

Standard vs. Creative Audio Description in Arabic: A Reception Study on Accessibility and Engagement

Audiodescripción estándar frente a creativa en árabe: un estudio de recepción sobre
accesibilidad y participación

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Abstract

This paper presents an exploratory study on the Arabic audio description in Arabic, a language in which media accessibility remains underdeveloped. While streaming platforms like Netflix have introduced AD for Arabic content, its availability is limited due to the lack of binding legislation and inconsistent provision. The study uses focus groups, in-depth interviews, and a reception study to discuss the AD of a film in Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) and Lebanese dialect. The focus groups and interviews explore participants' media consumption practices. The paper advocates participatory approaches in AD creation, involving blind and visually impaired individuals in script development. It also calls for multilingual AD options to address the diverse linguistic needs of Arabic-speaking audiences and promote inclusive media access.

Keywords: audio description; Arabic; dialect; media accessibility; blindness

Resumen

Este artículo presenta un estudio exploratorio sobre la audiodescripción (AD) en árabe, un idioma en el que la accesibilidad en los medios está en sus inicios. Aunque plataformas de *streaming* como Netflix han introducido AD para contenido en árabe, su disponibilidad es limitada debido a la falta de legislación vinculante y falta de concienciación sobre accesibilidad. Este artículo presenta un estudio que utiliza grupos focales, entrevistas en profundidad y un estudio de recepción para analizar la AD de una película en árabe estándar y en dialecto libanés. Los grupos focales y las entrevistas exploran las prácticas de consumo de medios de los participantes. El artículo aboga por enfoques participativos en la creación de AD, involucrando a personas ciegas y con discapacidad visual en el desarrollo de guiones. También propone opciones de AD multilingües para abordar las diversas necesidades lingüísticas de las audiencias de habla árabe y promover el acceso inclusivo a los medios.

Palabras clave: audiodescripción; árabe; dialecto; accesibilidad; ceguera

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1. Introduction

In recent years, the field of media accessibility has seen significant growth, yet the availability of accessible media in Arabic-speaking countries remains limited. Media accessibility ensures that individuals with disabilities can fully engage with cultural and social content that might otherwise be inaccessible. In particular, audio description (AD) plays a critical role by providing additional narration that describes visual elements in media for individuals who are blind or visually impaired. While streaming platforms like Netflix have made strides in offering AD for Arabic content, the overall provision of AD in Arabic-speaking countries remains inadequate. In many of these regions, the absence of binding legislation on media accessibility means that AD is either unavailable or offered only on a very limited scale, leaving a significant portion of the population with restricted access to cultural experiences and entertainment.

This study employs an exploratory qualitative approach, beginning with a focus group to assess participants' experiences with AD and media consumption. It then includes in-depth interviews with regular AD users and a reception study in which participants engage with two versions of AD in different dialects. The reception study aims to contribute to Arabic AD research by exploring various topics, including the use of dialects versus Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) in audio description.

The following sections provide a comprehensive overview of media accessibility, with a particular focus on AD in Arabic, and examine the role of participatory approaches in both media accessibility and related research. The methodology employed in the study is then outlined, followed by a detailed discussion of the findings. Finally, the conclusion highlights the implications of the study and suggests areas for further research.

2. Media Accessibility

The field of accessibility has seen significant growth in both theory and practice over the past decade. Specifically, media accessibility provides “access to media and non-media objects, services, and environments through media solutions, for any person who cannot or would not be able to, either partially or completely, access them in their original form” (Greco, 2019, p. 18). Thus, media accessibility serves as a mediator between the original content and its audiences or users.

This paper focuses on AD, defined as “narration added to the soundtrack to describe important visual details that cannot be understood from the main soundtrack alone. It

provides information about actions, characters, scene changes, on-screen text, and other visual content” (Federal Government, 2015). While access to television and other forms of media is pervasive and often assumed in today’s world, AD is not consistently available. Even in countries with relevant legislation, as of 2017, AD was provided for less than 15% of television content on average (Costa, 2017). As a result, a segment of the population lacks full access to culture and entertainment, with potential implications for social cohesion, cultural identity, personal enrichment, and creativity.

