

# Arabic Language Proficiency Test Efficiency and Innovation on Imalah.com

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## ABSTRACT

The Arabic proficiency test in Indonesia has recently shown a significant development, compared to the TOEFL, in the decade of the 2000s. The UPI Arabic Language Education Department began to develop this test to be more compatible with internet-based (iBT). This paper describes some of the efficiency and innovations of a test format called Imalah.com. iBT is applied to guarantee the quality of learning outcomes based on accurate and specific measurements of performance that occurs in realizing what is expected so that quality assurance is truly a guarantee of real achievement. The proficiency test was developed by lecturers and researchers to find out the Arabic learners' strengths and weaknesses to identify aspects of difficulty and convenience in the language being studied. The test covers language knowledge and language skills. Language skills include listening (*istima'*), speaking (*muhadatsah*), reading (*qiraah*), and writing (*kitabah*). The expected results and implications of the development of imalah.com are being able to measure the ability of test-takers more accurately.

**Keywords:** Arabic proficiency test, Imalah.com, innovation, test efficiency.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The term test in Arabic is called *ikhtibar* which comes from the words *ikhtabara*, *yakhtabiru*, *ikhtibaran* which means testing to find out the quality of something or someone. Thu'aimah (1989) defines that *ikhtibar* as a group of questions compiled by the teacher, which must be answered by students. The questions are intended to measure the level of language proficiency of students in certain aspects, find out how far they have progressed in learning, and compare them with their peers.

The test is a set of stimuli (oral written questions, pictures, or charts) that are "prepared to measure a behavior by using quantitative or qualitative methods" (Ubaidat et al., 1984, p.157). In education, teachers use tests to reveal proficiency; measuring learning outcomes, identify students' difficulties, intelligence, and interests.

In the field of teaching, the test is defined as a "tool, procedure, or series of activities used to obtain examples of a person's behavior" (Djiwandono, 2008, p. 1) that provides an overview of his abilities in a particular teaching field. This statement is by the statement put forward by Nurgiyantoro (2011), which states that the test is an instrument or a systematic procedure for

measuring a sample of behavior, the answer is in the form of numbers.

Proficiency test (*ikhtibarat qiyas al-qudrah al-lughawiyyah*) is a test used by teachers or researchers to determine aspects of the strengths and weaknesses of language learners. Through this test, aspects of difficulty and ease in learning the language can be identified. The Arabic language proficiency test covers (1) language knowledge and (2) language skills. Language knowledge includes phonology, vocabulary, and grammar, while language skills include listening (*istima'*), speaking (*muhadatsah*), reading (*qiraat*), and writing (*kitabah*).

Therefore, it is considered important to carry out research and development of Arabic proficiency test models that have been applied to university students in Indonesia.

Experts identify criteria that a test should have validity, reliability, objectivity, and practicality that have been determined by the criteria (Nuriyah, 2014; Purwanto, 2013). Objectivity needs to be achieved with having no personal element that influences it. According to Arikunto (2007), a test is said to have high objectivity if in carrying out the test no subjectivity factor affects it, especially in the scoring system.

Another characteristic of a good test is practicality. According to Arikunto (2007), a practical test is a test that is easy to carry out, for example, it does not require a lot of equipment and gives freedom to the learner to do the part that is considered easy by the students.

For Madkur (2000) reading skills mean the ability to identify written symbols and understand them in the context of sentences, paragraphs, topics, and discourses. This view is in line with the views of Mushthafa (2002) and the views of Hasib (2004) who view qira'ah as a process of building a relationship between language and writing symbols. Speech-language consists of many meanings and demands that function to convey meaning.

Assessment of listening is emphasized on cognitive, psychomotor, and affective aspects. Three types of tests can be used in the assessment of listening learning, namely limited response tests, multiple-choice response tests, and broad communication tests (Syihabuddin, 2008).

Speaking is a system of signs that can be heard and seen, which utilizes several muscles in the human body. Which has a purpose to convey thoughts to meet human needs themselves. Speaking skills must also be based on listening skills, vocabulary mastery skills, and the courage to express. Generally, speaking tests can be divided into two groups, namely direct oral performance testing and indirect oral performing testing (Syihabuddin, 2008).

