

TEACHERS' PROFESSIONAL COMPETENCIES AND THEIR ROLE IN ADVANCING ARABIC COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE: EVIDENCE FROM A FIELD STUDY IN BRUNEI DARUSSALAM

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Abstract

This field study aims to analyze and evaluate the effectiveness of communicative Arabic language teachers' competencies in fostering communicative competence among students of the Faculty of Usuluddin at Sultan Sharif Ali Islamic University (UNISSA). Conducted within a non-Arabic-speaking environment, the study underscores the necessity for high-level linguistic and pedagogical performance by instructors to compensate for the absence of a natural Arabic-speaking context. The research is grounded in multiple intersecting theoretical frameworks, notably the Communicative Competence Model of Canale & Swain (1980), Bachman's (1990) conceptualization of organizational and pragmatic competence, Dörnyei's (2001) theory of classroom motivation, and Nation's (2009) procedural model for teaching language skills. The study employed a descriptive-analytical quantitative method, selecting a purposive sample of twelve students enrolled in the "Communicative Arabic" course—representing 40% of the total study population. Data were collected using a validated questionnaire covering six primary domains: phonological competence, writing proficiency, training in oral and written communication skills, classroom management, and motivational ability to encourage language production. The findings revealed that instructors demonstrated high levels of linguistic competence (both oral and written), classroom efficiency, and motivational capacity, with satisfaction indicators in all domains exceeding 93%. The study highlights the importance of maintaining a balance between theoretical knowledge and practical teaching skills, and the need to implement interactive and motivational teaching strategies capable of fostering authentic classroom communication. Practical recommendations are provided for enhancing teacher training programs, integrating educational technology, and enriching the cultural context within Arabic language instruction. This research contributes to the body of literature on Teaching Arabic as a Foreign Language (TAFL) by offering a field-based analytical model for evaluating teacher performance in non-native contexts. It further underscores the critical role of communicative competence development in teachers as a decisive factor in the success of the educational process.

Keywords: Competence, Teachers, Arabic, Language, Communicative.

1. INTRODUCTION

The teaching of Arabic as a foreign language has witnessed a significant global expansion, driven by an increasing demand to master the language for religious, cultural, and academic purposes. This expansion has been accompanied by growing scholarly interest in improving the quality of instructional practices and assessing the effectiveness of teachers in developing learners' linguistic competencies. Within this context, teachers' linguistic and pedagogical competencies emerge as fundamental determinants of the success of Arabic language programs—especially in environments where Arabic is not naturally spoken (Richards, 2008, pp. 1–3; Nation, 2009, pp. 65–67).

Contemporary linguistic and educational theories assert that communicative competence transcends mere grammatical knowledge, encompassing an integrated set of skills that enable teachers to transform linguistic knowledge into dynamic and interactive pedagogical practice (Canale & Swain, 1980, pp. 5–6; Bachman, 1990, pp. 84–90). This

comprehensive competence spans phonological, written, organizational, communicative, and motivational dimensions, all of which intersect in shaping the instructional performance of the teacher and their ability to facilitate language learning in linguistically diverse classrooms.

In light of this theoretical background, the teacher is regarded as the primary linguistic model from whom students acquire foundational language skills. Accordingly, the teacher's mastery of Arabic—both in spoken and written form—is of critical importance, particularly in instructional contexts where Arabic is not the learners' native language. Albirini (2016, pp. 118–121) emphasizes that high levels of phonological and organizational competence among teachers constitute a cornerstone in transmitting accurate and effective linguistic knowledge to students.

This issue becomes even more pronounced in higher education, particularly in institutions dedicated to Islamic studies and Shariah education, where Arabic serves not only as a medium of communication but also as the vessel of religious knowledge and the key to understanding primary Islamic texts. Hence, there arises an urgent need for systematic evaluation of teachers' performance across phonological, writing, and pedagogical dimensions, with the aim of determining the effectiveness of instructional programs and their alignment with intended educational outcomes.

