

GAZZE ESKİ ŞEHİR, FİLİSTİN'DE GENÇLERİN KENT KÜLTÜRÜNÜN BİLİNCİSİ

YOUTH AWARENESS OF URBAN CULTURE IN GAZA OLD TOWN, PALESTINE

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ÖZET

Filistin'in Gazze eski kentindeki geleneksel yapılar, koruma eksikliği, güncel olmayan düzenlemeler, kamu bilincinin olmaması ve bölgede sürekli çatışmaların neden olduğu yıkım gibi ciddi sorunlardan muzdariptir. Gazze'deki gençlerin özellikle eski şehirdeki Filistin geleneksel konutlarının mimarisine yönelik farkındalıklarının artırılmasına ihtiyaç var. Bu makale, Filistinli gençlerin kentsel kültürlerinin bir göstergesi olarak Filistin geleneksel evlerinin mimarisine yönelik farkındalığını keşfetmek için Gazze eski kentindeki Al Zahra Kız Lisesi'nde yürütülen bir araştırma projesini özetlemektedir. Araştırma, kızların farkındalığının değerlendirilmesinde kullanılan bir dizi kentsel kültür unsurunu geliştirmek için betimsel analiz ve vaka çalışması analizini kullandı. Öğrencilerin konutun temel mimari unsurları hakkında oldukça bilinçli oldukları tespit edilmiştir. Mimari terimlerle ilgili farkındalıkları daha düşüktü. Filistinli gençleri Filistin geleneksel mimarisinin unsurları ve terimleri hakkında eğitmeye ihtiyaç var. Bu araştırma, Gazze'de bu konuyu ilk kez incelemesi nedeniyle önemlidir. Öğrencileri geleneksel mimarinin kalan eserleriyle ve aynı zamanda onunla ilgili kelime dağarcığıyla ilişkilendirmeye Gazze'deki Eğitim Yetkililerinin dikkatini çekmek için de önemlidir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Kent kültürü, Filistin, Gazze, konut, mimari

ABSTRACT

Traditional buildings in Gaza old town, Palestine have been suffering from serious problems such as lack of conservation, outdated regulation, absence of public awareness, and destruction caused by continuous conflict in the region. There is a need to raise awareness of the youth in Gaza especially the old town towards the architecture of the Palestinian traditional dwellings. This paper outlines a research project conducted in Al Zahra High School for Girls (Al Zahra School herein after), Gaza old town in order to explore the awareness of the Palestinian youth towards the architecture of Palestinian traditional houses as an indicator of their urban culture. The research used descriptive analysis and case study analysis to develop a set of urban culture elements used in the assessment of girls' awareness. It was found that the students were fairly aware of the basic architectural elements of the dwelling. Their awareness of architectural terms was lower.

There is need to educate the Palestinian youth about elements and terms of the Palestinian traditional architecture. This research is important because it is the first to study this issue in Gaza. It is also important for raising the attention of Education Authorities in Gaza to link the students with the remaining artefacts of traditional architecture and at the same time to the vocabulary related to it.

Keywords: Urban culture, Palestine, Gaza, dwelling, architecture

1. INTRODUCTION

The definition of culture is a difficult task and the term culture itself is ubiquitous. The intention here is not to provide a full account of definitions of culture per se. Rather, the goal is to explore some of the definitions of culture as a means to understanding the relationship between culture and the urban environment. This would help to understand the relationship between urban culture and architectural heritage especially the traditional dwelling architecture. The research uses descriptive analysis and case study analysis to develop a set of elements for the study of certain aspects of urban culture namely the architecture of traditional dwellings in Gaza old town, Palestine. These elements were used to design a questionnaire for examining the students' awareness in Al Zahra High School for Girls in Gaza old town for the elements and terms of the Palestinian traditional dwelling architecture.

Gaza is a city of very special circumstances in its all aspects. It has been for decades suffering under siege that seriously affected the whole life of the population including their urban culture. It has been the stage for elongated military conflict that also has damaged the urban environment especially the old traditional structures. One important aspect of this research is that it dealing with the cultural attitudes of the young Palestinians living in these very harsh conditions. It was expected that the students will be totally depressed and frustrated to talk about issues of culture and destroyed old buildings. Yet on the contrary, they showed interest to learn about these issues and they were aware of the architecture of the Palestinian traditional dwelling. The research also highlights the need to raise the awareness of the Palestinian youth towards the physical and perceptual components of traditional Palestinian architecture. This is crucial for building trust and confidence in the youth and to spread between them the seeds of the culture of peace and cooperation.

