

TESTS AND LINGUISTIC PLATFORMS: AL ERFAAN PROFICIENCY TEST AS A MODEL

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ABSTRACT

This research revolves around the utilization of digitization or digital linguistic platforms in creating effective language tests capable of assessing learners' proficiency in their first or second language. This is achieved by measuring the learner's actual level in the four language skills: listening, reading, speaking, and writing. The attainment of these skills relies on a linguistic platform that employs linguistic algorithms to describe and prepare linguistic material. It also incorporates computer algorithms to construct algorithms in the form of local patterns that enable the automatic reading and utilization of linguistic algorithms. Additionally, the research introduces and defines the proficiency test developed by the Erfaan institute, an electronic test primarily designed to measure the skills of Arabic learners who are not native speakers, particularly those in advanced stages of learning Arabic (C1-2 level according to the Common European Framework), equivalent to the high school level. This test addresses the gap in assessing the skills of non-native Arabic learners and aims to elevate Arabic to the status of global languages with standardized measures for assessing the competencies of non-native speakers.

KEYWORDS

Skills; Linguistic Algorithms; Computer Algorithms; Platforms; Measurement

1. INTRODUCTION

Perhaps what occupies the minds of researchers in Arabic language education, whether as a first or second language, has surpassed the stage of establishing pedagogical foundations, programs, and study plans. It has shifted towards the quest for establishing global standardized foundations for evaluating (not just assessing) the achievement level of learners who have undergone educational experiences accumulated over recent years. The delay in this regard may be attributed to the fact that most specialists in Arabic language education, whether as a first or second language, do not rely on globally recognized frameworks. This ultimately led to achieving results that are arguably limited in effectiveness in the assessment, which is considered the cornerstone of the educational process that cannot be completed without it. Evaluation requires the adoption of strict standards by which the learner's proficiency in representing the language can be measured. Many specialists in Arabic language education lack the theoretical and methodological experience upon which language teaching, which prepares the learner for assessment, should be based. Most of them do not differentiate between teaching the first language and teaching the second language, and there is a significant difference between the two methods, whether in approach or in purpose.

In addition to the lack of pedagogical training in teaching the language at both levels, the abundance of practitioners in this field without such training might explain why, until now, they have not been able to establish an Arabic reference framework similar to what is globally available in this field. This shortage may be attributed to the absence of support from official regional organizations, such as ALSCO or IESCO, which could adopt this project. However, according to our knowledge, the real reason behind this delay might be the absence of any serious proposals presented by researchers to these organizations. The lack of a framework has

negatively impacted the establishment of an Arabic reference framework for assessment that adheres to international standards, evaluating proficiency in the Arabic language as a first or second language. This is despite the increasing demand for learning Arabic globally.

The availability of such interest is not accompanied by a parallel development in teaching methods, and necessarily, there is no corresponding development in assessment methods. So far, we only find the European reference framework or the American ACTFL framework. Although both are globally recognized frameworks, they cannot accommodate the evaluation of Arabic language education as it has its own morphological, syntactic, and semantic characteristics that require specific standards. This is particularly true for Arabic language with emphasis on Fusional morphology, Conjugaison, and Flexional syntax, not to mention Arabic with the distinctive "Dhad" sound, as opposed to Arabic dialects that many private institutions focus on teaching to non-Arabs, seemingly undermining the acquisition of Arabic eloquence for non-Arabs.

Therefore, we are in need of establishing two types of controls:

The first: Controls for teaching Arabic that apply to all institutions specialized in teaching Arabic in our Arab world. This involves the establishment of an Arabic reference framework that is adopted by official organizations in our Arab and Islamic world, similar to the European reference framework adhered to by institutions teaching European languages to non-native speakers in European countries.

The second: Establishing a reference framework for assessing skills (not just knowledge), as a correction to the path followed by most institutions, both private and public. These institutions tend to focus on dry and rigid rote learning, which complicates the entire educational process and places obstacles in front of any program for assessing the globally recognized language skills: reading, writing, speaking, and listening.

