Analysis of the Arabic Language Test Questions at the CELAD Institute from the Perspective of CEFR Standards

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Abstract

This study aims to describe and analyze the Arabic language test items used at the CELAD Institute, which serves as an assessment tool to measure the Arabic proficiency of students in the Faculty of Islamic Studies at Universitas Islam Riau. Specifically, the research identified the characteristics of CELAD's Arabic language test items and determined their alignment with Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) proficiency levels. This study adopted a descriptive-qualitative design with a content-analysis approach. The findings indicate that: (1) CELAD's Arabic language test items are integrative, communicative, and interactive in nature, and fall within the category of standardized tests that include proficiency and achievement assessments; and (2) the competency standards reflected in the test align with CEFR, corresponding to level B1 for reading skills and level A2 for speaking and writing skills. This research is expected to serve as an evaluative reference for stakeholders in the further development of the CELAD Arabic language test. Additionally, the findings may offer a model for the development of other Arabic language tests that have not yet been standardized using an international reference framework.

Keywords: CELAD, Arabic Language Test, CEFR, Test Items.

Introduction

Language testing is a tool for measuring language proficiency that plays a crucial role in evaluating learning outcomes[1]. Beyond merely providing information on the success of the language learning process, language tests also serve as benchmarks for assessing the quality of the instruments being used[2]. As a measurement tool, a test must demonstrate accuracy so that its results genuinely represent the intended abilities[3]. Therefore, test development must follow proper testing standards, including validity, reliability, an appropriate level of difficulty, and strong discriminative power[4].

Unlike most other forms of assessment, language testing possesses distinctive characteristics[5]. Language tests measure not only one's knowledge about the language but also the ability to use the language[6] in meaningful contexts[7]. For this reason, language test design must be grounded in a philosophical framework aligned with the linguistic approach that informs its development[8]. Consequently, the content and types of language tests are influenced by how language is conceptualized across multiple disciplines, including linguistics, psycholinguistics, sociolinguistics, philosophy of science, and ethnolinguistics, as well as other fields closely related to language learning[9].

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[1] Jaeseong Lee et al., "Automated Testing Linguistic Capabilities of NLP Models," *ACM Transactions on Software Engineering and Methodology* 33, no. 7 (2024), https://doi.org/10.1145/3672455.

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[6] Noza Aflisia, Rizka Salsabillah, and Asma Binti Abdul Rahman, "Review of Arabic Language Books Independent Curriculum in Madrasah Ibtidaiyah: Materials, Methods, Advantages, and Disadvantages," *Al-Muktamar As-Sanawi Li Al-Lughah Al-'Arabiyyah (MUSLA)* 2, no. 1 (October 9, 2024): 85–100, https://doi.org/10.24042/albayan.v14i2.12514.

[7] Albarra Sarbaini and Novita Rahmi, "Enhancing Arabic Speaking Skills: A Study on Instructional Design, Implementation, and Assessment," *Arabiyatuna: Jurnal Bahasa Arab* 8, no. 2 (October 22, 2024): 641–62, https://doi.org/10.29240/jba.v8i2.10828.

[8] Resti Septikasari et al., "Teknik Penilaian Tes Dan Non Tes," *Jurnal Ilmiah Multidisipline* 1, no. 11 (2023): 761–64.

[9] Roviin, "Evaluasi Pembelajaran Bahasa Arab (Kajian Tentang Instrumen Tes)," 2020, 195–213.

In addition to selecting an appropriate test model, another essential aspect of language test development is the framework or reference used in constructing the assessment[10]. This becomes even more important when the test aims to function as a standardized instrument, as it must follow guidelines established by authorized institutions[11]. Among the most widely recognized frameworks in foreign language education is the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), developed by European scholars[12]. Others include the ACTFL standards developed in the United States[13] and the IMTA standard recently introduced by Arab researchers specifically for Arabic language instruction[14].

The CEFR has long been acknowledged as a global framework for classifying foreign language proficiency, particularly in Europe[15]. It outlines six levels of competence, including A1, A2, B1, B2, C1, and C2,[16] which provide institutions and stakeholders with a clear basis for assessing an individual's language qualifications[17].

Recent observations have identified several websites that apply CEFR-based Arabic proficiency classifications, including toafl.com, arabiconline.eu, learning.aljazeera.net, and ArabicWorkshop.com[18]. This development indicates

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[10] Eliana Pangestika, R. Umi Baroroh, and Salma Lulu Maknuna, "Innovation Discrete Approach Based on Arabic Language Test Assessment," *Arabiyatuna: Jurnal Bahasa Arab* 8, no. 1 (May 27, 2024): 395, https://doi.org/10.29240/jba.v8i1.8992.

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[15] Gökhan Haldun DEMİRDÖVEN, "CEFR Updates (2020)-Based next-Gen Immersive Learning in 5 Steps," *Frontiers in Education* 10 (2025), https://doi.org/10.3389/feduc.2025.1567249.