2. WHAT IS CULTURE?

Culture is related to people, created by them as community and it keeps working to shape them as individuals and communities alike. It also includes the arts, living style, human rights and the orders of norms, values and beliefs that are all communicated in society by different means of communication including language (Geertz, 1973) Culture is continuous and changes with the development of society from its grass roots. It is the sum of spiritual, physical, emotional and theoretical features that distinguish society (Muller, ed. 2005). The semiotics and semantics of culture are the communication frameworks that differentiate one culture from another. They are crucial means for the understanding of culture and its anthropological evolution (Brown, , de González, & McIlwraith, 2017).

3. CULTURE OF DIVERSITY AND PEACE

As much as communities and social groups exist, different sets of cultural frameworks and settings exist. And as humans are spatio-temporal creatures, cultures will keep development and change creating a vast collection of diversified human experiences and practices connected to the histories and geographies of societies. UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity declares that "Culture takes diverse forms across time and space. This diversity is embodied in the uniqueness and plurality of the identities of the groups and societies making up humankind.

As a source of exchange, innovation and creativity, cultural diversity is as necessary for humankind as biodiversity is for nature. In this sense, it is the common heritage of humanity and should be recognized and affirmed for the benefit of present and future generations” (UNESCO, 2002: 62).

Culture of diversity, continuity and change by its nature means cooperation, integration and mediation. This is the culture of peace and at the opposite lies the culture of hatred, isolation and discrimination. This culture by virtue bears deterioration inside its threads and soon will corrode from the inside.

4. THE GOAL OF CULTURE

There is one main goal of culture: to defeat barbarity and to build a more civilized sense of humanity. It is even sometimes argued that humans without culture would not be humans (Johnson, 2013). To attack other cultures in an attempt to destroy and erase them is a crime against humanity. On the contrary, the preservation, conservation, and restoration of cultures is an act of constructing and rehabilitating communities for survival and development.

Therefore, it is of great importance in conflict areas like Gaza to search for a culture of peace to help mediate the serious consequences of living under continuous pressures of fear, depression and the loss of security. As culture by nature has a great bulk of heritage, and the architectural heritage is a cultural inheritance, then architectural heritage can play a crucial role in the development of culture of mediation by connecting the current generations with their architectural past to build confidence and dignity. Architectural heritage conservation is therefore an important tool for the construction and maintenance of culture of peace. The Council of Europe stresses that “Promoting culture as the "soul of democracy" means advocating strong cultural policies and governance aimed at transparency; access; participation and creativity; respect for identity and diversity; intercultural dialogue and cultural rights – as the basis for respectful and tolerant living together in an ever-more complex world.” (Council of Europe, 2020).

5. BASIC COMPONENTS OF CULTURE:

Different classifications are used for the components and elements of culture. Pultar (1997) for example argues that culture has different components including main and secondary components. The main components include language, values, measures, and status. For him, language represents the symbolic framework that helps to raise the society and build its culture through communication and the transferring of skills and knowledge between generations. Language also forms representations for the environment and its components and it constructs the collective memory of the society. At the same time, Barkan (2010) introduces several components of culture in addition to language. They include symbols, norms, rituals, values and artifacts. According to De Rivera (2011), basic components of culture of peace include education, tolerance, gender equality, human rights, and sustainable development.

All these classifications highlight the importance of language as a main component of culture. Language in this sense includes verbal and non-verbal means of communication. Architecture within this framework represents a very strong system of visual communication that conveys cultural symbols and meanings. Yet it should be emphasized that not only physical visual architectural vocabulary is important but also the verbal architectural vocabulary is equally important and needs special consideration. The notion of De Rivera (2011) that education is a component of culture gets a special position in this regard. As culture is a system of inheritance, it depends on teaching and learning between the generations. And it is this process that keeps the vitality and livability of culture. Therefore, connecting architectural heritage to the education system of the community would play a crucial role for the preservation and development of both culture and architectural heritage at the same time.