The advent of streaming platforms has made AD more available and accessible. In recent years, AD has been introduced on most major streaming platforms, including Netflix, Amazon, Hulu, and iTunes. The Accessible Netflix Project was initiated by activists in 2014 (Ellis et al., 2016), who successfully persuaded Netflix to introduce AD to all of its original programs starting in 2015, with AD added within two weeks of a new show’s release (Ellis, 2019, p. 131). On Netflix, the AD feature appears under language settings, positioning it as a form of translation.

In Arabic, AD is currently available only on Netflix for selected Arabic content (El-Taweel & Jimenez, forthcoming), as TV and cinema in the Arab world do not yet offer regular AD services. In Arabic audiovisual translation (AVT), subtitling is predominantly done in MSA. While some content is subtitled in regional dialects, this remains limited. Conversely, dubbing for popular Turkish shows, for example, often uses a variety of Arabic dialects, while voiceover translations typically employ MSA. In the absence of binding legislation on media accessibility in Arab countries, media companies tend to prioritize cost-saving over the provision of accessible content. As a result, blind and visually impaired audiences in the Arab region have limited exposure to AD due to the scarcity of audio-described media (Jimenez-Andres & El-Taweel, forthcoming).

Research such as the present study is valuable for gaining deeper insights into the viewing habits and media consumption of individuals who are blind or have low vision in Arabic-speaking countries.

2.1. Participatory approaches in Media Accessibility

Media productions are witnessing not only a rise in audio-described content worldwide, but also increased participation of blind and visually impaired individuals in both media production and research. Notably, Bus Stop Films released their Inclusive Filmmaking Toolkit in 2020, which recommends involving people with disabilities in filmmaking

from the pre-production stage (Bus Stop Films, 2020). In their film *Offspring*, a visually impaired actor, Ben Philips, pointed out to the sighted scriptwriters that a scene depicting a blind person feeling someone's face with their hand was inauthentic (Haller, 2023, p. 46). Such a scene could have been revised early on if a blind person had been involved in writing the script.

Another example of inclusive media is the *Avatar: The Last Airbender* live-action adaptation on Netflix. The AD script for the series was voiced by Ross Minor, a blind American accessibility content creator, who collaborated closely with the audio describer during script development (Minor, 2024).

In the realm of research, participatory approaches to media accessibility are also on the rise. Di Giovanni (2018) defined participatory accessibility as the “design, creation, revision and consumption of access in an inclusive way” (p. 158). In such projects, accessibility users move beyond their traditional role of validation to become active contributors in the creation process. Notable examples include Pérez's (2023) study of an inclusive accessibility team at a film festival in Slovakia, and the work of Marcela Tandredi et al. (2023), whose project in Uruguay involves sign language users as integral members of a media accessibility team within an inclusive co-creation laboratory.

2.2. AD and Arabic audience reception

AD research in Arabic is still in its infancy, but it is gradually growing—possibly due to the increased availability of AD on streaming platforms. Existing studies have primarily examined the linguistic features of AD, as well as user preferences and enjoyment. For instance, Darwish et al. (2023) conducted a reception study with 152 participants on the popular show *مدرسة الروابي للبنات* (Al-Rawabi School for Girls). Participants evaluated the quality and technical aspects of the AD, as well as the benefits of consuming audio-described content. Overall, the AD was rated positively. The study also investigated participants' viewing practices and found that 83% of visually impaired respondents wanted more content to be audio described. Moreover, they reported that watching AD content enhanced their sense of social inclusion. In addition, 93% believed there should be a legal framework mandating the provision of AD on national TV channels.

An important finding related to the language of AD is worth noting: half of the participants found it confusing that the original dialogue was in the Jordanian dialect while the AD was in MSA (Darwish et al., 2023). MSA remains the standard in Arabic

AD, even though this practice contradicts AD guidelines—such as those of Netflix (2025)—which recommend matching the AD language with the dialect or accent of the original dialogue. Currently, no comparative studies have been conducted on the use of MSA versus regional dialects in AD for film or streaming content. This study seeks to address that gap.

