



Critical analysis of Arabic language proficiency test in Indonesia

Raodhatul Jannah¹, Sabaruddin Garancang², Amrah Kasim³, & Darmawati⁴

^{1,4}Parepare State Islamic Institute, ^{2,3}Alauddin State Islamic University Makassar

Correspondence Email: raodhatuljannah@iainpare.ac.id

ABSTRACT

This article discusses the Arabic test development tests in Indonesia, especially the Arabic language proficiency tests in Islamic universities. The data used to analyze this comes from literature relevant to the topic of study. The analysis developed in this article is in the form of a critical analysis of Arabic language proficiency tests applied in Indonesia. The main conclusion is that Arabic skills tests in Indonesia have been widespread and implemented in almost all Islamic religious colleges (PTKIN) under the auspices of the Ministry of Religion. In addition, institutions have also begun to emerge that provide Arabic language testing services. Then, there are several essential concerns regarding implementing the test in universities, which all students must carry out. This test has yet to measure student language proficiency due to student ignorance and lack of information and guidance about this test and Arabic in general. Because Arabic language lessons in universities have yet to be able to deliver students Arabic language proficiency, the Arabic language proficiency test in universities seems less than optimal. However, on the other hand, the number of applicants for this test continues to increase yearly in line with the growth of applicants who wish to continue their education in the Middle East.

Keywords: Arabic Proficiency test; language testing; TOAFL

1. INTRODUCTION

The term test was derived from the word *testum*. An understanding from ancient French means a plate to set aside precious metals (meaning that by using a tool in the form of a plate, one can obtain types of precious metals of very high value) (Herdah et al., 2020), in the large dictionary of languages In Indonesia, the word test is defined as a

written, oral or interview test to find out one's knowledge, abilities, talents and personality. The word test in Arabic is called "*ikhtibar*" which comes from the words *ikhtabara*, *yakhtabiru*, *ikhtibaran* (Abdurrahman et al., 2022) which means a test to know the quality of something or someone.

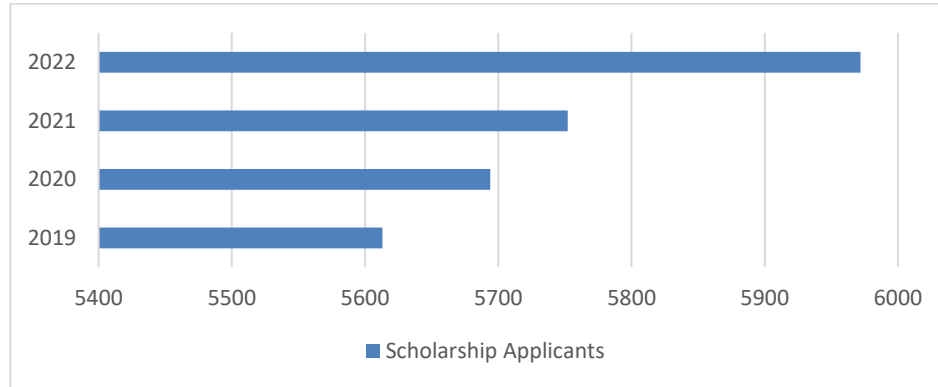
In education, a test is a tool, procedure or series of activities to obtain information about a person's behaviour that can provide an overview of his or her ability towards a skill (Jannah et al., 2021). This aligns with Nurgiyantoro's view, which explains that a test is a systematic instrument or procedure to measure a behaviour as measured by numbers.

The language proficiency test (*ikhtibar qiyas al-qudrah al-lughawiyah*) is a test that works to verify how well a test taker can apply knowledge. A language test can measure how well the person understands how to apply his knowledge of the language. The Arabic language proficiency test covers two aspects: knowledge of Arabic and skills in using Arabic. Knowledge of the language in question is knowledge of language elements such as mastery of phonology, vocabulary and grammar. In this case, it includes the science of *al-aswat*, *mufradat*, *nahwu* and *sarf*. In contrast, skills language includes four maharah: *istima'*, *muhadatsah*, *qira'ah* and *kitabah*.