6. CULTURE AND URBAN FORM

Urban form is the manmade structures and spaces which represents the spatial setting for the living and development of society and the fulfilment of its goals. It is composed of the physical built form and the social settings of the society living in it (Kita, & Hashira, 2007). Urban form is a manifestation of the cultural factors that shape it and direct the human activities within it. Gradually, the urban form constructs an influential framework that reinforces the existing cultural models and impinges them with new attitudes and ideas. And therefore, urban form is considered a main source of urban culture. The confidence of society in its culture can be built and supported by the use of suitable architectural forms and styles that correspond to its precise identity (Bin Abdulla, 1999). The initial starting point for this process is the architecture of the dwelling where the spatial experience of the individual starts in the early stages of his life. This experience depends on the different sets of norms and values of the family which lays down the foundations for individual and thence community value system. This value system is affected by architectural expressions that respond to the need of people to keep certain frameworks for their social norms and life values. These frameworks represent the reservoir for social-spatial expressions and images that form the urban culture.

"Urban landscapes are storehouses of these social memories, because natural features such as hills or harbors, as well as streets, buildings and patterns of settlements, frame the lives of many people and often outlast many lifetimes" (Hayden, 1997: 9).

7. URBAN CULTURE AND THE DWELLING

United Nations Task Team on Habitat III (2015) refers to the urban culture as the culture connected with the built urban form that represents the general physical setting of society. Arab historian and sociologist Ibn Khaldun in his masterpiece, *Al Muqaddimah* "The Introduction" defined the urban culture as the language, values, measures, beliefs and status connected to the creation, development and maintenance of the urban form (Dawood ed. 1967). It includes the symbols, terms and phrases used to refer to and describe the built form. It also includes the style of the built form which can only be shaped according to the wishes and aspirations of the society to attain its needs and to fulfil its goals. Urban culture is also responsible for the orientation of buildings and the configuration of their spatial units and spaces to serve certain beliefs or to observe certain norms or to fulfil certain values and measures (Al Naim, 2001). The dwelling is the major component of the urban form in terms of social setting and physical architectural form (Sharif & Murayama, 2012). Where the family is the basic unit of society, the dwelling is the basic unit of urban form. The dwelling is the initial family formation space and the cradle for building the individual and collective social and cultural identity of its members (Coolen & Ritsuko, 2004).

8. ARCHITECTURAL HERITAGE AND CULTURE

Architectural heritage conservation is usually perceived as the conservation of the tangible part which is the physical form of buildings (Karakul, 2011). This perception overlooks the fact that it is equally important to preserve the intangible part of architectural heritage. This part includes most the names and terms of architectural heritage in addition to the tools and materials. The histories, stories, meanings and values of architectural heritage are all important parts that need to be preserved as part of the overall preservation of the culture of the community (Shahedi, Inangda & Yaacob, 2010). This concept gains great importance in Gaza where cultural heritage has been subject to intentioned aggressive destruction for decades and the greatest part of it has already been lost.

9. TRADITIONAL DWELLING ARCHITECTURE IN THE OLD TOWN OF GAZA:

Traditional dwellings of Gaza are considered the only remaining tangible source of Palestinian dwelling architecture in the city. Wars, neglect, ignorance and poverty have been the main enemies of these dwellings for many decades. The rapid disappearance of these traditional dwellings and the replacement of them with bared concrete structures have been badly affecting the traditional image of the old city and its cultural image, Figure 1. Most of the remaining traditional dwellings in Gaza are concentrated in the old town. The urban character and architectural style of these dwellings belong to the Ottoman period with very few from the Mamluk period (Al Mubayed, 1995). Their main building material is sandstone with little limestone. The main structural system is bearing walls with domed and cross-vaulted roofs. Their architectural features include arches, domes, vaults and cross vaults, Figure 2. In addition to the rooms and services, functional units of the dwelling include a courtyard, iwan (living space opens to the courtyard), and sometimes a fountain in the courtyard and terraces in the upper floors if there is any, Figure 3.



Figure 1. Effects of deterioration and destruction on traditional dwellings in Gaza old town [Iwan center for architectural heritage, Islamic University Gaza]



Figure 2. Al Hato dwelling, Gaza old town. 3D AutoCAD drawing showing its architectural elements: courtyard, arches and iwan [Architecture students drafting and rendering supervised by Dr. Abdurrahman Moahmed]

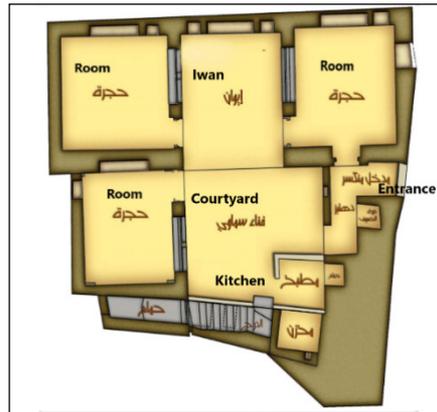


Figure 3: Al Hato dwelling Gaza old town. 2D AutoCAD drawing showing the ground floor plan. [Architecture students drafting and rendering supervised by Dr. Abdurrahman Mohamed]