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significant progress in the creation of standardized Arabic language tests across various countries[19].

Despite these advancements, a universally recognized standardized Arabic proficiency test, equivalent to the TOEFL for English[20], has yet to be established. Meanwhile, many Islamic educational institutions require standardized tools to assess their students' Arabic proficiency[21]. In the absence of a unified standard, numerous institutions have created their own in-house Arabic language tests to evaluate student competencies within their respective contexts[22].

For instance, UIN SUSKA Pekanbaru has developed an internal Arabic proficiency examination through its Language Center. Other institutions have established their own versions as well, such as the TOAFL test at UIN Jakarta, the IKLA test at UIN SUKA Yogyakarta, and the ILAIK test at IAIN Salatiga[23].

Efforts to standardize Arabic proficiency assessments for graduates of Islamic Higher Education Institutions (PTAIN) have been proposed for years, yet no consensus has been reached[24]. Consequently, Arabic language tests across institutions vary widely in their standards. At UIN Jakarta and UIN SUKA Yogyakarta, for example, Arabic instruction focuses primarily on reading and comprehending religious texts relevant to each faculty and study program, which naturally influences the test models and content used[25].

The Center for Language and Academic Development (CELAD), operating under the Faculty of Islamic Studies (FAI) at Universitas Islam Riau, is one such language institution established in 2019. It serves as a facilitator for the Faculty by offering foreign language instruction, namely Arabic and English, to all students regardless of program affiliation.

Among CELAD's programs is a two-semester Arabic language course for first-year students, culminating in written and oral examinations designed to assess both learning outcomes and overall Arabic proficiency. To support this program, CELAD has developed its own Arabic proficiency test, designed by its

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team of instructors. As a proficiency test, the CELAD Arabic Test requires further study to determine the extent to which its items meet established standards, particularly the CEFR, which serves as an internationally recognized framework.

Research on the application of CEFR within Arabic language education, such as in curriculum design, textbooks, and instructional materials, has been widely conducted. However, studies examining the alignment between institutionally developed Arabic tests and CEFR proficiency levels remain limited, such as Zaenuri's study on the TOSA Arabic Test.[26] Research on the CELAD Arabic Test is even more scarce. This type of study is essential to determine whether the CELAD test reflects international standards and whether its test format and item types align with principles of language testing and Arabic test item classification. Such analysis will help determine whether the CELAD test qualifies as a standardized, high-quality instrument capable of accurately measuring Arabic proficiency.

This study employed a descriptive qualitative approach using content analysis. This method was selected because the primary objective was to analyze CELAD Arabic Test items and determine their alignment with CEFR competency indicators. The analysis was conducted systematically by categorizing the items according to skill areas and mapping them onto CEFR proficiency descriptors. The data used in this study consisted of (1) primary data in the form of CELAD-developed Arabic test items and (2) secondary data from books, articles, and journals related to language testing and CEFR. Data collection was carried out through documentation, while the analysis involved: (1) classifying items based on language skills, (2) mapping CEFR levels using proficiency descriptors, (3) analyzing items according to their assigned levels, and (4) interpreting results descriptively.

Findings and Discussion
The Language Testing Approach in the CELAD Arabic Language Test

The language testing approach refers to the underlying perspective that shapes how language skills and materials are presented in test items. Scholars generally classify these approaches into several categories, including the discrete, integrative, pragmatic, communicative, and authentic approaches[27].

From the perspective of item presentation, when language skills or components are tested separately, the approach is known as the discrete

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[26] Muhammad Zaenuri, Muhammad Nur Kholis, and Anisatul Barokah, "Analisis Soal TOSA (Test of Standard Arabic) Mengacu Pada CEFR (Common European Framework of Reference For Language)," *An Nabighoh: Jurnal Pendidikan Dan Pembelajaran Bahasa Arab* 22, no. 02 (2020): 169, https://doi.org/10.32332/an-nabighoh.v22i02.2219.

[27] Eka Dewi Rahmawati, "Pendekatan Komunikatif Dalam Tes Kemampuan Berbicara Bahasa Arab," *Lugawiyyat* 3, no. 1 (2021): 77–95, https://doi.org/10.18860/lg.v3i1.12321.

approach. When skills are assessed in a combined manner, it is referred to as the integrative approach. The discrete approach focuses on evaluating a single linguistic component or skill in isolation, based on specific assessment criteria. In contrast, the integrative approach aims to measure authentic communicative ability by combining multiple language skills and components within a unified assessment[28].

The pragmatic approach views language comprehension as something shaped not only by linguistic elements within a text, but also by the extralinguistic context surrounding it. Test items developed under this approach measure how well learners can use linguistic forms appropriately in real communicative situations. Meanwhile, the communicative approach emphasizes functional language use, prioritizing communicative purposes in receptive (listening and reading) and productive (speaking and writing) skills[29].

