

Assessing Arabic Teachers' Assessment Methods in Evaluating Students' Literacy

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ABSTRACT

Learning Arabic online during the COVID-19 pandemic is full of challenges. Educators are required to be selective in choosing assessment methods relevant to the four Arabic language competencies and suitable for use online. This study aims to determine the online assessment methods and assessment media used by Arabic language teachers to evaluate their students' literacy in Arabic learning. This research is survey research. This study involved 87 Arabic teachers from 45 Public Madrasah Aliyah (Islamic Public Senior High School) in South Kalimantan. Data collection techniques used in this study were questionnaires and interviews. The data from close-ended questionnaires were analyzed and presented in descriptive methods. The data from open-ended was analyzed by reviewing each response, discovering themes in the verbatim statement, coding, and grouping the topics. The results of this study indicate that the assessment methods most often used by teachers are multiple-choice, true-false, short answer, and performance. The assessment method most students respond to is multiple-choice, true-false, and short answers. The assessment methods that students respond to the least are performance, products, interviews, and short answers.

Keywords: *Arabic, Assessment, Online Learning, Language Skills, Literacy.*

1. INTRODUCTION

The need to shift from face-to-face learning to online learning immediately as a response to the spread of COVID-19 forced teachers to creatively deliver the instruction in digital format [1], [2]. Teachers need to adapt to the new learning system and prepare materials and assessments that can be conveyed online. Fortunately, various applications are available to meet the distance learning challenges imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic [3]. Those applications enable teachers easily to modify content digitally. However, carrying out appropriate assessments to measure the progress of student learning outcomes in online learning is challenging.

The purpose of learning Arabic is to ensure that students master four language skills, namely *istima'* (listening), *kalam* (speaking), *qiraah* (reading), and *kitabah* (writing). Ideally, authentic assessments such as performance and portfolio assessments are carried out to measure the progress of students' achievement in these four abilities. Authentic assessment is also related to academic integrity and is the academic

standard since it clearly describes students' abilities [4].

Developing or selecting reliable and valid assessment techniques to measure student achievement and engagement in online learning is essential. In online learning, face-to-face interaction between teacher and students are limited [5]. Delivering learning content accurately and providing appropriate feedback immediately to students are challenging for teachers [6]. Therefore, informal assessments may be challenging in online learning due to the lack of face-to-face interaction [7]. Informal assessment is urgent for Arabic teachers to measure students' four language skills development from day-to-day learning activities. Beebe, Vonderwell, and Boboc [8] assert that before shifting face-to-face to online learning, the teacher needs to pay attention to learning time management, student responsibility and initiative, selection of learning media, and material complexity, especially in informal assessment.

Moreover, many issues related to online learning assessment include the importance of promoting student academic self-regulation as it is associated with positive learning outcomes in online learning

[9], [10] and encouraging students' engagement in online discussions and collaborations. [11], [12]. The level of student engagement in online learning can also influence teachers in choosing online assessment methods.

In addition, before carrying out the assessment, teachers also need to ensure that the instruments can measure student learning outcomes validly and reliably [13], [14]. If the student's score is higher than the previous years, there is a possibility of cheating because it was carried out without direct supervision from the teacher [15]. However, if the students' score is low, it could be because they have not adapted to the new evaluation format or their self-study ability is less developed [16]. Therefore, this

study aims to reveal and explain the online assessment method implemented by the Arabic teacher of *Madrasah Aliyah* in South Kalimantan to measure the four language skills of students and their relationship to online learning methods during the study from home program.

2. METHODS

This study used a survey method that involved eighty-seven Arabic teachers from forty-five *Madrasah Aliyah* in South Kalimantan. The instrument is a Google Form questionnaire with five closed-ended questions and three open-ended questions filled with descriptive statements.

Table I. Open- And Closed-Ended Questions

No	Items
Closed-Ended Questions	
1	How does the teacher in Arabic apply the online learning method?
2	What online learning media do teachers often use?
3	What assessment methods do teachers often use?
4	What assessment method received the most student responses?
5	What assessment method received the least student response?
Open-Ended Questions	
6	According to the teacher, what is the most suitable assessment method to measure Arabic language skills and the reasons?
7	What are the difficulties faced by teacher in applying the assessment method?
8	What difficulties did the students face in completing the assessment that is considered the most ideal by the teacher?