10. RESEARCH PROBLEM: AWARENESS OF AL ZAHRA SCHOOL STUDENTS TOWARDS THE URBAN CULTURE OF THE TRADITIONAL DWELLING ARCHITECTURE

10.1 Background

Al Zahraa School, Figure 4 is the only high school in Gaza old town. It is located in the middle of the northern edge of the old town. It is directly neighboring one of the largest and most important historical buildings in the town and the whole Gaza region which is El Basha palace, Figure 5. It is also few hundred meters to the north of the most important and largest historical mosque in the region that is Al Omari Mosque, Figure 6. This is in addition to its proximity to a large number of historical dwellings still exhibiting the traditional architectural style. One of these is Al Alami house which is located directly opposite the school, Figure 7. At the same time, it is surrounded by a large mass of contemporary gray concrete buildings, Figure 8. This very special urban setting clearly exhibits the dilemma of urban cultural identity in Gaza old town. This was the main reason for choosing this school for this study.



Figure 4: Al Zahra School in Gaza old town. [Iwan Center for architectural Heritage, Islamic University Gaza]



Figure 5: El Basha palace, Gaza old town. [Iwan Center for architectural Heritage, Islamic University Gaza]



Figure 6: Alami historical dwelling, Gaza old city. [Iwan Center for architectural Heritage, Islamic University Gaza]



Figure 7: Grand Omari Mosque, Gaza old town. [Iwan Center for architectural Heritage, Islamic University Gaza]



Figure 8: Contemporary buildings around Al Zahra School, Gaza old town. [Iwan Center for architectural Heritage, Islamic University Gaza]

Table 1: Traditional architecture dwelling elements used in the 5-point Likert Questionnaire for measuring urban culture of grades 11 and 12 of Al Zahra School, Gaza old town. [Author]

Evaluation of urban culture components related to in dwelling architecture	
Traditional dwelling Architectural elements	Traditional ornaments
	Internal courtyards
	Arches, domes and vaults
	Thick bearing walls
	Natural building materials
	Narrow openings
	Traditional colors
	Acoustics
Traditional dwelling architectural terms	Ventilation
	Proverbs connected with traditional dwelling
	Name of dwelling components
	Names of building materials
	Terms of construction methods
	Names of building tools

10.2 Methodology

The study of awareness of heritage as a component of culture has been a well-established research tradition in many disciplines such as heritage, architecture, and education. Several of these studies (Karadeniz, 2020; Srivastava, 2015; Rouhi, 2017 and Ahmed, 2017) depended on the arrangement of sets of cultural components that were introduced to the interviewees to examine if they were aware of them. It is noticed that due to the wide range of elements of culture, there was no consistency among the studies of the sets of elements that were used. The selection of the elements depended on the scope of the research and the sample of the survey. Karadeniz (2020) used a set of 2 categories: cultural heritage sites and intangible cultural heritage where each of them included several elements.

On the other hand, Srivastava (2015) used a list of 40 elements grouped under 5 categories: national symbols, cultural literature, history and religion, performing arts, and visual arts. For the purpose of this research, the set of cultural elements was developed based on the previous discussion of urban culture, the dwelling, and culture and architectural heritage.

The list included 2 categories: architectural elements of the traditional Palestinian dwelling and architectural terms of the traditional Palestinian dwelling, Table 1.

10.3 The questionnaire

Based on the previously defined set of cultural elements related to the traditional Palestinian dwelling, a questionnaire was designed as a means of quantitative research method to support the descriptive analysis and the case study analysis used above. It was designed as a 5-point Likert questionnaire to collect enough information to help understand the cultural trends of the sample students, Table 1.

10.4 Sample of the study and data collection

The research used Total Population Sampling which is usually used when the number of cases under investigation is small (Etikan,; Musa; & Alkassim, 2016). The students of grades 11 and 12 in Al Zahra High School for Girls were chosen. There were only one class in each level. Most of the students were living in the old town. They were also a suitable age group capable of understanding and interacting with the project. Although very few of them were living in traditional dwellings, they have been experiencing these dwellings as components of the urban environment of the old town. The students were approached with the help of the school administration and the project was introduced to them and the questionnaire was explained. They showed great interest in the project and actively participated in the introduction session. All the students in the two classes participated in the exercise.

