



Proceeding of International Conference on Arabic Language (INCALA)



Organized by Arabic Department, Faculty of Letters, Universitas Negeri Malang

The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) Representation in SIMLA Arabic Language Test

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to determine the representation of CEFR in the Syahadah Ikhtibar al Lughah Al Arabiyyah (SIMLA) test at the Islamic University of Indonesia. This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach with content analysis and observation. Meanwhile, seen from the type of research, it is a library and field research. The researcher conducted direct observation of the SIMLA test. The data sources in this study consist of: 1) Primary data sources taken from SIMLA test questions 2) Secondary data in this study in the form of books, articles and journals discussing language tests and CEFR, and other documents that can be used to support this research. The results indicates that the competency standards contained in the SIMLA questions compared with the CEFR standards can be concluded that for the fahmu al-masmu category in the SIMLA competency standards refer to CEFR levels A1 to C1, the al-Asalib wa at-Tarakib test in SIMLA refers to CEFR levels A1 to B2, and the fahmu al-maqr'u' test in SIMLA refers to CEFR B1 to C1.

Keyword

CEFR; Arabic Language Competency Test; SIMLA; Development of Language Test

مستخلص البحث

تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى تحديد تمثيل الإطار المرجعي الأوروبي المشترك للغات (CEFR) في اختبار شهادة اختبار اللغة العربية (SIMLA) في الجامعة الإسلامية بإندونيسيا. تعتمد هذه الدراسة على منهج وصفي نوعي مع تحليل المحتوى والملاحظة. ومن حيث نوع البحث، فهو بحث مكتبي وميداني. وقد أجرى الباحث ملاحظة مباشرة لاختبار SIMLA. وتتكون مصادر البيانات في هذه الدراسة من: (1) مصادر بيانات أولية مأخوذة من أسئلة اختبار (2) بيانات ثانوية في هذه الدراسة، وهي عبارة عن كتب ومقالات ومجلات تتناول اختبارات اللغة والإطار المرجعي الأوروبي المشترك للغات، بالإضافة إلى وثائق أخرى يمكن استخدامها لدعم هذا البحث. تشير النتائج إلى أنه يمكن استنتاج أن معايير الكفاءة الواردة في أسئلة SIMLA بالمقارنة مع معايير CEFR بالنسبة لقسم الفهم

المسموع في معايير الكفاءة SIMLA تشير إلى مستويات CEFR A1 إلى C1، واختبار الأساليب والتراكيب في SIMLA يشير إلى مستويات CEFR A1 إلى B2، واختبار الفهم المقروء في SIMLA يشير إلى مستويات CEFR B1 إلى C1.

الأطور المرجعية الأوروبية المشتركة ١؛ شهادة اختبار مهارة اللغة العربية ٢

كلمات أساسية

Introduction

Arabic is one of Smith's languages which is used to communicate by Sam's children and grandchildren, namely the residents between the two great rivers and the Arabian peninsula. Among their famous languages are Arabic, Syriac, Hebrew, Assyrian, Babylonian, and Abyssinian. Arabic is a language that has experienced a lot of development among these languages. Arabic comes from the Arabian peninsula, or commonly called 'Arabiyyat from Himyarite, Babylonian, Hebrew and Abyssinia, which still has its own characteristics. (Zaidan 2013). In Indonesia, Muslims traditionally learn Arabic from an early age, from kindergarten through elementary school, middle school, and on through university, both private and public. The curriculum used follows the directives of the government, universities, and research institutions, and some schools or madrasahs use their own curricula.

The curriculum encompasses related concepts: subjects, educational programs, and educational units. One concept related to the curriculum is the subject, a system in which students, teachers, and educational materials interact. This educational system consists of several small educational units with specific objectives, content, and educational resources. It can also be taught using various methods within specific study periods and for specific student levels. These are all part of the curriculum system. (Al-Tamimi 2015). In line with the educational process, efforts are needed to continually update and improve the curriculum. A good curriculum is one that is in line with current developments, scientific knowledge, societal needs, and national trends. (Nurdianto 2020).