Against this backdrop, the present field study aims to analyze and assess the linguistic and pedagogical competencies of Arabic language instructors at a college specialized in Islamic education. This is achieved through a structured survey of students' perceptions regarding multiple aspects of teacher performance, including: pronunciation, writing, training in communicative skills, classroom management, and motivation for oral and written language production. The study seeks to provide a quantitative analytical perspective supported by statistical indicators to evaluate the extent to which instructors contribute to the development of communicative competence among non-native Arabic-speaking learners.

This study constitutes a practical response to contemporary challenges in Arabic language education across non-Arabic contexts. Recent literature has emphasized the necessity of integrating theoretical linguistic competence with procedural competence (Nation, 2009, p. 65), while also highlighting the crucial role of learner motivation and encouragement—elements no less essential than the linguistic content itself (Dörnyei, 2001, pp. 28–30).

Accordingly, this study endeavors to address the following central question: To what extent do Arabic language instructors possess the linguistic and pedagogical competencies required to develop students' oral and written communicative skills?

Moreover, the study aims to analyze key dimensions of instructional performance based on students' satisfaction indicators, thereby paving the way for the refinement of future training programs and the establishment of effective criteria for the selection and professional development of Arabic language instructors.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

2.1. Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in four interrelated theoretical foundations, which collectively form the conceptual basis for analyzing teacher competence in teaching communicative Arabic, particularly within non-native instructional contexts.

2.1.1. The Theory of Communicative Competence

Canale and Swain (1980) proposed a foundational model of communicative competence, comprising four interdependent components:

- Grammatical Competence: Encompasses knowledge of grammatical rules, sentence structure, morphology, vocabulary, and phonological systems.
- Sociolinguistic Competence: The ability to use language appropriately in social contexts, considering levels of formality and cultural relationships.
- Strategic Competence: The use of verbal and non-verbal strategies to overcome or compensate for gaps in communication.
- Discourse Competence: The capacity to produce and comprehend linguistically cohesive and coherent texts.

This model constitutes the guiding framework for examining teacher performance, emphasizing their role in conveying language as a communicative tool rather than merely a grammatical system (Canale & Swain, 1980, pp. 5–6).

2.1.2. Teacher Competencies in Language Instruction

Bachman (1990) addressed linguistic competence from a functional perspective, dividing it into:

- Organizational Competence: Incorporating grammar, syntax, and textual cohesion.
- Pragmatic Competence: Involving the ability to use language persuasively, effectively, and contextually.

These competencies reflect not only the teacher's linguistic knowledge but also their capacity to transform it into effective communicative performance within the classroom (Bachman, 1990, pp. 87–89).

2.1.3. Motivation and Classroom Interaction Theory

Dörnyei (2001) emphasized the importance of teachers employing motivational strategies to foster learners' desire to engage with the language, particularly at early stages of foreign language acquisition. Such strategies include encouragement, recognition of achievement, creating a safe space for participation, and promoting group interaction. Classroom competence also contributes to establishing a structured and disciplined educational environment that enhances learning effectiveness. Richards (2008) termed this "pedagogical leadership within the classroom," which he regarded as a central element in achieving measurable outcomes in language education (Richards, 2008, pp. 2–3).

2.1.4. Procedural Competence in Teaching Language Skills

The works of Nation (2009) and Hyland (2003) underscore the importance of balancing theoretical linguistic knowledge with practical instructional application, particularly in the domains of speaking and writing. These studies recommend that teachers focus on producing meaningful and authentic language through guided activities, free expression, and continuous feedback.

2.2. Review of Related Studies

Numerous contemporary studies have offered in-depth analyses of teacher performance in the context of teaching Arabic to non-native speakers, particularly regarding communicative competence, classroom management, and instruction of oral and written skills.