Another study by Darwish et al. (2022) analyzed the content of Arabic AD in film and streaming platforms, focusing on Al-Rawabi School for Girls. The study found that most AD content described physical attributes of characters, actions, settings, emotional states, interpersonal interactions, and on-screen text. These categories align closely with international AD standards, such as the ADLAB guidelines (Remael et al., 2015), which emphasize the importance of describing visual elements that are crucial for narrative comprehension. The authors also noted the use of English words and code-switching in Arabic AD, viewing this positively—especially in shows that already include English in their dialogue. This reflects natural speech patterns common in many Arabic-speaking contexts.

Hejazi (2024) examined the AD of a Palestinian film, focusing specifically on how the occupation was described and how scenes deemed taboo were censored. The study suggests that AD is not neutral, but rather a political and interpretive act. Indeed, audio description inherently involves editorial decisions about what to emphasize, omit, or reinterpret—raising broader questions about objectivity, representation, and the describer's influence on viewer perception (Fryer, 2016). Hejazi's findings therefore support the growing scholarly view that AD is shaped by cultural, political, and ethical considerations.

Finally, Al-Zoubi (2020) conducted a reception study with sighted participants on the AD of the Spanish short film *Tiempo de Blues*. The study found that 80% of participants enjoyed the AD in MSA, and 67% expressed interest in watching more AD content. The AD was shown to enhance participants' attention to detail and comprehension of the material. However, to our knowledge, no other studies compare the use of MSA and vernaculars in Arabic AD—a gap this study also aims to address. While Al-Zoubi's study is interesting in terms of examining AD with sighted audiences, it does not significantly contribute to AD research or practice for blind audiences. To advance the field, future research should center blind participants to more accurately assess the effectiveness and relevance of AD for its intended audience.

3. Methodology

This study followed an exploratory, qualitative sequential approach (Creswell, 2013). In the first phase, the research team conducted an initial focus group to gather information about the experiences with audio description (AD) and the media consumption practices of people who are blind or have low vision in Doha. This was followed by one-on-one interviews with four additional participants who were regular AD users, in order to collect more in-depth data regarding their engagement with AD. Lastly, a reception study was carried out in a focus group format, where participants viewed the short documentary *Al Compás* by Ghinwa Daher, accompanied by two distinct AD styles: MSA and the Lebanese dialect—the original language of the film.

The AD in MSA was written by one of the authors of this paper, a professional audio describer. The dialectal version, however, was developed collaboratively by the filmmaker and another author of this paper. The MSA AD adhered to traditional practices, following the ADLAB guidelines (Remael et al., 2015), whereas the dialectal AD deviated from these conventions. It was primarily written by the filmmaker, who lacks formal training in audio description, and was instructed to provide descriptions during the film's silences—though these were limited due to the film's musical nature.

The first focus group took place in April 2024 at the Qatar Cultural Centre for the Blind during one of its monthly gatherings and lasted 90 minutes. Participants were informed in advance, through the Centre, that researchers from HBKU would be conducting a study on AD. All participants were blind or had low vision. Further details on the participants are provided in Table 1 below. The aim of this focus group was to examine participants' media consumption habits and experiences with AD—especially given that, due to the lack of AD content in Arabic, some participants had never previously engaged with AD in television or film.

The discussion followed a semi-structured interview protocol that addressed topics such as familiarity with AD, preferences regarding dialect (MSA vs. vernacular), reactions to audio introductions, and the perceived usefulness of naming characters in advance. Additional topics included the overlap of AD with music, preferences for standard versus non-standard AD styles, and the importance of including physical descriptions—such as race, clothing, or cultural identifiers. Broader questions explored cultural sensitivities, such as whether potentially inappropriate content should be

described or omitted. This comprehensive guide enabled a nuanced exploration of both linguistic and cultural expectations surrounding AD in Arabic-language media.

Due to the limited AD experience of most focus group participants, we also conducted in-depth interviews with four other individuals who are regular consumers of AD. These interviews were intended to explore aspects that were not covered in sufficient depth during the initial focus group. Conducted via Microsoft Teams in May 2024, the interviews averaged 20 minutes in length. Participant details are also provided in Table 1.