In an educational process, one important aspect that needs to be considered is learning evaluation. This is because evaluation is the only aspect that measures the effectiveness of a learning process. One of the main goals of educational evaluation is to gain knowledge regarding the level of effectiveness (accuracy in achieving goals) and efficiency (use of resources, personnel, funds, and time) in a progressive learning process. Another reason is that evaluation also aims to gain knowledge regarding student learning outcomes after participating in a planned learning process. It is important to note that evaluation is not only conducted on students in the classroom, but also on the curriculum, methods, learning media, teachers, the readability of textbooks, and so on. (Yusuf and Ar-Rafi'i 2003).

Therefore, the evaluation process is not only important for students in various aspects, but also benefits educators, parents, heads of institutions, the community, and even the government. All parties and components have a role and share in conducting evaluations at their respective scales. Therefore, evaluation plays a very strategic role in the development and advancement of the education and learning system itself. (Khathir 1983).

One type of evaluation in Arabic language learning is a test or assessment. As a tool, tests are designed based on the objectives set by the test creator. Furthermore, the material and learning objectives also influence this. These tests are administered to evaluate and assess student achievement or mastery of the material. An Arabic language test can be defined as a series of questions about Arabic language material, designed to be answered by students. From these answers, their level of achievement and progress in the Arabic language learning program can be determined and measured. (Thu'aimah 1989).

The Arabic language acquisition test is intended to assess what students have learned after completing or gaining educational and learning experiences over a specific period of time. The language proficiency test is not intended to assess students' language acquisition and is not tied to a specific curriculum, textbook, or learning program period. (Wahab n.d.).

In addition to TOAFL held by UIN Jakarta, TOSA by UIN Surakarta, and IKLA by UIN Yogyakarta, the Islamic University of Indonesia, through its language institute, the Central for International Language and Cultural Studies (CILACS), holds an Arabic language competency test called *Syahadah al-Ikhtibar li Maharah al-Lughah al-Arabiyyah* (SIMLA). This test is an official Arabic language competency measurement tool held by CILACS, Islamic University of Indonesia. This test can be used by students, teachers, academics, practitioners, and the general public. After taking the test, participants will receive a certificate that can be used to continue their studies, apply for jobs, and even obtain scholarships.

Previous research has shown that TOSA test items are designed using an integrative, communicative, and pragmatic approach. Furthermore, TOSA is a standardized test used to measure the testee's Arabic language competence, not their mastery of the material being taught. (Zaenuri, Kholis, and Barokah 2020). Another study discussed the development of Arabic language teaching materials based on the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) to improve Arabic language skills. The results showed that the quality of CEFR-based Arabic language textbooks for students at MI Darussolihin Yogyakarta was categorized as Good (B), with a score of 74.7% out of a maximum of 100% (Rohman and Rosyadi 2021). Regarding the development of Arabic language tests in Indonesia, according to

Muhbib, it can be concluded that standard Arabic language proficiency tests in Indonesia, the Arab world and internationally have not received serious attention.

Based on the introduction above, the researcher intends to analyze the SIMLA Arabic language competency test conducted by Cilacs UII in accordance with the CEFR. This study aims to explain and explore the SIMLA test in more depth and analyze it in accordance with the CEFR. In relation to previous research, this study is expected to complement the analysis of Arabic language competency tests in Indonesia based on the CEFR, and serve as a reference in the development and evaluation of Arabic language competency tests in Indonesia.