2.2.1. Albirini (2016)

In his study on teaching Arabic as a foreign language in Western contexts, Albirini emphasized the importance of teachers possessing a precise and accurate linguistic model, particularly in phonological performance and grammatical structure. He affirmed that teachers' oral performance serves as a mirror of instructional quality, especially in non-Arabic-speaking environments (Albirini, 2016, pp. 118–121).

2.2.2. Savignon (2002)

Savignon analyzed the effectiveness of applying the communicative approach in language instruction, revealing that a teacher's success depends not solely on knowledge of linguistic structure, but on the ability to create authentic communicative scenarios and transform the classroom into a space of genuine learner–language interaction (Savignon, 2002, pp. 9–10).

2.2.3. Hyland (2003)

This study emphasized that writing skills require sustained encouragement for self-expression, exposure to diverse and realistic writing models, and sensitivity to learners' cultural contexts. It highlighted the importance of engaging students in producing meaningful written texts, thereby enhancing their communicative writing competence (Hyland, 2003, pp. 112–115).

2.2.4. Dörnyei (2001)

Dörnyei's study addressed the teacher's role in fostering language learning motivation. It stressed that verbal and emotional encouragement is a fundamental pillar of active learner engagement in the classroom, and that a positive classroom environment is more effective than relying solely on abstract linguistic content (Dörnyei, 2001, pp. 28–30).

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

This study adopted the Descriptive-Evaluative Quantitative Method, widely recognized as one of the most suitable approaches for assessing participants' perceptions and analyzing their attitudes through statistically measurable quantitative data. This design seeks to provide a precise depiction of the educational reality and to evaluate the extent to which targeted educational indicators have been achieved, based on the experiences and perceptions of the students who directly engaged with the instructional process.

The method employed is a branch of the broader descriptive-analytical paradigm, which does not merely present raw data, but rather interprets them in light of established theoretical frameworks and research objectives (Creswell, 2014, pp. 155–159; Fraenkel, Wallen, & Hyun, 2012, pp. 390–392). Its flexibility in examining educational phenomena within natural settings—without researcher interference—makes it particularly appropriate for evaluative educational research, especially in the context of language teaching and learning.

3.2 Population and Sample

The population of this study consisted of all first-year students at the Faculty of Usuluddin, Sultan Sharif Ali Islamic University (UNISSA), who were enrolled in the course "Communicative Arabic" during the 2024 academic year, amounting to a total of thirty (30) students.

From this population, a purposive sample of twelve (12) students—representing 40% of the total population—was selected based on specific inclusion criteria:

- Actual enrollment in the course under evaluation,
- Willingness and cooperative attitude to participate in the study,
- The ability to articulate their learning experiences objectively.

This approach is consistent with the purposive sampling model, one of the most prominent participant selection strategies in evaluative and analytical studies that aim to investigate groups with characteristics directly relevant to the research focus (Creswell, 2014, pp. 158–159). Such a sampling technique is typically employed when the primary objective is to gain in-depth insight into a particular educational experience rather than to generalize findings across a broader population, which aligns with the goals of applied educational research that prioritizes descriptive and interpretive analysis over statistical prediction (Fraenkel, Wallen, & Hyun, 2012, pp. 100–102).

This sampling model is particularly recommended for studies evaluating instructional effectiveness, teacher performance, or learner experiences, where precise internal criteria are required to ensure that participants can provide data with high methodological relevance. The purposive sample is one of the most commonly employed strategies in educational research that seeks to assess specific instructional experiences within small and clearly defined populations, as it allows for a thorough exploration of the dimensions involved (Fraenkel et al., 2012, pp. 99–101; Teddlie & Yu, 2007, p. 77). Moreover, a representation ratio of 40% is deemed sufficient in small populations for conducting reliable descriptive quantitative analyses that reflect the educational reality with a high degree of trustworthiness.