10.5 Results and analysis

The results of the survey are presents in Tables 2 and 3; and Charts 1 and 2.

10.5.1 Traditional architecture elements

Table 2 and Chart 1 show that more than half of the traditional dwelling elements got average score 3/5 and above. This indicates that students got some kind of experience either actual or perceptual. Actual if they used to live temporarily or permanently in a dwelling with these elements. Perceptual experience means that they used to get informed about the value of these elements. It is noticed that these five elements comprise the major design and visual elements of the dwelling. The highest total score went to arches, domes and vaults. The following two elements are natural building materials and thick walls. These elements represent the most striking design and visual features of the highest five element. Moreover, they have been the elements of striking images of destruction and deterioration in the traditional dwellings as a result of neglect deterioration or war destruction. The other four elements at the bottom of list in Table 2 got average score less than 3/5 which indicates less experience of the students with them. These elements could be well experienced in complete well-maintained dwellings. Lower score did not mean they were not important. It indicates that students did not get enough actual or perceptual experience of them which highlights the need to bring these elements into the conscious perception of the students in order to use them in building a culture of peace of these students. And this is how education can help to cure a suffering urban culture.

10.5.2 Traditional architecture terms

Table 3 and Chart 2 show that the average value of knowledge of traditional architecture terms for the majority of the students was 3 and below. This result is quite below the result for traditional architecture elements at least for more than half of the elements. This can refer to the fact that visual images are stronger in affecting students' appreciation of traditional architecture. These images are part of the daily students' experience of existing urban form. Yet these images could not contribute to the preservation of the vocabulary and terms associated with them. This is because of the lack of family awareness of these terms and the lack of interest to use them. It has been also caused by the lack of education and awareness building of the students and the community alike on the importance of these terms as vital part of the traditional Palestinian urban culture.

Table 2: Results of the survey for the traditional architecture elements. [Author]

	Traditional architecture elements	No. Of students	Average score	Total score
1	Traditional ornaments	4	5	20
2	Internal courtyards	1	4.5	4.5
3	Arches, domes and vaults	10	4	40
4	Thick bearing walls	7	3.5	22.5
5	Natural building materials	8	3	24
6	Narrow openings	7	2.5	17.5
7	Traditional colors	4	2	8
8	Acoustics elements	4	1.5	6
9	Ventilation elements	6	1	6

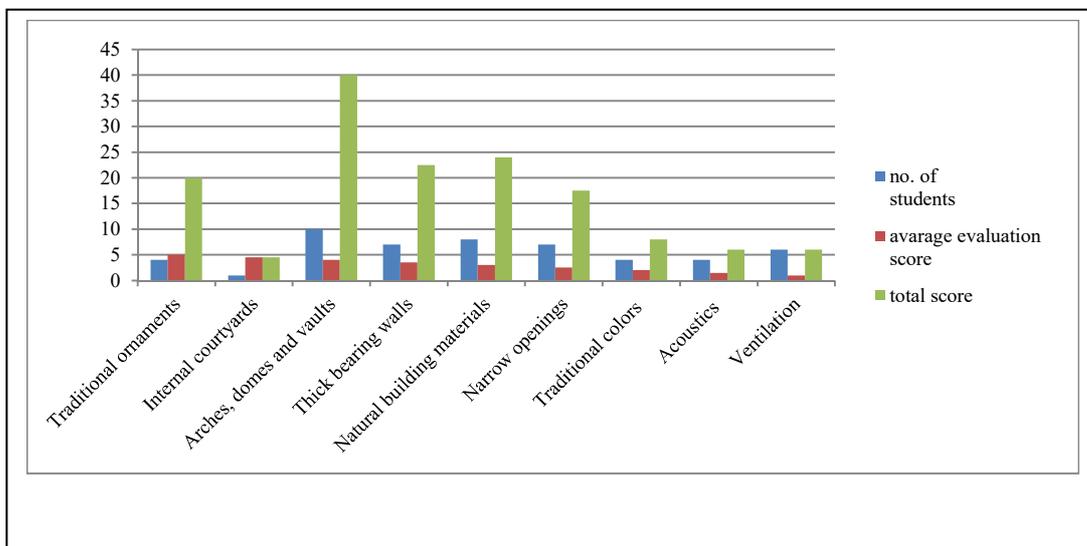


Chart 1: Comparison of the students' evaluation of traditional architecture elements. [Author]