Methods (منهجية البحث)

This study aims to determine the development of Arabic language competency tests in Indonesia and to determine the CEFR reference in the SIMLA test at the Islamic University of Indonesia. This study uses a qualitative approach, namely research that collects qualitative data in the form of oral or written and objects that are observed in detail so that the implied meaning in the document or object can be captured. Meanwhile, seen from the type of research, it is a library and field research. The researcher conducted direct observation of the SIMLA test. The data sources in this study consist of: 1) Primary data sources are basic data originating from original sources used to answer the research. The primary data in this study are SIMLA test questions. 2) Secondary data are supporting data in the form of books and other documents used in library research. Secondary data in this study include books, articles and journals that discuss language tests and the CEFR, and other documents that can be used to support this research.

Results & Discussion (نتائج البحث ومناقشاتها)

Competency Leveling on the CEFR

In determining the success of a measurement tool, the question model plays a crucial role. This is especially true in language learning, as it presents a distinct characteristic compared to other forms of learning, as language is a competency or skill, not simply knowledge. A language test measures at least two aspects: theoretical language mastery, which views language as a structured system. Second, practical language proficiency, which examines how a person communicates in that language. (Andriani 2014). These two elements then form the basis for developing the components of a test. In SIMLA, for example, the questions are designed to measure the testee's ability to understand and use Arabic in various situations, using correct nahwiyah (syntax) and sharfiyyah (morphology) rules.

After determining the measurement tool, the next step is to establish language competency standards. With these standards, a testee's score can be determined. This score reflects the testee's language competency, and leveling can then be performed based on the scores obtained. Establishing Arabic language standards is an interesting topic because its structure and agreement are not as neat and concise as those for measuring English language competency. SIMLA, in particular, as a standardized measurement tool, must adhere to standards developed by linguists and align with tests conducted by internationally recognized language institutions.

The Thu'aimah divides a person's language competency into several levels, both in terms of linguistic elements and language skills. These Thu'aimah provisions can serve as a reference in developing Arabic language competency standards as a reference for developing SIMLA. (Thu'aimah 1989).

Several language institutions around the world have developed language competency levels that are then used as a reference in developing standardized tests, one of which is the CEFR. Among the language tests that refer to the CEFR are the International English Language Test System (TOEC or TOEIC), the Cambridge English Language Assessment, the International English Language Testing System (IELTS), the Test de francais international (TFI), and so on. (Canadian Association of Second Language Teachers 2013).

The CEFR itself is an international standard for describing a person's language competence. The CEFR stems from the need to define and measure language proficiency levels, through agreement among various stakeholders in the field of second language or foreign language education at the national and international levels. The CEFR's purpose is to help stakeholders clarify the levels of proficiency required by existing standards, tests, and examinations, and to facilitate comparisons between different qualification systems.

The CEFR defines six levels of foreign language competency: 1) Beginner or A1; 2) Elementary or A2; 3) Intermediate or B1; 4) Upper intermediate or B2; 5) Advanced or C1; and 6) Proficient or C2. Each level represents a language proficiency qualification as defined in the CEFR. These qualifications are then translated into test questions. (Al-Abidy, Al-Khalifah, and Dkk n.d.).

At the A1 or Beginner level, the competencies that must be mastered are: 1) understanding and using everyday language expressions and very basic phrases designed to meet very limited communication needs, 2) being able to introduce oneself and others, for example by conducting question and answer activities with detailed questions about someone such as where they live, the people they know, and the things they own, and 3) being able to interact in a simple way in a conversation with others slowly and clearly. And at the A2 or Elementary level, the

competencies that must be mastered are: 1) understanding sentences and phrases frequently used in everyday life such as basic information about oneself, family, shopping and local geography, 2) communicating in simple and routine topics that require a simple and direct understanding of familiar and routine matters, 3) explaining simply about one's personality and surroundings, as well as urgent needs.

Meanwhile, at the B1 level, or *Mustawa Mutawasith Tsalits* (Intermediate), the competencies that must be mastered are: 1) Understanding the main points of familiar and obvious topics, such as business, vacations, and school; 2) Dealing with situations that are likely to arise while traveling in areas where the language is spoken; 3) Writing simple texts on familiar or personal topics; 4) Briefly describing experiences, events, dreams, hopes, and aspirations, providing reasons and explanations.