The researchers distributed the research instrument (questionnaire) to the sample participants at the end of the second semester of the 2024 academic year, after the completion of the course in question. This timing was chosen to ensure that participants had acquired a comprehensive perspective on the learning experience, thereby enabling them to provide a well-informed and objective evaluation.

4. FIELDWORK: ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Teachers' Phonological (Oral) Competence

The results indicate that 66.7% of students strongly agreed that the instructor speaks Arabic fluently, while the remaining 33.3% expressed moderate agreement. With a weighted average satisfaction rate of 93.3%, it is evident that the majority of the sample perceived the instructor as possessing advanced phonological competence. This finding reflects the realization of what is known as “phonological competence,” a core component of linguistic proficiency within the Communicative Competence framework as conceptualized by Canale and Swain (1980, pp. 5–6). It forms the foundational pillar for effective oral communication.

Moreover, this result underscores the instructor's role as a linguistic model for students—particularly in contexts where Arabic is taught as a foreign language. Accurate phonetic performance and the ability to produce grammatically correct sentences are considered among the most prominent indicators of instructional competence (Albirini, 2016, pp. 118–121).

4.2. Teachers' Written Competence

The data show that 75% of students strongly agreed that their instructor demonstrates strong writing abilities in Arabic, while 25% moderately agreed, yielding an overall agreement rate of 95%. This reflects the teacher's high level of “organizational competence” in writing, in alignment with Bachman's (1990, pp. 87–89) conceptualization of organizational competence as a critical element in producing grammatically and semantically coherent written texts. Such findings reveal a high level of writing proficiency that enables the teacher to effectively instruct writing skills—a vital element in Arabic language instruction for non-native speakers. It also implies that the teacher is capable not only of correcting students' errors but also of guiding them in organizing ideas and articulating thoughts accurately.

4.3. Training Students in Oral Communication Skills

The findings further show that the student satisfaction rate concerning their training in oral communication skills reached 93.3%, reflecting the instructor's ability to transform linguistic competence into interactive pedagogical performance. However, the presence of 8.3% neutral responses indicates room for improvement, particularly in stimulating student engagement and incorporating effective communicative strategies such as role-play and collaborative learning.

These findings may be linked to Savignon's (2002, pp. 9–10) notion of “interactive communicative competence,” which emphasizes the importance of transitioning students from theoretical language acquisition to practical implementation through rich oral interaction in the classroom.

4.4. Training Students in Written Communication Skills

The results also show that 95% of students agreed that their instructor was capable of effectively training them in written Arabic. This suggests the instructor's ability to employ strategic approaches in developing students' writing skills, including free writing, guided composition, and textual editing.

This finding points to a balance between theoretical linguistic knowledge and procedural competence, thereby enhancing meaningful learning experiences. This aligns with Nation's (2009, p. 65) emphasis on the importance of procedural competence in the context of teaching writing to non-native Arabic learners.

4.5. Classroom Management Competence

The results indicate that 95% of students agreed that the instructor managed the classroom efficiently. This outcome aligns with existing literature that connects classroom competence—also referred to as educational leadership—with effective learning. A well-organized and purposefully directed classroom provides an optimal environment for language acquisition (Richards, 2008, pp. 2–3).

4.6. Encouragement of Oral Communication

According to the findings, 93.3% of students affirmed that the instructor encourages them to engage in oral communication in Arabic. This points to the use of motivational strategies that foster an interactive learning environment. As noted by Dörnyei (2001, pp. 28–30), motivation and encouragement are fundamental to successful foreign language learning, especially at the beginner level.

4.7. Encouragement of Written Expression

Furthermore, 95% of students reported that the instructor motivates them to express themselves in written Arabic. This reflects the teacher's ability to create a supportive writing environment, potentially through the integration of writing into meaningful and evaluative activities. Hyland (2003, pp. 112–115) underscores the importance of promoting self-expression through purposeful writing tasks that connect learners with authentic language contexts.

