*, 83(2), 163–175. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/330333>
- Thelin, J. R. (1976). *The cultivation of Ivy: A saga of the college in America*. Schenkman Pub. Co.
- Trentman, E. (2012). *Study abroad in Egypt: Identity, access, and Arabic language learning* [Doctoral dissertation, Michigan State University]. <https://www.proquest.com/dissertations-theses/study-abroad-egypt-identity-access-arabic/docview/1038141852/se-2>
- Trentman, E. (2013). Arabic and English during study abroad in Cairo, Egypt: Issues of access and use. *The Modern Language Journal*, 97(2), 457-473. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-4781.2013.12013.x>
- Trentman, E. (2022). Addressing the ideologies of study abroad: Views from the U.S. context. In McGregor, J., Plews, J.L. (Eds), *Designing second language study abroad research* (pp.89-109). Palgrave Macmillan. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-05053-4\\_5](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-05053-4_5)
- Trentman, E., & Diao, W. (2017). The American gaze east: Discourses and destinations of US study abroad. *Study Abroad Research in Second Language Acquisition and International Education*, 2, 175-205. <https://doi.org/10.1075/sar.16001.tre>
- U.S. Department of State, USA Study Abroad. (2020). Near East: Location reports. Retrieved from <https://studyabroad.state.gov/regions/near-east>
- van Dijk, T.A. (2001). Multidisciplinary CDA: A plea for diversity. In R. Wodak and M. Meyer (Eds.), *Methods of critical discourse analysis* (pp. 95–120). SAGE Publications. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9780857028020.n5>
- Vrasti, W. (2013). *Volunteer tourism in the global south*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203104453>
- Woolf, M. (2006). Come and see the poor people: The pursuit of exotica. *Frontiers: The Interdisciplinary Journal of Study Abroad*, 13, 135-146. <https://doi.org/10.36366/frontiers.v13i1.178>
- Younes, M. (2014). *The integrated approach to Arabic instruction*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315740614>
- Zemach-Bersin, T. (2007). Global citizenship and study abroad: It's all about U.S. *Critical Literacy: Theories and Practices*, 1(2), 16-28.

- Zemach-Bersin, T. (2009). Selling the world: Study abroad marketing and the privatization of global citizenship. In R. Lewin (Ed.), *The handbook of practice and research on study abroad* (pp. 303–320). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203876640-27>
- Zemach-Bersin, T. (2020). Global citizenship education and the making of America's neoliberal empire. In *The Global Citizenship Nexus* (pp. 22-42). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429320668-3>

## Author Biography

**Zakaria Fahmi** is a Ph.D. candidate in the Linguistics and Applied Language Studies (LALS) at the University of South Florida (USF). As a graduate teaching assistant, he has taught content and language courses (e.g., Linguistics, French), with a research interest in sociolinguistics, language and culture interface, and discourse studies.

**Dakota Liska** is a Ph.D. candidate in the Linguistics and Applied Language Studies (LALS) at the university of South Florida. As a graduate teaching assistant, she has served as a consultant for English language learning and a supervisor for World Languages Lab. Her research interest focuses on multimodality and identity construction in online space.