For this purpose, an Awareness Test has been developed, taking into account a set of credible global standards applied to more than one natural language. It relied on several globally recognized references in assessment, considering the specific characteristics of Arabic as a fusional, morphological, and flexional language in terms of structure. The preference was given to Arabic fusional morphology and flexional syntax. A comparison was made between multiple global reference frameworks to adopt what serves the Arabic system and is suitable for it educationally. This enabled the formulation of the introduction to an Arabic reference framework that is subject to development, taking into account the reasons for the technological evolution that has aided in building a global standardized test. This test distinguishes itself from other Arabic experiments by focusing on language skills without neglecting knowledge. It automatically considers the learner's level through the principle of randomness, which was adopted in constructing questions, selecting texts, audio and visual clips, as well as presenting writing and speaking questions. All these aspects were tested on tens of thousands of learners who underwent this test through the Internet in various parts of the world. The response to the test was significant worldwide, with the majority of participants from the Russian Federation, where the Ministry of Higher Education adopts and applies it to all Arabic learners in the country.

2. LINGUISTIC TESTS

Internationally, there are numerous linguistic tests aimed at measuring learners' proficiency in languages and their mastery of them. These tests are characterized by their comprehensiveness, relying on the assessment and measurement of the four language skills according to international frameworks. Among these criteria, the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) stands out as a well-known international standard for language proficiency measurement. CEFR is widely adopted in Europe and gaining popularity globally. It serves as a method to describe your ability to understand and speak a foreign language. Several other frameworks with similar goals include the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign

Languages (ACTFL), the Canadian Language Benchmarks (CLB), and the Interagency Language Roundtable (ILR) scale.

It's important to note that CEFR is not tied to specific language tests. Currently, the EF SET is the only standardized English language test that accurately assesses all skill levels from beginner to proficiency. It aligns with the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages. While other standardized tests can evaluate certain proficiency levels, they may not assess all skills specified by CEFR.

Educators in the Arab world have made efforts to establish theoretical foundations for teaching Arabic as a second language. However, measurement experts have not yet set standards for assessing the skills of learners of Arabic as a second language from all genders. This delay may be attributed to the dominance of traditional grammatical perspectives on Arabic linguistic studies, which differs significantly from the views of modern educators and linguists who have formulated comprehensive frameworks for teaching second languages and evaluating learners' proficiency in all languages.

Arabic, in terms of competence, does not differ from any other language globally, given its linguistic program inherent to all speakers. However, in terms of achievement, Arabic is a language based on simple and straightforward structural characteristics that respond to any type of assessment, as long as it is based on pedagogical concepts. The Erfaan Foundation has developed an electronic test that operates entirely online, demonstrating the strength of this standardized test. It adheres to the strongest pedagogical standards aimed at measuring linguistic competencies, taking into account the specificities of the Arabic language.

After testing the most global and robust standards, the Common European Framework of Reference stands out as the strongest framework. Referred to as CEFR, this framework has been adopted in building test questions, owing to its comprehensive nature that combines learning, teaching, and assessment. The theoretical and methodological aspects of this framework related to the assessment of second language skills have been adapted to the requirements of assessing Arabic language skills, with the exclusion of details that do not align with the characteristics of the Arabic language. This approach has resulted in the development of a reference framework specifically for the Arabic language, allowing for a clear vision of the goals of this test, built according to the latest requirements of this globally recognized reference framework. This test's strength lies in considering the methods through which learners have acquired their native languages, specifically tailored to the learning methods of individuals aged twenty to forty, who are learning Arabic as a second language after mastering their native language through the latest pedagogical methods worldwide. The Erfaan test is powerful compared to other experiences that may lack the adoption of a specific reference framework like CEFR or other globally recognized frameworks.

Adopting the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) does not mean neglecting other reference frameworks that form the basis for foreign language tests in the Anglo-Saxon region. Specifically, the American system, mostly based on the ACTFL reference framework, and the British system, using IELTS. Consequently, the test directly benefits from multiple global reference frameworks that have contributed to the development of high-quality language tests. In addition to European frameworks, other internationally recognized frameworks have been incorporated.

Experts involved in constructing the test's skill-based questions underwent training sessions. During these sessions, they were trained on the methodology behind questions based on the five skills adopted in this test. It is essential to note that while various reference frameworks contribute to the test's form, they do not surpass its essence. This distinction is crucial due to the clear differences between the American emphasis on communication skills and the European focus on immersion principles. Therefore, the standardized test aligns with the philosophy of the latter, aiming to measure non-native Arabic learners' immersion in the Arabic linguistic and cultural society.

The adoption of the CEFR framework provides the Erfaan Proficiency Test with the same level of credibility as globally recognized standardized tests. The goal is to ensure that the certificate obtained by candidates carries international credibility. This certification contrasts with tests lacking a global reference, emphasizing that those obtaining the Erfaan Proficiency Test certificate are not inferior, in terms of Arabic language proficiency, to those with TOEFL, IELTS, or other globally recognized English language certificates. The certificate attests to the ability to apply linguistic skills both immersively and communicatively.