This study explained the types of assessment methods used by Arabic teachers in online learning, the types of applications used by teachers to facilitate the online assessment, and the assessment methods that get the most and few responses from students. This study also investigates teachers' challenges in making and distributing online learning assessments and the assessment method that received a minor response. In addition, the linkage of online learning methods to the assessment methods used by teachers. The data from close-ended questionnaires were

analyzed and presented in descriptive methods. The data from open-ended was analyzed by reviewing each response, discovering themes in the verbatim statement, coding, and grouping the topics.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The respondent of this study are varied in characteristics such as male and female, master's degree and bachelor degree, and year of experience

Table 2. Summary Of Respondents Demographic

No	Characteristics	N	%
Gender			
1	Male	53	60.91
2	Female	34	39.09

No	Characteristics	N	%
Education			
3	Bachelors	79	90.80
4	Master's	8	9.20
Years of Experience			
5	< 5 Years	28	32.18
6	50– 10 Years	37	42.52
7	>10 Years	32	25.28

The results of the questionnaire showed a total of fifty-three teachers (61%) applied the *qawaid wa tarjamah* method. This method focuses on students' understanding of the content of the text and its linguistic structure. The teacher records the activities in a video format while reading the text along with the translation. After that, the teacher analyzes the structure of the sentences that make up the text. Then, deliver the video to students.

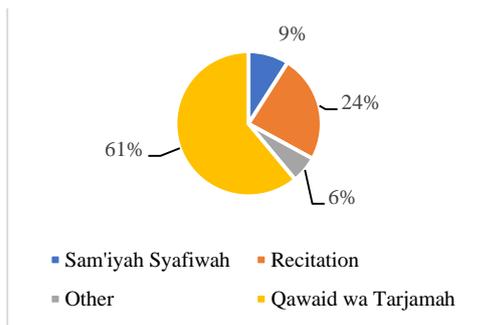


Figure 1. Online Learning Method Applied by Teachers.

Reading is the second most widely used method by teachers. A total of twenty-one respondents (24%) stated that they often use the reading method. The teachers provide videos and translations in text and then ask students to answer questions related to the text. The teachers usually ask students to match words with pictures or compose missing sentences through reading.

Several teachers (9%) applied the *sam'iyah syafawiyah* method. The teachers say *mufradat* or sentences several times, then ask students to repeat the sentences until they can speak fluently. Teachers applied this method to *maharah kalam*, *qira'ah*, and mastery of *mufradat*.

The Arabic learning method used by the teacher, as mentioned above, is only limited to developing receptive language skills. Meanwhile, learning Arabic at the *Madrasah Aliyah* level aims to develop productive and communicative language skills. The *qawaid wa tarjamah* (grammar-translation) and *sam'iyah syafawiyah* (audio-lingual) methods used by

teachers are not suitable for developing productive and communicative language skills [17]. Developing creative speaking and writing skills need practice.

Written and oral communication has a complex relationship. It requires students to have the experience of communicating, interpreting, expressing, and negotiating meaning. Therefore, contextual and communicative language teaching is needed. It interprets language as an inseparable part of individual identity and social behavior. Creating a constructive environment for teaching and learning Arabic is challenging. At least, it can be maximized through learning activities such as practice and skills demonstration. The main challenges for teaching communicative language skills are perception, assignment, and innovative classroom activities [18]

In face-to-face learning, the communicative language teaching approach is easier to do. Teachers can arrange the students to collaborate and work in groups to express their feelings or thoughts regarding the studied topic. It can improve communication skills. Students learn to write creatively through the assignment that asks students to write down their opinions, thoughts, or feelings regarding a topic.

In online learning settings, teachers are required to manage student contributions equally in expressing their thoughts, feelings, and opinions regarding the topics studied. Card and Horton [19] stated that the information technology used as a medium for online language learning is not always able to ensure two-way communication, both between student-student and student-teacher. Wang and Woo [20] also revealed that there are many possible interactions in face-to-face learning. Teachers can encourage students who are less active directly by asking questions. In addition, face-to-face communication allows multiple communication channels with nonverbal information such as tone of voice, gestures, and facial expressions [21]. This way, face-to-face learning creates multi-way communication with complimentary comments, clarifications, and even cross-opinions. Meanwhile, interaction in online learning is limited.

In regards to online learning, Yamagata-Lynch [22] stated that small and well-structured online classes could help students to establish communication with friends and teachers in a learning process, thereby improving their communicative language skills. In addition, Cunningham [23] stated that interactions in online learning are optimal if it is done synchronously. Participants can receive immediate feedback and feel more connected [24]. However, most distance learning is carried out asynchronously. It means students in different locations and their teacher exchange information through digital text, audio, and/or video recordings. Communication between teacher-students and student-students is limited, usually only through text or voice notes [25]. Moreover, due to unresponsive infrastructure conditions, weak internet connectivity, limited data quotas, or incompatible smartphone specifications, the majority of Arabic language teachers at Madrasah *Aliyah* in South Kalimantan use asynchronous learning.