Arabic has yet to be learned at educational institutions in Indonesia. Remember, Arabic entered Indonesia around the 13th century AD and has been taught in Islamic boarding schools since the 19th century AD. The teaching of Arabic was initially only in the grammar-translation phase (*qawaid wa tarjamah*), which is taught by the direct method (*tariqah al-mubasyarah*) by the teacher or *Kyai*. (Sauri, 2020) However, in the next phase, Islamic figures in Indonesia established institutions of education, both individuals and organizations, such as *Madrasah Adabiyah* School in West Sumatra, *Muhammadiyah Madrasah* in Yogyakarta and *Salafiyah Madrasah* in Jombang, which include Arabic lessons in their curriculum. Until then, these madrasas became a pioneer of reforming Islamic education in Indonesia under the auspices of the Ministry of Religion in 1945. Islamic educational institutions in Indonesia have been significantly developed compared to when they appeared, including in learning Arabic. Language Arab is compulsory in madrasas and institutional courses in the Islamic university. Under the auspices of the Ministry of Religion, every university conducts an Arabic language proficiency test for each of its students, which is usually a graduation requirement.

In addition, as one form of evaluation, the Arabic language skills test does not only work to measure a person's language skills in learning (Ridho, 2018). However, this test is one of the most popular tests, given that it is a requirement for continuing education in the Middle East. According to data from the Ministry of Religion, the number of people who apply for college scholarships to the Middle East yearly increased.

Picture 1. Middle East scholarship applicants' data for 2019-2022



Source: <http://diktis.kemenag.go.id//>

The data above showed that the number of applicants for Middle East scholarships is increasing. Thus, the Arabic language skills test is always full of fans. Knowledge about this test needs to be introduced to students and students.

2. METHODS

In this article, the method used is a type of library research, namely a series of activities related to collecting library data, reading, recording and processing information sourced from books, scientific journals, and documents. So, the data used in this study is library data or literature review related to Arabic language proficiency tests.

The data collection technique is documentation, namely studying and searching for data in notes, documents, transcripts, books and scientific journals. The data sought in the research is in the form of the history of the development of the Arabic language in Indonesia, the evaluation of Arabic language learning, and the Arabic language skills test available in Indonesia.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Concept of the Arabic Language Proficiency Test in Indonesia

Tes Arabic language skills are a set of verbals, written, and picture stimuli and a chart prepared to measure the strengths and weaknesses of a language learner. Through this test, aspects of language learning can be identified. Arabic language skills test summarizes two main things: 1) language knowledge and 2) language skills (Setiawaty, 2019). Language knowledge includes understanding Arabic language sciences such as nahwu, sarf, phonology, vocabulary and grammar. Language skills include listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills.

Assessment of listening skills is based on cognitive, affective and psychomotor aspects. Three types of tests can be used to measure listening skills: a limited response test, a multiple-choice response test, and a broad communication test. Talking is a system of symbols that can be heard and seen. The ability to speak must be supported by listening skills, vocabulary mastery, and the courage to express opinion. Generally, speaking skills can be measured in two ways: direct oral performance testing and indirect oral performance testing. As for abilities, reading is the ability to identify writing and understand it. In this case, Readers are expected to be able to understand the content, concept, and purpose of a text. Writing ability can be assessed by using language, writing techniques, mastery of written topics, and punctuation and spelling (Abdurrahman et al., 2022).

TOAFL (Test of Arabic as a Foreign Language)

The Test of Arabic as a Foreign Language, better known as TOAFL, or "*al-ikhtibar fi al lughah al-Arabiyyah li ghairi al-naatiqina biha*", is a standardized test to test someone's Arabic language skills from various proficiencies; proficiency in listening, speaking, reading and writing and grammatical analysis of Arabic and its grammar. Of course, to complete it, it must require adequate Arabic language proficiency. Because without having basic abilities, it can be ascertained that the ability to analyze and answer the test is not optimal. Therefore, it is highly recommended before doing the TOAFL to understand the grammar of the Arabic language and often practice agility by reading a lot of Arabic texts and practising the TOAFL test.