Conclusion

The study showed the effect of the traditional architectural elements and terms used in the traditional Palestinian dwelling in Gaza old town in shaping the urban culture of the students of Al Zahra high school for Girls. The preservation of these buildings has great importance for the Palestinian generations to provide continuous inspirations for traditional architecture as an important pillar of Palestinian culture. It is also indispensable for the ministry of education to concentrate on the inclusion of this architecture in the school curriculum and to direct schools to make more site visits to these buildings and to conduct activities in or around them. On the contrary, the study showed the deterioration of the vocabulary and terms associated with the traditional architecture of the Palestinian dwelling. It is also needed to be proposed here to include such terms in the school curricula. This would greatly help in their preservation and in strengthening the connection of the students with their architectural heritage.

Limitations and future research

The research was limited to study the of the urban culture of two classes only in Al Zahra High School for Girls in Gaza. It was not possible to conduct the research in other classes in the same school or in other schools either in Gaza old town or outside it. The research also could not link the knowledge of students of architectural elements and terms of the traditional Palestinian dwelling with other components of urban culture. It was neither possible to link any of these cultural components to other dwelling settings like ownership, age, ... etc.

The study left the door open for future research to examine the reasons behind the deterioration of traditional architectural vocabulary in the urban culture of these students. There is a need to conduct similar researches in other schools in Gaza old town in particular and elsewhere in Gaza in order to arrive at more generalizations on the actual connections between urban culture and architectural heritage and the suitable strategies for improvement.

Table 3: Results of the survey for the Traditional architecture terms. [Author]

	Traditional architecture terms	No. Of students	Average evaluation score	Total score
1	Proverbs connected with traditional dwelling	15	3	45
2	Names of dwelling components	14	2.5	35
3	Names of building materials	13	2	26
4	Terms of construction methods	5	1.5	7.5
5	Names of building tools	4	1	4

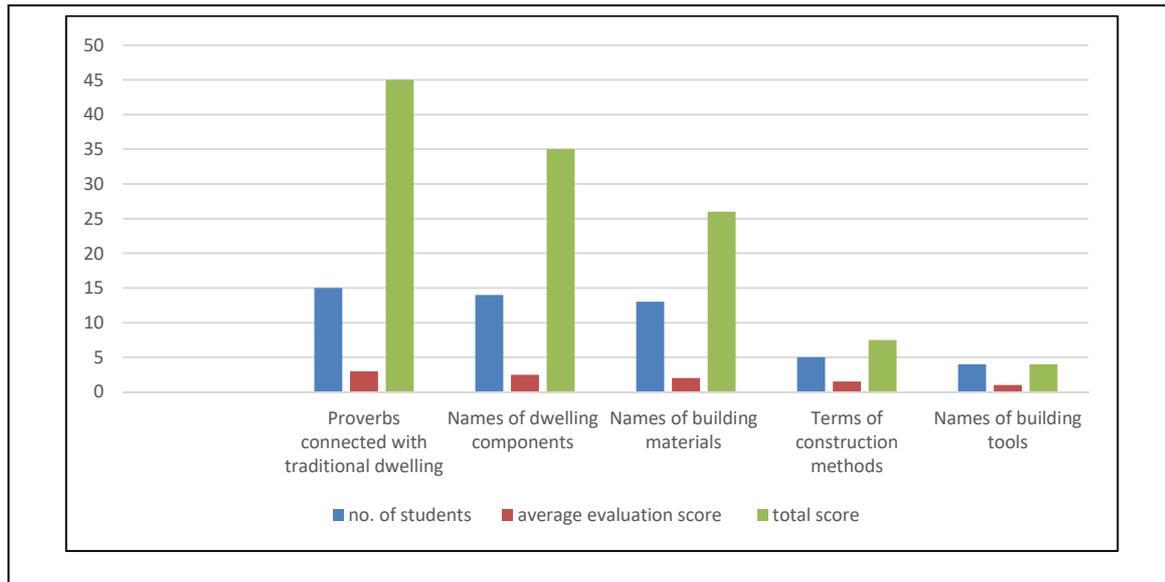


Chart 2: Comparison of the students' evaluation of traditional architecture terms. [Author]

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Privacy of the participants in the questionnaire

The author certifies that the consent was obtained from the students participated in the questionnaire and certify that their privacy rights was observed.

Disclosure and Conflicts of Interest

The author discloses that there are no financial or other substantive conflict of interest that might affect the research

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