It's worth noting that the term "candidate" is used instead of "student" or "learner" in this context. Candidates undertaking the test have moved beyond the learning stage. They possess skills in their native languages and take the test to measure proficiency, not to learn. Therefore, they cannot be labeled as learners. The goal is to evaluate their language skills in the Arabic linguistic and cultural context, particularly for advanced learners (C1 and C2 levels in CEFR).

This standardized test is not designed to teach non-Arabs the Arabic language. Instead, its purpose is to evaluate their language proficiency and skills. Language learning is the domain of language institutes worldwide, each with its methods and approaches. The Erfaan test specifically targets advanced learners who seek to measure their Arabic language proficiency. This distinction acknowledges that these learners have already acquired their native language skills and aim to assess their proficiency in the Arabic language.

In conclusion, the Erfaan Proficiency Test is entirely electronic, eliminating the need for candidates to use paper and pen. It has been professionally designed and placed online, allowing candidates to answer all skill-based questions automatically, including written and oral expressions. Answer evaluation is semi-automated, maintaining high standards of realism, authenticity, and simplicity tailored to the candidates' level.

3. LINGUISTIC PLATFORMS AND AUTOMATED ASSESSMENTS

Linguistics has undergone various developments across its four generations, transitioning from viewing language as structured forms, constituting finite linguistic texts, to conceptualizing language as linguistic algorithms. These algorithms aim to describe linguistic material and prepare it for automated processing through computer algorithms capable of reading and utilizing this material.

Fourth-generation linguistics combines linguistic perspectives with the hard sciences to align with the cognitive and artificial intelligence evolution witnessed by humanity. The transition from weak artificial intelligence (IA Faible), relying on deep learning technology, to strong artificial intelligence (IQ Forte) is anticipated. The desired goal set by artificial intelligence experts is expected to be achieved by 2030. Experts have developed a future program extending to the year 2045 to enable machines to continue evolving instead of relying on humans.

Linguistic assessments rely on computer algorithms capable of reading and utilizing linguistic algorithms. Automated linguistic evaluation relies on Automated Essay Scoring (AES), utilizing electronic systems to record essays. Historically, AES was based on rule-based approaches. Modern systems are more advanced, utilizing probabilistic models. Some models identify features predicting writing quality, including features addressing complexity and standard features in the second language (L2).

These features aid in constructing computer models to detect errors and enable automated evaluation. By using model explanation procedures, the importance and impact of these features have been measured. Recent efforts to identify standard features have been fruitful, with studies addressing various features. However, most can be described as empirical, lacking an automated mechanism to handle user data from input to output. In other words, preprocessing and data analysis are not necessarily linked to any machine learning unit or application interface. Most experiments involve multiple stages of data modeling, hindering realistic model utilization.

Working on standard features has also increased the need to build systems tailored for extracting linguistic features. The goal is to build a dataset reflecting the diversity of linguistic dimensions. Various tools have been developed to meet the needs of specific projects in extracting linguistic

complexity features. These tools provide features with different dimensions of language. However, they cannot be applied to a single dataset in one process. Researchers seeking to weigh the importance of all these features will benefit from a uniformly applied tool on any dataset.

4. AL ERFAN TEST

Al Erfan Test is based on global specifications for teaching and learning Arabic, similar to international language tests, especially those for English, French, and Spanish. It serves the strategic plan for teaching Arabic in the Arab world, meeting the need for teaching and learning Arabic using the latest pedagogical methods. This allows for measuring the competencies of Arabic learners and teachers, leading to a significant educational advancement in promoting Arabic on a broader scale worldwide. Arabic is considered the language of identity and Arab heritage for the peoples of the Arab world, aiming to transition these communities into the knowledge society using their natural language.

The test also aims to integrate non-Arab societal segments into the culture and traditions of Arab countries. It is applicable to government and private schools, universities, and Arabic language education centers in both Arab and non-Arab countries seeking to teach Arabic to their upcoming generations.

The objective is to bring about a radical change in Arabic language education, positioning it as a skill measurable by global standards, similar to other foreign languages. It seeks to enable Arabic to spread globally, akin to the role played by TOEFL in disseminating English worldwide and establishing national identity in the hearts of society in their natural language. Additionally, it aims to empower students in public education to comprehend university materials in the Arabic language, and facilitate the integration of non-Arabic speakers into the culture of the countries they reside in using the local language. Furthermore, the test aims to refine the skills of students and teachers alike in dealing with the Arabic language in understanding, writing, and speaking.