Finally, a reception study was conducted in May 2024, also at the Qatar Cultural Centre for the Blind. During this session, members were informed that a film screening would be followed by a reception study conducted by researchers from HBKU. Participants watched the 30-minute documentary and were then asked for their views on the AD and various aspects of the film, including AI compas, the language used, content selection in the AD, and the issue of censorship. The session lasted 90 minutes. The interview guide used in this session is included in Annex 1. Participant details for the reception study can also be found in Table 1.

Data collection activity	Participant's sex	Ages	Denominations of Study Participants
Focus group	F: 5 female M: 5 male Total: 10	20s :4 30s: 3 40s: 3	FG-Participant 1-10
Interviews	F: 1 M: 3 Total: 4	20s: 1 30: 3	INT 1- 4
Reception study	F: 5 M: 9 Total: 14	20s: 9 30: 2 40: 3	RS-Participant 1 - 14

Table 1. Details of participants by data gathering activity

All data collection activities were audio recorded and later transcribed with the permission of participants. The study had the ethical approval of HBKU's Institutional Review Board (study number: HBKU-IRB-2024-55). Data was analysed qualitatively.

We used pragmatic analysis to prioritize finding useful answers rather than adhering to a strict theory. Our guiding questions helped focus the analysis on what the data revealed.

4. Key findings and Discussion

This section presents the findings from the study, which was conducted through three methodological approaches: a focus group, interviews and a reception study. The analysis follows a pragmatic framework, examining the data in relation to the research objectives and the broader context of media accessibility.

4.1. Consumption of audio described and non-audio described content

Interviews with blind participants revealed nuanced and varied experiences concerning AD and media consumption. These findings not only reflect diverse individual preferences and specific accessibility needs but also reinforce the conclusions drawn from the preceding focus group discussions.

For instance, INT-Participant 1 expressed a preference for platforms such as Audiovault.net, particularly enjoying Arabic content in a family setting, but did not identify other platforms of interest. Consistent with insights from the reception study, Netflix did not emerge as a preferred platform among participants. INT-Participant 2, in contrast, indicated a clear preference for English-language content, emphasizing its perceived superior narrative quality, though also highlighting the cultural significance of Arabic programming during Ramadan. Notably, both participants regularly consume media content without AD; however, when opting for AD, they demonstrate distinct platform preferences shaped by their specific accessibility priorities and content interests.

INT-Participants 3 and 4 indicated a preference for streaming platforms like Netflix due to their flexibility and robust AD offerings. Additionally, their genre preferences—ranging from comedy and sci-fi to educational podcasts—demonstrate the need for diverse, accessible content.

Social media usage also reflected varied patterns. INT-Participant 1 avoids short-form content like TikTok, favouring YouTube for its meaningful, accessible content. In contrast, INT-Participant 3 enjoys TikTok's fast-paced media, while INT-Participant 4 described Instagram as inaccessible due to design limitations.

Cinema attendance was another concern, with AD availability strongly influencing participants' willingness to attend. INT-Participant 1 relied on companions for scene

descriptions, while INT-Participant 3 preferred cinemas with AD-equipped screenings. INT-Participant 4 avoided cinemas altogether due to the lack of AD, highlighting systemic barriers that limit access to shared cultural experiences.

Participants also reflected on their experiences with live AD in events such as the World Cup and Ajyal Film Festival, which they described as “transformative”. These events served as models for how AD can enrich audience engagement in various contexts, emphasizing the importance of expanding such services across media and public venues. FG-Participant 8 noted that live AD during sports events fostered a sense of inclusion and excitement.

Preferences for Arabic versus English AD further highlighted the complexity of user needs. INT-Participants 1 and 2 valued Arabic AD for its cultural expressiveness, while INT-Participants 3 and 4 preferred English AD for its detailed descriptions. This disparity underscores the need for improved Arabic AD quality to meet international standards, as well as the importance of offering multilingual options to cater to diverse preferences.

These findings emphasize the need for tailored, user-centered approaches to AD development. By addressing platform design, content diversity, and linguistic flexibility, media providers can create more inclusive and engaging experiences for blind and visually impaired audiences.