Writing test is a way of measuring to collecting information to evaluate the ability that has been achieved by students in writing skills. The components measured through the writing test are the ability to use language, mastery of written topics, writing techniques, and the use of punctuation and spelling.

## 2. METHOD

The research was carried out by using the Research and Development design used to develop and produce certain products and testing the effectiveness of these products. In this case, it is a professional test of Arabic language proficiency for Arabic language learners in public universities. To be able to produce certain products needs analysis is used and to test the effectiveness of these products so that they can function in several Indonesian public universities, both Arabic Language Studies Programs or Islamic Education Studies, then research is needed to test the effectiveness of these products. The participants recruited were university students in Indonesia. The research and development steps taken include (1) potential and problems, (2) data collection, (3) product design, (4) design validation, (5) design revision, (6) product testing, (7) product revision, (8) use trial, (9) product revision, and (10) mass production.

## 3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### 3.1. Language Proficiency Test

The Arabic Proficiency test developed in this study met several criteria for a good test. According to some experts, these criteria are tests that meet certain values of validity, reliability, objectivity, and practicality that have been determined by the criteria (Purwanto, 2013). In addition, the test is equipped with clear instructions so that it can be given/started by someone else. The needs analysis showed that the Arabic Proficiency test met the criteria.

In the study, the test items in the listening assessment are given orally, either directly or through recording media, while the answers can be made in writing. Three types of tests can be used in the assessment of listening learning, namely limited response tests, multiple-choice response tests, and broad communication tests

In addition, the test also provides a limited response test. This form of test allows students to answer verbally or nonverbally. The verbal answer expected from students is in the form of a word or two, not a row of words that builds a sentence. This type is suitable for low-grade students whose language skills are still limited. Forms of limited response tests include true-false, yes-no, and selecting images.

The Arabic Proficiency test also has the multiple-choice response test. The form of the multiple-choice response test is almost the same as the limited response test. The answer choices in the limited response test are only in the form of a few words or a simple picture, while the answer choices in the multiple-choice response test are in the form of words, phrases, and sentences.

Furthermore, the Arabic Proficiency test has an extensive communication test. Assessment with this broad communication test requires students to understand fragments of dialogue (conversation) or lectures (talk) as students usually do in their daily lives.

The next skill is speaking skill which is one of the skills that must be mastered by foreign language learners after listening skills. Speaking skills are skills that have productive characteristics that produce articulation sounds to express what is in the mind (Syihabuddin, 2008; Hermawan, 2011).

In this case, when interpreted broadly speaking is a system of signs that can be heard and seen, which utilizes some muscles in the human body. Which has a purpose to convey thoughts to meet human needs themselves. Speaking skills must also be based on listening skills, vocabulary mastery skills, and the courage to express.

Generally, speaking tests can be divided into two groups, namely direct oral performance testing and indirect oral performing testing (Syihabuddin, 2008).

In the Arabic Proficiency test, the direct speaking test requires students to find, limit, develop, and organize ideas in an integrated and intact manner and then manifest them in speaking activities. With this direct speaking test, students use various language skills to express the ideas that have been chosen. In addition to the aspects of ideas and language, the use of intonation, pause, tempo, tone, and kinesthetics, students were observed in an integrated manner in the direct test. This direct speaking test is in the form of a speaking task with a certain stimulus, for example, speaking with a certain theme, speaking based on the provided series of pictures, speaking based on the information heard, speaking based on a book, or speaking based on the observations of certain objects/activities (Syihabuddin, 2008).

The indirect speaking test is not an oral test but is carried out in writing and a focused manner. The target of the test is not directly related to the content of the conversation, for example finding, limiting, developing, organizing, and editing ideas that are appropriate to the context of speaking. This type of test can only be used to measure the ability to compose speech ideas/contents that will be displayed by students in speaking activities (Syihabuddin, 2008).