And at the B2 level, or *Mustawa Mutawasith Rabi'* (Upper Intermediate), the competencies that must be mastered are: 1) Understanding the main ideas of complex texts, whether on abstract or specific topics, including discussions on specific fields; 2) Communicating with a level of fluency and spontaneity that allows for regular communication with native speakers without pauses for either party; 3) Producing detailed and clear texts on a variety of topics, explaining one's perspective on topical issues and commenting on the advantages and disadvantages from various perspectives.

Meanwhile, at level C1 or *Mustawa Mutaqadim Khamis* (Advanced), the competencies that must be mastered are: 1) Understanding various long texts and searching for and analyzing hidden meanings, b) Expressing oneself fluently and spontaneously without seeking too much explanation with various expressions, 3) Using language flexibly and effectively for social, academic, and work purposes, 4) Producing texts that provide clear, well-organized, and detailed information on complex themes, demonstrating the use of structured and communicative patterns.

At the highest level, namely level C2 or *Mustawa Mutaqaddim Sadis* (Proficient), the competencies mastered are: 1) Being able to easily understand and articulate everything read and heard, 2) Easily repeating conversations, reasons, instructions, and arguments from various written and spoken references, 3) Being able to draw conclusions well, with the ability to speak competently, in detail, and with a high degree of eloquence. (Council of Europe 2001).

From the description above, if you pay close attention, you can understand that the CEFR contains a descriptive scheme that includes language, language skills and vocabulary presented together as a whole, taking into account cognitive, emotional and socio-cultural levels. (Khasanah 2019).

To use the CEFR as a reference in developing language tests, it is necessary to establish indicators developed from the descriptive descriptions of the CEFR levels mentioned above, adapting the test model to the test being developed. For example, the TOEFL only covers three test components: listening comprehension, structure and written expression, and reading comprehension. To develop questions for these three components with reference to the CEFR, an interpretation of the CEFR is necessary so that the test developed truly reflects the levels referred to in the CEFR.

CEFR Representation in SIMLA Test

The Islamic University of Indonesia was founded on 27 Rajab 1364 H, or July 8, 1945, as the Islamic College (STI) in Jakarta. STI was the lofty ideal of Indonesian national figures who recognized the reality that higher education at the time was under the control of the Dutch colonial government. STI was born to demonstrate the awareness of education among the indigenous population. The Center for International Language and Cultural Studies – Universitas Islam Indonesia (Cilacs UII) is a Language and Cultural Studies Training Center under the Islamic University of Indonesia (UII), Yogyakarta. Cilacs UII is committed to playing a role in efforts to improve language competency broadly, so that currently Cilacs UII services are not only accessible to UII academics but are also widely open to the general public. (CILACS UII 2021).

As a language institution, CILACS UII offers various language courses/test preparation programs, including English, Arabic, Mandarin, Korean, Japanese, German, French, and Italian. CILACS UII also offers English language tests such as CEPT, TOEFL ITP, TOEFL IBT, and IELTS Simulation.

Furthermore, CILACS UII also offers an Arabic language competency test called the Syahadah Ikhtibar Maharah al-Lughah al-Arabiyyah (SIMLA). The SIMLA test measures Arabic language proficiency and consists of three sections: Fahmu al-masmu' (Fahmu al-masmu'), al-Asalib wa at-Tarakib (Asalib wa at-Tarakib), and Fahmu al-Maqr'u' (Fahmu al-Maqr'u').

To understand the level at which SIMLA questions are structured according to the CEFR, it is necessary to first explain the SIMLA questions. SIMLA questions consist of three sections: fahmul masmu', al-Asalib wa at-Tarakib, and fahmul al-maqr'u'. Looking at the elements contained in SIMLA questions, it can be understood that SIMLA covers two things: linguistic competence and language competence.