The authentic approach assesses the process and the product of language use simultaneously. It prioritizes communicative competence rather than purely linguistic competence. Test items based on this approach evaluate the accuracy and appropriateness of language within real-life contexts commonly encountered in society[30].

When the CELAD Arabic language test items are examined through these frameworks, it becomes clear that the test adopts the integrative approach.[31] This is evident from the range of test items that cover multiple skills such as reading, writing, and speaking, as well as linguistic components including vocabulary and grammar/syntax.

For test items assessing reading skills and linguistic components such as vocabulary and structure, this is reflected in the following instruction:

<div dir="rtl">

(ب). اقرأ هذا النص جيدًا ، ثم أجب عن الأسئلة التي تليه !

</div>

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[28] Herdah, Firmansyah, and Ali Rahman, "Pendekatan Tes Diskret Dalam Pembelajaran Bahasa Arab," *AL-ISHLAH: Jurnal Pendidikan Islam* 18, no. 1 (2020): 65–84, https://doi.org/10.35905/alishlah.v18i1.1258.

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[31] Hasan Saefuloh and Noza Aflisia, "Konvergensi Separated Dan All in One System Dalam Pembelajaran Bahasa Arab Di Pondok Pesantren Al-Muqaddas Cirebon," *Arabia* 14, no. 1 (July 14, 2022): 17, https://doi.org/10.21043/arabia.v14i1.13581.

These instructions require test-takers to demonstrate clear comprehension of the passage, as shown through the accuracy of their responses. All test items in this section are designed to measure the degree to which test-takers understand the content of the reading text.

Furthermore, the questions accompanying the reading passage also assess mastery of vocabulary and sentence structure within the text. Without a solid understanding of these linguistic elements, comprehension becomes limited, which in turn affects the accuracy of responses.

For writing skills, the CELAD test includes a narrative writing task, formulated as follows:

(د). اختر واحدًا من هذه العناوين، ثم اكتب ما لا يقل عن خمسة أسطر مما يتعلق بالعنوان المختار!

This instruction indicates that the test deliberately measures writing proficiency while simultaneously assessing the use of vocabulary and sentence structure.

For speaking skills, assessment is based on the oral examination guidelines provided in the CELAD test. These guidelines include a list of oral questions asked by the examiner. An example is shown below:

Table 1. Oral Questions

الدرجة	أجوبة الطالب الممتحن	قائمة أسئلة المدرس الممتحن
		ما اسمك الكامل ؟ ومن أنت؟
		أين ولدت ؟ ومتى ولدت ؟ وأين نشأت ؟
		كم عدد أسرتك ؟ وكم إخوانك أو أخواتك ؟

In addition to the integrative approach, the CELAD Arabic language test also incorporates elements of the communicative and pragmatic approaches. This is reflected in test formats that emphasize the ability to use language in authentic situations. The following example demonstrates this:

الطالب : السلام عليكم، أريد كتابًا في علم الفقه، لو سمحت!

الموظف : وعليكم السلام، أهلا ! وما اسم الكتب الذي تريده ؟

الطالب : أريد مما ألفه الشيخ النووي

الموظف : حسنًا، الكتاب موجود في الرفوف في جناح (أ)، أي خدمة ؟

الطالب : شكرًا.

(أ). أجن عن الأسئلة التالية مستعينًا بهذا النص الحواري!

1. أين يقع الحوار ؟

2. أي كتاب يريده الطالب؟

3. أين يقع الكتاب المطلوب

This example clearly illustrates the use of communicative and pragmatic approaches. The test item presents a dialogue situated within a specific context, location, and set of participants. Test-takers must understand the contextual meaning, setting, and roles of the speakers in order to respond appropriately. This demonstrates an emphasis on real-life language use, situational relevance, and contextual interpretation.

Types of tests in the CELAD Arabic language examination

From the perspective of test classification, the CELAD Arabic language test is categorized as a standardized test because it meets several criteria: (1) it measures specific aspects, (2) it is administered under uniform, standardized conditions, (3) it demonstrates high validity, reliability, and objectivity, (4) it maintains consistent standards, and (5) it can be applied to a wide group of test takers.

The CELAD Arabic language test was formally developed by a team appointed by the faculty leadership in coordination with the CELAD administration. This team consists of Arabic language instructors who possess active proficiency in Arabic, extensive teaching experience across secondary, higher secondary, and university levels, and academic backgrounds in Arabic Language Education from both domestic and international institutions, such as UIN Sultan Syarif Kasim (Pekanbaru), UIN Maulana Malik Ibrahim (Malang), Al-Azhar University (Egypt), Syarif Ali Islamic University (Brunei Darussalam), and the Khartoum Institute of Arabic Teaching (Sudan).