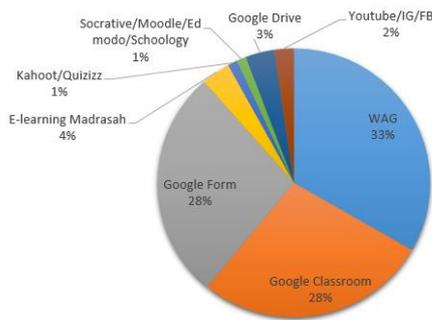


Figure 2. Online Assessment Media used by Teacher.

WhatsApp groups are the most familiar assessment media used by teachers. A total of 29

Table 3. Assessments Method

No	Indicator	N = 67	
		n	%
The assessment method most often used by Arabic teachers to measure the four language skills			
1	Multiple choice	53	60.91
2	True or False	16	18.39
3	Short answer	9	10.34
4	Demonstration	4	4.59
5	Others	5	5.74
The method that gets the most student responses from several assessment methods that are usually carried out by teachers			
1	Multiple choice	65	74.71
2	True or False	21	24.13
3	Short Answer	1	1.1
The method that gets the least student responses from several assessment methods that are usually carried out by teachers			
1	Demonstration	32	36.78
2	Product	29	33.33

respondents (33%) stated this. The respondents said that WhatsApp group is the lightest and most practical application for learning. Students are usually asked to send photos or assessment documents via WhatsApp group. Although it is easy to use, WhatsApp group has weaknesses. It is difficult for the teacher to organize the assessment products. It is also hard for the teacher to separate the assessment products from chat or online discussions with students.

Apart from WhatsApp group, the application that teachers most widely used for online Arabic assessment is Google Classroom (28%) and Google Forms (28%). Google Classroom has an advantage over the WhatsApp group, in which it is easy to categorize topics, materials, assignments, and the assessment. However, unfortunately, some students often complain about being unable to access Google Classroom due to internet connectivity problem. Google Forms are also the mainstay of teachers in conducting online assessments. Google Forms are mainly used for assessment in multiple-choice tests. Its features allow teachers and students to get direct feedback.

Moreover, several teachers stated that they used various assessment media such as gamification through Kahoot! or Quizizz, and web-based learning such as e-learning madrasah, Socrative, Edmodo, Schoology, Moodle, and the like. Teachers who use those kinds of media are from areas with strong internet connection. There is no teacher from public Madrasah *Aliyah* located in sub-district who used this media for online Arabic assessment.

No	Indicator	N = 87	
		n	%
3	Interview	16	18.39
4	Short Answer	7	8.04
5	Others	3	3.44

Through open-ended questions, the teacher expressed an ideal method for assessing four language skills. Thirty-four teachers stated that there must be a web-based learning application that contains material and assessment in the form of performance. Because of the limited internet connectivity, the ideal assessment is students' performance through recorded videos and practicing *muhadatsah* skills with friends. Moreover, students can present themselves by reading the text and explaining its content to enhance their reading ability. For writing ability, creative writing with a specific theme determined by the teacher is the best assessment.

Most Arabic teachers used multiple-choice, true-false, and short answers to measure students' four language skills. This type of assessment method received the most student responses. It means that students find it easy to complete this assessment. However, based on the teacher's statement in the open-ended question, the suitable assessment to measure language skills is non-test one such as performance, work, or oral assessment. The teachers applied this type of non-test assessment, however this only received a few responses. Limited budget for providing adequate internet connection could be the reason for the limited responses of students when the teachers ask them to upload or download videos [26].

The selection of assessment method is also considered by the teacher, especially regarding the online learning method. The learning method still uses a teacher-centered approach and is ineffective for engaging students [27]. In other words, delivering material online is more accessible, but conducting appropriate assessments in online learning is challenging [28]. Moreover, students have been reported that sometimes they got an easier assignment, but sometimes it was difficult and unexpected [26].

The lack of student responses to the non-test type of assessment caused demotivation of teachers to conduct non-test assessments. Performance or work is the most common obstacle expressed by teachers in implementing non-test assessments in online Arabic learning. In addition, the teachers also identified other challenges such as the possibility of students' dishonesty in completing the assessment, limited time allocation, and the complexity of performance or work. Moreover, internet connectivity, lack of smartphone specifications, and the skill in using online assessment applications [26] also contribute to the challenges.