4.2. Reception study: non-standard dialectal AD versus MSA standardised AD

AD is essential for ensuring inclusion and comprehension for audiences who are blind or partially blind. Fryer (2016) argues that high-quality AD serves as a bridge between visual storytelling and auditory understanding. In the documentary *Al Compás*, the first 15 minutes were audio described in Lebanese dialect (the original language of the film) using a non-standard AD approach, while the remaining 15 minutes were described in MSA following current AD guidelines.

Participants in the focus group emphasized the need for more detailed AD throughout the film. After viewing the content, they raised concerns about vague scene transitions and insufficient detail in the description of actions and settings. For example, FG-Participant 14 remarked, “I should have been notified from the beginning that his friend was there with him”, highlighting the need for greater narrative clarity. Similarly, FG-Participant 11 noted that while soundtracks can sometimes offer contextual clues, explicit clarification within the AD is still essential. Other participants cited unclear transitions,

such as a scene involving a flamenco dancer or the sound of a lighter, which left them confused about the context. These observations align with Di Giovanni's (2018) argument that AD must clarify narrative elements when visual storytelling is ambiguous.

Research on AD supports these user experiences, indicating that insufficient descriptive detail can lead to confusion and reduced viewer engagement (Fryer & Freeman, 2012; Peaty, 2023; Walczak & Fryer, 2017). Furthermore, experts emphasize the importance of including subtle yet essential elements such as facial expressions, gestures, and environmental cues to provide a more comprehensive understanding of scenes for blind and partially blind audiences (Clark, 2001; University of Leeds, n.d.).

In line with these findings, participants mentioned that English-language content with AD often includes such detailed information. However, in the case of *Al Compás*, they felt that the descriptions were lacking and omitted key visual details. This discrepancy may be attributed to the film's musical nature—where music was often prioritized over description—or to the use of non-standard AD in part of the film, which participants may have found unfamiliar and less effective.

International streaming platforms such as Netflix tend to enhance their AD during pauses in dialogue and scene transitions, which helps clarify visual shifts and enriches the overall viewing experience. However, this is not always feasible; time constraints often limit the inclusion of visual details like facial expressions, gestures, and spatial context.

Descriptions of key objects, character movements, and spatial settings not only improve comprehension but also add emotional and contextual depth to the story, helping audiences build a stronger connection to the content. Focus group feedback suggests that non-standard AD may not always meet viewers' expectations. For example, RS-Participant 9 pointed out the omission of pivotal details—such as the appearance and actions of secondary characters—which led to confusion regarding who was on screen, where scenes were taking place, and even the time of day.

4.2. Viewing practices: platform accessibility and integration

Limited platform accessibility emerged as a significant barrier for blind and partially blind users in the Arab region. Jimenez-Andres & El-Taweel (forthcoming) found that AD availability is largely restricted to international platforms such as Netflix, while regional services like OSN offer inconsistent support. FG-Participant 5 highlighted this gap, noting: “OSN only offers AD sometimes, but not always”, emphasizing the lack of

consistency in regional platforms. Focus group participants stressed the importance of implementing robust and reliable AD offerings across all services.

Research by Chmiel and Mazur (2012) highlights the need to standardize accessibility features across platforms, arguing that fragmented or inconsistent provisions hinder inclusivity. The integration of AD into services such as Netflix has been recognized globally as a benchmark for accessibility. Streaming platforms like Netflix have emerged as leading examples of effective AD integration, widely acknowledged by users and accessibility advocates alike. Participants in this study also pointed to Netflix's user-friendly interface and variety of AD options as key features enhancing media accessibility. These findings emphasize the need for regional platforms to adopt international best practices. According to Matamala and Orero (2019), platforms should embed AD into their core services rather than treating it as an optional or supplementary feature.

Participants further elaborated on the potential of streaming platforms to foster inclusivity. For instance, RS-Participant 3 expressed appreciation for Netflix's multilingual AD options, stating that such features allow users to engage with content in their preferred language. Likewise, RS-Participant 8 advocated for the inclusion of AD in regional platforms to better reflect local cultural contexts, suggesting this would enhance relatability and user satisfaction.