A person's knowledge related to the language system, which includes structure, vocabulary, and all other interrelated aspects of language, is called linguistic competence. This competence is very important for someone to master because it will affect their language competence. Therefore, the linguistic

competence test is a test intended to determine a person's mastery of the language system, language structure, vocabulary, and all interrelated aspects of language. The linguistic competence test presented in the SIMLA questions is not a question in the form of a knowledge test, discrete, isolated and not yet communicative function, instead the linguistic competence test presented in the SIMLA questions is a communicative linguistic competence, namely the structure and vocabulary involved in discourse, both spoken discourse (listening) and written discourse (reading and writing). (Zaenuri, Kholis, and Barokah 2020).

Listening Comprehension Part (*Fahmu al-Masmu'*)

The *Fahmu al-Masmu'* section is a SIMLA test that tests test takers' ability to write *Imla'* (Arabic dictation), listen to conversations, and understand spoken Arabic. The *Fahmu al-Masmu'* section consists of eight pages of questions, seven of which are multiple-choice and one page contains fill-in-the-blank questions (6 sub-questions). In the fill-in-the-blank section, participants are required to answer in written Arabic.

In *al-Qismu al-Awwal*, consisting of 5 questions (1-5), participants are asked to choose one of the available options related to a spoken word. This section is similar to *Imla'*, which is an Arabic dictation that is widely taught in Islamic boarding schools. Next, in *al-Qismu at-Tsani* (6-10), participants are asked to explain the work of a mentioned profession, of course by choosing from the 5 options provided. In *al-Qismu at-Tsalis* (11-15), participants are asked to choose the appropriate expression in a situation, such as *ma'assalamah*, *ila al-liqa'*, *shabahal khair*, and so on.

Next, in *al-Qismu ar-Raabi'*, *al-Qismu al-Khamis*, and *al-Qismu as-Sadis* (16-30), participants will be listened to a short and long muhadatsah, then asked to determine the time, place, speaker and interlocutor. As for *al-Qismu as-Sabi'* (31-35), participants are asked to understand a short and long muhadatsah, then determine the conclusion or essence that is not spoken, but only implied, so it requires the ability to understand in depth. Then in the last part, *al-Qismu at-Tsamin* (36-40), participants are asked to listen to an Arabic text, then asked to rewrite several words specified in the numbers provided. Overall, *al-Qismu al-Awwal* to *al-Qismu at-Tsamin* as many as 40 numbers divided into 8 pages, participants are provided with 20 minutes. In the *fahmu al-masmu'* test, the themes tested are related to transportation, schools/universities, hospitals, dormitories, money exchange, and the Quran.

When analyzed based on the scope of material and question models in *Fahmu al-Masmu'*, it can be concluded that the level of *Fahmu al-Masmu'* questions in SIMLA is equivalent to A1-C1 CEFR, which is included in the eight sections of *Fahmu al-Masmu'* questions.

Structure and Grammar Comprehension (*Al Asalib wa at Tarakib*)

The second section of the SIMLA test is *Al-Asalib wa at-Tarakib*. This section consists of two pages of questions, each containing 10 questions. This totals 20 questions, which must be completed within 15 minutes. This test aims to assess the ability to identify written Arabic used in formal situations. Written communication differs from oral communication, as what is perceived through oral communication may not be commonly accepted in written communication. Therefore, the testee's ability to determine the most appropriate and correct sentence for written expression is tested. Therefore, adequate knowledge of the rules of Arabic, including word formation (*syigah kalimah*), vocabulary mastery, and word order (*tarakibu al kalimat fi al jumlah*), is essential for understanding how letters are arranged to form the correct word and convey the intended meaning, constructing words into correct sentences, and easily identifying errors in those sentences.

On the first page of the *Al-Asalib wa at-Tarakib* test, there are 10 questions that test participants in distinguishing *mudzakkar* and *muannats*, determining the correct *wazn* and *sigah* for words in a sentence, determining the correct *harf* for a sentence, and determining the correct *fi'il* for a sentence in terms of both *sharf* and meaning. The themes on this page relate to health, Islamic science, educational development, economics, politics, development, sports, and language.