Furthermore, the CELAD Arabic test was pilot-tested with a sample group consisting of Islamic studies lecturers and students from the Faculty of Islamic Studies. The results of this pilot phase demonstrated high validity, reliability, and objectivity.

This Arabic language test is administered to all students across every major within the Faculty of Islamic Studies, including Islamic Religious Education (PAI), Early Childhood Islamic Education (PIAUD), Sharia Economics (EKIS), Sharia Banking (PBS), and Arabic Language Education (PBA).

From the perspective of its purpose, the CELAD Arabic language test can be classified as both a proficiency test and an achievement test. This dual function is due to the test measuring not only the general Arabic language competence of students within the Faculty of Islamic Studies but also the extent to which the learning objectives of Arabic courses have been achieved.

To support this purpose, CELAD offers Arabic language instruction through a 2-credit course delivered over two semesters. The instruction is conducted by selected tutors using official CELAD modules. After completing these two semesters, students take the CELAD Arabic language test. This arrangement ensures that the test items are directly aligned with the learning objectives and course content taught throughout the program.

The CELAD Arabic language test format and proficiency levels according to the CEFR

The CEFR defines six levels of foreign language proficiency: Beginner (A1), Elementary (A2), Intermediate (B1), Upper Intermediate (B2), Advanced (C1), and Proficient (C2). Each level represents specific qualifications of language ability as outlined by the CEFR and covers four core language skills: listening, reading, speaking, and writing.

Below is an overview of the six CEFR proficiency levels.

Table 2. Comparison of CEFR Levels

CEFR Level	Description
A1	Able to understand and use very simple everyday expressions.
A2	Able to communicate in simple and routine tasks.
B1	Able to understand and use language to communicate in everyday situations.
B2	Able to understand more complex topics and interact effectively with native speakers.
C1	Able to use the language flexibly for social, academic, or professional purposes.
C2	Able to understand with near-perfect accuracy and speak spontaneously.

When the CELAD Arabic language test was analyzed against these six proficiency levels, the results revealed that the test items correspond to the Intermediate (B1) level across three language skills: (1) reading, (2) writing, and (3) speaking, as shown in the table below.

Table 3. Levels Across Three Language Skill Areas

CEFR Level	Reading	Writing	Speaking

A1			
A2		√	√
B1	√		
B2			
C1			
C2			

From the table above, it is evident that the competency standards for each section of the CELAD Arabic language test vary in level. This variation is based on the weighting and distribution of the test items within the CELAD examination.

Based on the reading test items in the CELAD Language Test, the content includes everyday expressions, vocabulary related to daily professions, and descriptions of common events. The table below presents the themes covered in the listening proficiency test items.

Table 4. Materials Covered in the Listening Proficiency Test Items

Theme	Number of Questions
Daily activities at home	1, 12, 22, 35
Daily activities at university	2, 23, 29
Daily activities at school	3
Travel and transportation	4, 34
Work and jobs	5, 6, 10, 14, 15, 13, 35, 36, 37
Health	8, 33
Surrounding environment	16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21

For the theme of travel and transportation, the following is an example of a reading test item text.

اقرأ النص جيدا ثم اختر الكلمات المناسبة بالخيار!

١) غسل شريف ملابسه وجفّفها تحت ضوء الشمس ثم نظف أدوات حجيرته واسترّاح
برهة ثم استعد للعمل آخر

أ. الأنشطة الشهرية   ب. الأنشطة الأسبوعية

ج. الأنشطة اليومية   د. الأنشطة السنوية

Based on the samples from the classification and test items above, and after analyzing them according to the CEFR level descriptors, it was found that the CELAD Arabic language test items for the reading skill correspond to level B1.

In the writing component, students demonstrate the ability to compose moderately long texts accurately and appropriately, both in grammatical structure and vocabulary use.

Meanwhile, in the speaking component, students are able to communicate more effectively in everyday situations, although they may still rely on simple language patterns and remain limited to familiar, routine topics.

Conclusion

Based on the analysis of the CELAD Arabic language test, it can be concluded that the approaches applied in its design are integrative, communicative, and pragmatic. In terms of construction, the CELAD Arabic language test falls under the category of a standardized test, while in terms of purpose, it functions as both a proficiency test and an achievement test. However, when compared with international benchmarks such as the CEFR, the test has not yet achieved full alignment with CEFR proficiency levels. In addition, the test does not include listening components, which further indicates that the CELAD Arabic language test has not fully met international testing standards. As a result, the test outcomes cannot yet be recognized at the international level. Hence, it is expected that the development of the CELAD Arabic language test will fully adopt global language proficiency frameworks such as the CEFR or comparable standards. This study therefore recommends two key points: (1) the development of Arabic language competency standards based on international frameworks, and (2) the inclusion of listening proficiency items within those competency standards.

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