The aspects tested in the TOAFL consist of three parts, namely as follows:

1. *Fahm Masmu'*, consists of 50 questions that cover: a) understanding the meaning, understanding, logical reasoning or conclusion of a statement/or sentence heard, which consists of 20 question items; b) understanding the meaning, topic, logical reasoning, inference, conclusion or drawing conclusions, and the implied meaning of a short dialogue consisting of 15 questions; and c) understanding the meaning, topic, logical reasoning, conclusion and implied meaning of an extended dialogue between two or more people consisting of 15 question items.
2. *Fahm al-Tarakib wa al-'Ibarat*, consisting of 40 question items, which include: a) completing sentences or expressions with a standard structure consisting of 20 question items; b) identifying and analysing the incorrect use of words, expressions and structures in a sentence consisting of 20 question items.
3. *Fahm Mufradat wa al-Nash al-Maktub wa al-Qawaid*, consisting of 60 question items which include: a) understanding taraduf (synonyms), or the proximity of the meaning of an underlined word which consists of 20 question items; b) understanding the

contents, topics and implied meanings in several paragraphs or discourses consisting of 20 question items; c) understand the use of the word, position (*i'rab*), its derivation (*isytiqaq*) and the use of nahwu terms which consist of 20 question items (Wahab n.d.)

The time allotted to answer all 150 questions is 120 minutes (Ridho, 2018). So, each question must be answered in less than one minute. The form of the questions used are multiple choice questions, so one of the weaknesses of this test is that test takers can answer by guessing the correct answer.

Analysis of the Arabic Language Proficiency Test in Indonesia

One of the reasons for someone to take an Arabic language proficiency test is to measure their ability to understand the primary Arabic language, and the second goal is to obtain a certificate. The TOAFL test for example, is administered in almost all Islamic religious colleges. This is in line with the Graduate Competency Standards and Study Program Graduate Learning Outcomes launched by the Ministry of Religion of the Republic of Indonesia, which states that one of the learning outcomes in the field of knowledge for all study programs at Islamic religious universities is mastering knowledge and steps to communicate both orally and in writing by using Arabic in the development of the academic world and the world of work. (Kementerian Agama Republik Indonesia 2018). So, Arabic language courses are mandatory subjects for each study program.

When looking at this, every graduate or alumni of an Islamic religious college should be able to communicate in Arabic because they have taken the test to get a TOAFL certificate. The TOAFL certificate is a requirement for students to complete their studies at the undergraduate level, so every year, tens of thousands of students in Indonesia take the test. However, in reality, the test creates new problems in the higher education environment, both from students and external factors. The following are problems in the implementation of TOAFL in Higher Education.

Factors related to students

a. Poor *Mufradat*

The Lack of knowledge about students' vocabulary or *mufradat* makes them unable to read and understand the questions given (Ridho, 2018).

b. Difficulty in translating and understanding *qiraah*

Before answering the question, of course, the test taker must first understand the sentence or text given. So, translating the text reading it is still very difficult for most students.

c. Weak in the mastery of Arabic grammar

Arabic grammar includes the science of constructing sentences, so knowledge of *nahwu* and *sarf* is essential (Qodri, 2020).

External Factors

a. Lack of learning Arabic for students

Arabic is a compulsory subject at Islamic religious universities. However, in the total number of Arabic language subjects, only a few SKS or credits, and this is, of course, not able to lead its students to proficiency in the Arabic language.

b. Multiple choice question format

Multiple-choice questions allow test takers to choose answers randomly so that the score obtained is not by the test takers' ability.

c. Lack of literature and information

The TOAFL test is carried out without any preparation for students, so students get less information about the test. Both are related to the type of test, how to answer it, and tips for taking the test.

CONCLUSION

So far, the implementation of tests conducted in university has not had a significant impact on the development of Arabic language skills. This does not mean that the test is meaningless and unnecessary, given the importance of this Arabic proficiency test. However, some improvements can be made to maximize the performance of the test. One of the efforts that can be made is to increase the learning of Arabic in the form of courses and studies outside the course involving all students. In addition, an introduction to the Arabic language proficiency test is also critical to carry out. In addition, universities and Arabic language observers can subvert their thinking to enrich the literature on Arabic language proficiency tests so that information about these tests is easily accessible to anyone.

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