4.8. Analytical Summary

Overall, the data suggest that the instructors possess high levels of linguistic (oral and written), administrative, and pedagogical competence, all of which contribute to fostering students' communicative proficiency. Satisfaction levels exceeded 93% across most dimensions, indicating the effectiveness of the training programs received by the teachers or their selection according to stringent linguistic criteria.

Nevertheless, the study recommends conducting further qualitative follow-up studies to uncover the specific instructional mechanisms employed by teachers in the classroom. Such investigations would complement the current quantitative analysis and provide deeper practical insights into pedagogical best practices.

5. FINDINGS, SUGGESTIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1. Findings

The fieldwork findings revealed a high level of effectiveness in the competencies of Arabic communicative language instructors at the Faculty of Usuluddin, Sultan Sharif Ali Islamic University. These competencies are evident across various dimensions that reflect excellence in linguistic, pedagogical, and administrative performance. The most significant results are as follows:

- Advanced Phonological Competence: The average student satisfaction rate reached 93.3%, indicating that teachers possess accurate and fluent pronunciation skills. This aligns with what is referred to as phonological competence, a core component of linguistic competence in the Canale & Swain model (1980, pp. 5–6).
- High Writing Proficiency: Approximately 95% of students confirmed that the instructors could write in Arabic with grammatical and semantic accuracy. This corresponds to organizational competence, as defined by Bachman (1990, pp. 87–89).
- Effective Training in Oral and Written Skills: Satisfaction levels exceeded 93% in both speaking and writing domains, suggesting that instructors are capable of transforming theoretical knowledge into practical, interactive teaching activities. This reflects both interactive communicative competence (Savignon, 2002, pp. 9–10) and procedural competence (Nation, 2009, p. 65).
- Outstanding Classroom Management Competence: Student satisfaction with classroom management reached 95%, demonstrating the teacher's ability to maintain order and structure—an essential factor for a successful language learning environment (Richards, 2008, pp. 2–3).
- Effective Student Encouragement: Over 93% of students reported receiving consistent motivation to participate in both oral and written communication. This indicates effective application of motivational strategies (Dörnyei, 2001, pp. 28–30) and the promotion of self-expressive writing activities (Hyland, 2003, pp. 112–115).

In sum, these findings affirm that teacher competence extends beyond linguistic knowledge to encompass the ability to implement that knowledge through concrete, interactive classroom practices, aligned with the functional goals of language teaching in non-native contexts.

5.2. Suggestions

Based on the findings, the following suggestions are proposed:

- Enhance the use of interactive and dramatized activities, such as role-play and open discussion, to increase student engagement and activate communicative abilities in real-life simulated contexts, in line with the principles of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) (Littlewood, 2004, pp. 322–324).
- Integrate digital technologies into communicative instruction, such as using audiovisual applications, to support pronunciation and linguistic performance, consistent with current trends in technology-enhanced language learning (Hockly, 2015, pp. 307–308).

- Design continuous professional development units for teachers focusing on the pragmatic and cultural dimensions of language, to deepen intercultural communicative competence (Kramsch, 1993, pp. 23–24; Byram, 1997).
- Introduce interactive writing in assessment practices, wherein writing skills are evaluated through real-world communication formats—such as email writing, opinion essays, or journals—rather than abstract grammar exercises (Hyland, 2003, pp. 114–115).

5.3. Recommendations

The study recommends the following to higher education institutions in non-Arabic-speaking contexts that adopt Arabic as a medium of instruction:

- Implement systematic evaluation mechanisms for instructors' educational competencies, particularly in oral and written skills, and align these with the learners' actual communicative proficiency.
- Adopt interactive communicative curricula that integrate linguistic and cultural content, as isolating language from its authentic contexts diminishes the effectiveness of learning (Celce-Murcia, 2007, pp. 45–47).
- Encourage researchers to conduct qualitative studies that complement quantitative results by uncovering teachers' real-life classroom strategies and analyzing their interactions with the daily

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