Thus, it can be concluded that measuring Arabic speaking skills in students can be done in two ways. Two ways that can be done are direct speaking tests and indirect speaking tests. To use the indirect speaking test, the teacher must ensure that the test measures the ability to formulate speech ideas that will be displayed in speaking activities.

The Arabic Proficiency test has a set reading test. This type of reading aims to see students' reading abilities, both intonation and reading rhythm of students, punctuation marks, understanding reading material, and others. The thing that needs to be considered is to prioritize students who are good at reading as examples.

In the Arabic Proficiency test there are several reading test formats: first, completing the discourse or the close technique is a form of reading test that presents a discourse in which certain parts of the words are omitted. The omitted words can be done by omitting certain words or words with the same interval distance. The omitted words are replaced with dots. The student's task is to fill in the blanks or dots with the word that he thinks is most appropriate.

Second, answer questions. The form of this test is a form of reading test that presents the discourse as a whole. Long and short discourses are adjusted to the ability and level of understanding of students. Students answer questions that come from the discourse presented.

The form of the test presented can be in the form of multiple-choice or description.

Third, the form of a test that summarizes the contents of the reading is a form of reading test that requires students to read the discourse in its entirety. Next, students summarize the results of their reading.

Meanwhile, writing skills are a form of language ability and skill that are the most difficult for students to master compared to the other three language skills. Writing skills are not only difficult for second language learners to master but even native speakers (Musthafa, 2002). However, even though it is difficult, it does not mean that it cannot be learned and strived to achieve it. Nuha (2012) explains that writing skills are the ability to express the contents of thoughts, opinions, and feelings and are described in an article.

In the Arabic Proficiency test developed in this project, there are two types of writing tests: 1) a partial writing test, namely a test aimed at each component of writing, especially the written language component, such as structure, vocabulary, spelling, and paragraphs, 2) a totality test aimed at writing as a whole as a result of integrated writing skills. The partial writing/composing test is aimed at each component of the essay, especially the language component of the essay. The partial test consists of (a) structure test, (b) vocabulary test, (c) spelling test, (d) language style test, and (e) paragraph test. The totality writing/composing test is aimed at the whole essay as a result of integrated writing/composing skills.

### 3.2. *iBT Internet-based Proficiency Test*

The test with the iBT system is the most popular and widely used, especially since 2005, since the TOEFL implemented iBT. This computer-based test system is connected to the internet network. Thus, the test is carried out online. This test system was published and used in 2005 but was only used in Indonesia in 2006. The skills tested include reading, listening, writing, and speaking. Although this system is widely used, there are still some countries that use the PBT system (Veronika & Darnita, 2015).

Poorsoti and Davatgari (2015) emphasized that since 2005, the use of the internet network for test purposes has begun to be used, especially for English. In this study, the participant's readiness to take the Arabic computer-based test. The finding showed that the participants had positive attitudes towards internet use in taking English tests. 69% of respondents believe that the test will improve their performance.

Meanwhile, Zahedkazemi (2015) confirmed that the internet-based TOEFL and IELTS (iBT) are to measure the speaking ability of test-takers. Thus, if it is used to

measure Arabic speaking proficiency, it is predicted that the test can test their speaking skills.

Then, how is the internet-based language proficiency test implemented? What are the steps that need to be followed in developing the test? Following Sims (2015), the Arabic proficiency test developed in the study implemented the six stages or procedures: determining test objectives, designing test specifications, compiling test items, evaluating and revising tests, determining assessment procedures, and testing content, construct, and concurrent validity and testing reliability. test.

In this study, 4 teachers were observed and teaching materials were collected from various educational institutions. The research concludes that the TOEFL iBT affects both the teaching materials delivered by teachers and how they teach. But that influence is mediated by the preparation test material

Barnes (2016) examined the effect of the TOEFL iBT test in Vietnam. Demirel and Coskun's (2010) research in Iran said that students have a readiness to learn through computers and the skills to use them at a good level. This means that today a digital generation has been born who is doing various things, including language tests, computer-based and internet-based. So, the use of this device is strange, but a common thing in various circles and regions.