On the second page of the *Al-Asalib wa at-Tarakib* test, there are 10 questions that test participants to detect errors in the sentence. In each question there are five underlined words that have the potential to be incorrect, so participants must choose one of the choices, a word that is incorrect in terms of *sharf* and *nahwy*. This test assesses participants' understanding of the correct placement of *masdar shina'i*, determining *al-mufrad wal jam'u* of a word, the placement of *harf* for the appropriate *fi'l*, and determining *dhamir munfashil*. The themes discussed in this second page of the test are related to Islam, history, and the Quran. Overall, according to its title, the *al-Asalib wa at-Tarakib* test, tests participants to fully understand the text and context of a word so they can determine the truth or error in a sentence.

The question model in *al-Asalib wa at-Tarakib* measures the testee's competence in selecting appropriate vocabulary to express something that is appropriate to the desired sentence context related to sociolinguistics. However, only a few questions measure this, most of the questions are still dominated by questions that measure writing competence in practicing syntax and morphology. Not many questions measure more complex writing skills such as expressing ideas, exposition, and argumentation in writing. The grammar tested in the questions is also still basic, not reaching the integration between rules. This shows that in this

section, when referring to the CEFR, the standard for *fahmu tarakib* questions in SIMLA is equivalent to levels A1 to B2 CEFR.

Reading Comprehension (Fahmul al-Maqrū')

The third section of the SIMLA exam is *fahmu al-maqrū'*, a section of SIMLA that aims to test students' ability to understand, analyze, and summarize Arabic texts. Topics tested in this section include professions, school, transportation, communications, libraries, education, Western culture, astronomy, psychology, and family.

The question model in *Fahmu al-Maqrū'* has several patterns, including 1) *Ta'yiin Maudhu'u An-Nash* (knowing the theme of the reading), which is one type of question in *Fahmu al-Maqrū'* which measures the competence of participants in understanding the reading text by determining the topic or title of a reading; 2) *Al-fikrah ar-Raisiyyah* (knowing the main idea of the reading), which is a question model to measure the competence of participants in understanding the entire text in one paragraph by determining the main idea or idea in a paragraph; 3) *Marja'u al-Kalimah*, which is a type of question to measure the competence of participants in understanding sentences that use pronouns or demonstrative words related to the previous sentence; 4) *Istinbathu Al-kalimah*, which is a question model that measures the competence of participants in understanding the reading text by digging up information both implicitly and explicitly; 5) *Al-ma'lumat Al-mufashsholah*, which is a type of question that asks about certain information contained in the reading, not asking the content as a whole. Based on the model and scope of various reading themes in the SIMLA *fahmul maqrū'* questions, it can be concluded that the reading competency standards in SIMLA refer to the CEFR level equivalent to B1-C1.

Conclusions (الخاتمة)

Standardized Arabic proficiency tests in Indonesia, the Arab world, and internationally have not received serious attention, unlike English language tests. However, if pursued and developed, standardized Arabic language tests would have strategic importance, both academically and socioeconomically. Unifying Arabic language competency tests at the Islamic university level remains a challenging task. Competition among universities is one of the obstacles to unifying or standardizing Arabic language competency tests. Because they are standardized tests, research and validity testing of each test is necessary. In addition to competency tests administered by universities, numerous other competency tests are conducted by

various parties and are readily available online. However, there has been no in-depth validity testing or research into the suitability and suitability of these tests.

Overall, the competency standards contained in the SIMLA questions compared with the CEFR standards can be concluded that for the fahmu al-masmu category, the SIMLA competency standards refer to CEFR levels A1 to C1. The al-Asalib wa at-Tarakib test in SIMLA refers to CEFR levels A1 to B2. And the fahmu al-maqrū' test in SIMLA refers to CEFR B1 to C1.

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