In contrast, social media platforms such as Instagram and TikTok were identified as particularly inaccessible. INT-Participant 4 described Instagram as "challenging to navigate", reflecting broader systemic barriers to digital accessibility. The importance of providing AD on social media was a recurring theme. For example, INT-Participant 1 noted a preference for YouTube due to its accessibility features, such as adjustable playback and access to AD-enabled content. However, other platforms were criticized for their lack of such features, highlighting the need for industry-wide standards in digital accessibility.

Fryer (2018) argues that digital platforms must prioritize accessibility as a fundamental component of user experience design, integrating AD and other features seamlessly to ensure equitable access. This perspective aligns with internationally recognized standards, such as the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG), which provide comprehensive criteria for making digital content accessible to users with disabilities (W3C, 2018).

4.3. *AD in cinemas and events*

Cinema experiences remain largely inaccessible for blind and partially blind individuals due to the absence of audio description (AD). Rai et al. (2010) emphasize that AD transforms passive spectatorship into active engagement, enabling blind and partially blind audiences to participate meaningfully in cinematic storytelling. Participants in this study reported minimal exposure to AD-equipped cinema experiences in Qatar, with the notable exception of events like the Ajyal Film Festival. Ajyal, hosted annually by the Doha Film Institute, includes a dedicated inclusive screening session (Jimenez-Andres & El-Taweel, 2024).

Existing literature reinforces the critical role of AD in fostering inclusivity in cinema. According to Tatic (2015), providing AD in theaters allows blind and partially blind viewers to engage with films on equal footing with sighted audiences, thereby enhancing their sense of agency and enjoyment. Fryer (2016) further highlights that integrating AD into live screenings can replicate the immersive experience of home streaming platforms, where users independently access descriptive content.

Participants in this study echoed these perspectives, emphasizing the transformative potential of well-implemented AD. FG-Participant 8 described a positive experience with AD during live events such as the World Cup, illustrating how live AD can significantly enrich audience engagement. Similarly, FG-Participant 9 spoke about the effectiveness of AD-equipped films shown at the Ajyal Film Festival, advocating for wider adoption of such practices in regional cinemas. These examples underscore both the feasibility and value of introducing AD into the cinematic experience, particularly when aligned with international best practices.

The findings also point to the need for awareness campaigns that promote the value of AD in cinema, as well as the establishment of legal frameworks that guarantee AD in both cinema and television. RS-Participant 4 recalled past experiences with radio programs that described movie scenes, highlighting the nostalgic and imaginative power of audio storytelling. Reviving similar practices in modern cinemas could help normalize AD and cultivate broader public acceptance.

To advance cinema accessibility, collaborative efforts among filmmakers, distributors, and accessibility advocates are essential. As Romero-Fresco (2019, 2021) argues, accessibility features should be integrated proactively into the filmmaking process rather

than treated as post-production additions. Ensuring that AD is embedded from the earliest stages of production will not only improve access but also enhance the overall cinematic experience for blind and partially blind audiences.

4.4. From Consumers to Co-Creators: Participatory Accessibility in Practice

Involving blind and partially blind individuals in AD scriptwriting helps ensure that descriptions align with user needs. Matamala et al. (2018) emphasize the value of participatory approaches in AVT, where end-users contribute directly to the development process. By including individuals with lived experience of blindness, AD creators can better prioritize elements essential for accessibility and engagement. FG-Participant 14 emphasised this point, stating: “Kindly ask for the assistance of a blind person [in writing the script]”, highlighting the importance of integrating user perspectives into the scriptwriting process.

Di Giovanni et al. (2023) further note that participatory methods improve script relevance and inclusivity, as individuals with visual disabilities offer unique insights into what details are most important. Their input can influence how spatial relationships, character actions, and emotional cues are conveyed, ensuring the AD meets audience expectations. Similarly, Udo and Fels (2009) argue that collaboration between professionals and end-users fosters a deeper understanding of accessibility challenges, leading to richer and more effective AD.

Participants in both focus groups and interviews echoed these findings. They cited instances where existing AD scripts lacked narrative depth or failed to convey emotional nuances, leaving gaps in the storytelling experience. For example, FG-Participant 9 noted the absence of descriptions for non-verbal communication such as facial expressions and gestures—elements critical for understanding character dynamics. Involving individuals with visual disabilities in the scriptwriting process could address such gaps and enhance overall quality.