Dörnyei and Ushioda [29] define demotivation as a specific external force that reduces the intention for doing something. Demotivation is close to amotivation, it is a condition of lack of motivation resulting from feelings of helplessness and inability of individuals when faced with certain tasks or conditions, but not for lack of initial interest [30]. Vallerand [31] also attributes amotivation to four sources: lack of confidence in one's ability to perform a task, discovering ineffective strategies, finding the task too difficult, and the perception that one's effort is too small for the amount of activity to be completed.

If the teacher's lack of motivation in carrying out non-test assessments is due to the lack of student responses, then the lack of student motivation in learning foreign languages is due to the learning method applied by the teacher [32] and the dominant teacher-centered learning approach [33]. Lamb and Wedell [34] stated that highly inspired and motivated teachers would ignite students' motivation. It is because motivated teachers will be more energetic and committed to offering variety in classroom activities and will express interest and adaptability to meet the individual needs of learners. In other words, teachers' demotivation can have a very high association and impact in demotivating students in the classroom.

In addition, Trang and Baldauf [22] identified demotivating factors that come only from students, such as poor self-esteem, negative experiences related to the foreign language being studied, and negative attitudes towards the foreign language. The last thing is very prominent in students' demotivation to learn Arabic. Should we refer to the statement put forward by the teacher, that according to students, English is more impressive and easier to learn than Arabic. This is because there are more English users, the language is more familiar to them, and it has the same alphabet as Indonesian. To overcome this condition, Chong et al. [25] suggested a comprehensive improvement regarding teacher professional development, teaching methodology, texts, assignments, and tests and equipping students with coping strategies for self-regulation.

According to the teacher's observations, the challenge faced by students in completing the non-test assessment method was their engagement level in online learning forums. Students show a lack of motivation and engagement in online learning. It may be due to the sudden migration from face to face,

where students are accustomed to a teacher-centered learning approach.

In online learning, they are required to manage independent study time and utilize as many learning resources as they cannot show during online learning. Students are not focused on learning activities and prefer playing MMOGs (Massive Multiplayer Online Games), thus worsening academic procrastination. Amin et al. [35] found that online learning notifications from several applications while learning takes place distract and decrease focus. Students prefer face-to-face learning since managing focus during the learning process is more manageable. Some other obstacles faced by students are the number of assignments given by teachers from various subjects.

Not all students face this online learning with the skills to manage study time, balance learning with other activities, and use various online learning resources. Some students are not accustomed to using smartphones as learning media [36]. Moreover, student engagement in this online learning is determined by interactions between students [37] and students and teachers [38]. This interaction did not run smoothly because students did not know each other, the teacher did not recognize the students well, teacher did not explore the characteristics of students, and teacher did not identify learning problems faced by students. Thus, teacher could not provide appropriate feedback for each student. Low digital literacy [39] and the number of assignments from each subject [40] also make students uncomfortable in participating in online learning, so that it has an impact on the lack of effort in learning.

Regarding independent learning, many studies have been conducted on the concept of self-regulated learning (SRL), in which students are active and responsible for their own learning process [41] and choose a method that suits their learning style. Several studies show that SRL significantly affects students' academic achievement and learning performance [42], [43]. Researchers have shown that students with good SRL skills are more likely to achieve classroom and online learning goals successfully [44]. This reference is accompanied by the development of an adequate assessment instrument and student self-evaluation, which is indispensable in the COVID-19 pandemic to create a good e-learning environment [45].

4. CONCLUSION

The results of this study indicate that the assessment methods most often used by teachers to evaluate their students' literacy are multiple-choice (60.91%), true-false (18.39%), short answer (10.34%), and performance (4.59%). However, the assessment method most students respond to is

multiple choice (74.71%), true-false (24.13%), and short answer (1.1%). The assessment methods that students respond to the least are performance (36.78%), products (33.33%), interviews (18.39%), and short answers (8.04%). The investigation results indicate that the teachers' assessment method to measure four Arabic language skills during COVID-19 pandemic is not suitable completely. Students' attitudes in performing the non-tests assignments are the reason. Moreover, the online learning strategy used by teachers determined the online assessment method. Therefore, igniting students' motivation for Arabic online learning through interesting and engaging learning activities and encouraging students to confirm their achievement in mastering Arabic language skills through suitable assessment methods is needed.

AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS

All authors conceived and designed this study. All authors contributed to the process of revising the manuscript, and in the end, all authors have approved the final version of this manuscript.

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