The students' readiness is in line with the research of Poorsoti, and Davatgari, (2015) which confirms that the participants have a positive attitude towards using the internet is taking the English test. 69% of respondents believe that the test will improve their performance in English. In addition, this iBT test can measure language proficiency in an integrative way. Zahedkazemi (2015) confirmed that the internet-based TOEFL and IELTS (iBT) were able to measure the speaking ability of test takers. Thus, if iBT is used to measure Arabic speaking proficiency, it is predicted that the test can test their speaking skills.

The most important thing in the test is the effect of the test on improving teaching and learning. Barnes' (2016) research in Vietnam concluded that the TOEFL iBT affects both the teaching materials delivered by the teacher and the teaching methods used.

Assessment of language proficiency as stated above is also related to economic or financial issues. This means that tests administered by various institutions require large amounts of money repeatedly, every year, to finance test development, test administration, reporting of results, and other activities. With internet-based tests (iBT), financing can be done effectively and efficiently. That is, the time and cost required is not too much and expensive.

Assessment of language proficiency as stated above is not only an important job, but a sensitive issue in

Indonesia. This is because the test is related to the financial, political, and prestige of a region. From an economic point of view, tests are expensive and repeat every year. From a political point of view, every regional head wants the tests to carry their programs and political goals.

However, the most important thing in the test is the effect of the test on improving teaching and learning. This influence is termed washback, namely the effect of tests on teaching and learning. The test results greatly affect teaching and learning, either intentionally or unintentionally, whether the influence is positive or negative.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

The Department of Arabic Language Education, Faculty of Language and Literature Education, Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia has the experience in developing programs by making a set of standardized Arabic proficiency professional tests for students learning Arabic. The Arabic proficiency test that has been developed is the *imtiḥan maharah lughah ʿarabiyah* which is abbreviated as IMALAH. Thus far, IMALAH has been carried out using the Paper Based Test (PBT) type, which is a test format that is carried out by filling in the answers on the answer sheet manually using a 2B pencil. The IMALAH program was developed to guarantee the quality of learning outcomes that are based on accurate and specific measurements of the performance that occurs in realizing what is expected, so that quality assurance is truly a guarantee of real achievement.

Because the test to measure students' mastery of standardized Arabic has been implemented in the area of the Ministry of Arabic Language Education, and to maintain continuity in the quality assurance series, the PBT IMALAH test needs to be developed into iBT. The proficiency test (*ikhtibarāt qiyās al-quḍrah al-lughawīyyah*) was developed by lecturers and researchers to determine aspects of the learner's strengths and weaknesses, in order to identify aspects of difficulty and convenience in the language being studied. The test covers language knowledge and language skills. Language knowledge includes phonology, vocabulary, and grammar, while language skills include listening (*istima'*), speaking (*muhadatsah*), reading (*qiraah*) and writing (*kitabah*).

Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia teaches a curriculum with Arabic courses as a compulsory subject in the Islamic education. Furthermore, the public universities in the city do not yet have a standardized Arabic proficiency test model based on the results of empirical studies, while the Religious Universities under the Directorate of Islamic Higher Education of the Ministry of Religion first have an

Arabic proficiency test. They have developed the *Ikhtibar Kafaah al-Lughah 'al-'Arabiyyah* (IKLA) at UIN Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta and the Test of Arabic as a Foreign Language (TOAFL) at UIN Jakarta which are standardization or graduation requirements for all students in all study programs.

## AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS

The position of the researcher is as developer, analysis, and content composing. The main purpose of this invention is to overcome pre-existing problems, especially translation skills. (Arabic proficiency test 'IMALAH' iBT ([www: imalah.com](http://www.imalah.com).) in accordance with this invention consists of fahm al-masmu', fahm al-maqru, qawa'id and mufradat, and a translation characterized by 4 (four) maharah Internet-based. Another objective of this invention is to complete the lack of Arabic proficiency test through an Arabic-Indonesian translation test.

This research contributes directly to the development of a competent, digital-based Arabic proficiency test that accommodates all components of the Arabic language discipline in Indonesia, such as: Arabic Language Education, Arabic Language, Arabic Literature, General Purposes, and Religion.

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