Participatory approaches are also aligned with broader trends in inclusive design. Matamala et al. (2018) emphasize that user-centered methodologies in AVT not only improve the final product but also empower marginalized communities by valuing their expertise and lived experience. In the context of Arabic AD, this could include training blind or visually impaired individuals to co-create scripts, ensuring that regional and cultural nuances are both represented and respected.

To implement this approach effectively, AD providers should establish collaborative frameworks that include scriptwriters, consultants with visual disabilities, and accessibility experts. Training programs and workshops can equip individuals with the necessary skills to contribute meaningfully to AD development. In addition, ongoing feedback loops should be maintained to refine scripts based on audience experiences, ensuring continuous improvement and responsiveness to user needs.

Our own experience involving the filmmaker in the AD writing process offered additional insights. The filmmaker had never previously worked with AD. As outlined in the methodology section, she was asked to write descriptions of the visual content to be inserted during silences in the film. We observed that her focus was not primarily on delivering exhaustive visual detail, but rather on maintaining the rhythm and emotional tone of the film, which is lyrical, slow, and poignant. Compared to the AD written by the professional audio describer, her descriptions were shorter, limited to essential information, and featured longer pauses between narration and dialogue or music. She prioritized music and dialogue over description, treating AD as a background element rather than a central one.

This reflects an alternative approach to AD: while professionals typically prioritize the communication of visual content, the filmmaker aimed to preserve artistic coherence and harmony between the AD and the film's aesthetic. These choices offer valuable insight into how filmmakers may interpret and prioritize AD differently—though they may also, at times, compromise the clarity and effectiveness of the description for blind and partially blind audiences.

5. Study Limitations and Conclusions

This study offers important insights into the reception of AD in Arabic. However, it is essential to acknowledge the study's limitations to contextualize its findings and guide future research. The participant pool was relatively small—comprising 10 individuals in the focus group, 4 in the interviews, and 14 in the reception study. Additionally, as the study was conducted in Qatar, its findings are not generalizable to the entire Arab region. While Qatar is home to a diverse population drawn from across the Arab world, it does not fully represent the linguistic, cultural, and media accessibility landscapes of other Arab countries. Nonetheless, the trends identified in this study may offer a useful indicator for developments elsewhere in the region. Another limitation is the study's focus

on a single short documentary, *Al Compás*, which restricts the applicability of the results to other genres or dialects.

Despite these limitations, the study highlights key areas for further research and practice in Arabic AD. These include integration into mainstream platforms, improved accessibility, and deeper inquiry into the linguistic and cultural elements of AD. The participants' recommendations address these challenges and aim to align Arabic AD with international standards. Enhancing the quality of AD in Arabic is critical to enabling blind and visually impaired audiences to fully engage with audiovisual content. AD providers should adopt global best practices while adapting them to the unique linguistic and cultural contexts of the Arab world. These improvements would foster a richer and more inclusive storytelling experience.

Currently, Arabic AD remains limited—mostly confined to special events and a single streaming platform. Expanding regional availability is a pressing need. Streaming services, cinemas, and television broadcasters must integrate accessibility features into their offerings and provide consistent AD content. This broader availability would extend access to a wider audience. Additionally, AD must be implemented in cinemas to give visually impaired audiences an experience equal to that of sighted viewers. Achieving this will require close collaboration among filmmakers, distributors, and accessibility advocates to ensure cinema becomes a more inclusive space.

Adopting community-centered approaches is also crucial. Involving individuals with visual disabilities in the creation and testing of AD scripts ensures that the content is relevant, useful, and aligned with their specific needs. Participatory methods enhance inclusivity and help make AD more reflective of the audience it serves. Offering multilingual AD options is another essential step. While many participants favored the use of MSA, they also recognized the value of regional dialects. Providing AD in both MSA and dialects would cater to the diverse linguistic preferences of Arabic-speaking audiences, ensuring cultural relevance and broader accessibility.

The way forward requires not only expanding AD availability across platforms but also implementing tailored solutions that reflect the linguistic diversity and media consumption habits of Arabic-speaking users. Together, these steps will contribute to building a more inclusive and accessible media landscape.

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