4.1. Test within the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages with Adaptation to Arabic

The Common European Framework operates on two pillars:

1. **Education:** Teaching one of the European languages to a non-native speaker. The focus is on the foundations of linguistic immersion, meaning instructing the student in language skills that will enable them to pursue their studies in the language they are learning. This necessitates comprehensive coverage of various aspects of the language community, including culture, history, beliefs, etc.
2. **Assessment or Measurement:** This involves evaluating the student in the skills they have acquired over a period of at least one year, not exceeding two years. The length of this period depends on the student's language acquisition ability. The situation may differ for European students learning Arabic for the first time; they may require more than four terms to adjust to the mechanisms of the Arabic linguistic system and acquire its skills. However, Muslim non-Arab students may need a shorter duration.

Experiences have shown that this period is essential for non-Arab speakers to acquire basic Arabic language skills. This timeframe aligns with the practices of Arabic language institutes in Saudi Arabia, such as at Imam University, King Saud University, Umm Al-Qura University, Al-Madinah Al-Munawarah University, and other specialized institutes both within the Arab world, like the Khartoum Institute, and abroad, including France and the United States.

4.2. Skills Acquisition within the European Framework

The Common European Framework divides the assessment of skills into three major levels, each consisting of two sub-levels: A1-2, B1-2, and C1-2. The questions in the test have been aligned with the advanced level, specifically level three (C), as per European standards, which branches into two sub-levels: C1 and C2. This level is categorized under "Competent Use of Language" and closely corresponds to the educational level of students at the end of preparatory school and the beginning of general secondary education in the Arab world. However, it may not match the level of high school graduates in some Arab countries.

For non-Arabic speakers at this level (C1-2), these are individuals who have studied at least four consecutive terms in institutes or centers specialized in teaching Arabic to non-native speakers. They fulfill the condition of linguistic immersion or competent language use, a principle emphasized by natural language learning centers worldwide. This principle encourages learners to immerse themselves in the language community and culture they are learning for the purpose of acquiring knowledge, making immersion integral to daily communication for those learning the language.

The Common European Framework provides a brief description for each of these three categories as follows:

1. Category A with its sub-levels: Basic Language Use
2. Category B with its sub-levels: Self-Reliant Language Use
3. Category C with its sub-levels: Competent Language Use

Since this test primarily targets Category C, it is advisable to take a brief look at the competencies required in this category according to the Common European Framework. This understanding helps comprehend the mechanisms upon which the questions for the five skills are built in the test.

This test comprises questions distributed across five skills, incorporating the diversity found in global standardized tests. It oscillates between objective questions based on the multiple-choice principle, which involves choosing from closely related distractors in meaning and form, and subjective questions requiring written intervention, either in a written or oral expression. The construction of these questions has focused on a set of criteria succinctly presented in the following paragraphs.

5. READING SKILL

Reading is one of the fundamental language skills in all languages. In this test, the reading skill is defined through various perspectives, including:

- Extracting meanings from written texts and analyzing them.
- Understanding and interacting with written texts.
- Comprehending the content of paragraphs constituting the text.
- Establishing semantic connections within the text's components and its thematic axes.
- Assigning the correct meaning to lexicographical entries forming the text.
- Understanding the relationship between text paragraphs.

Reading, in this context, is the process of extracting meanings from written texts and analyzing them for the purpose of achieving understanding and awareness. It assesses the reader's ability to interact with these texts.

This skill is presented in the form of realistic texts drawn from daily life, encounters non-native Arabic learners might face in their ordinary lives. These texts are adapted to the age level of those who have reached the C1-2 level in Arabic language learning, typically above the age of twenty. They have likely internalized the system of their natural language and can understand the topics

presented in these written texts, which are in standard Arabic—neither too formal nor excessively colloquial, representing a middle-ground language. The question construction mechanisms for the texts in this skill follow this pattern:

- Each text has a set of questions, ranging up to ten questions, depending on the text's length, intellectual and semantic content.
- The four options/distractors are all plausible to ensure comprehension of the scattering concept.
- The question consists of four options, closely related in meaning, but one is correct.
- Options are arranged from lowest to highest, especially when dealing with numbers.
- The question does not include question marks, as it asserts a condition rather than inquires about it.
- Questions vary between thinking and remembering, both essential elements of critical thinking.
- The lengths of question options are similar, ensuring that no question has significantly more or fewer than ten words.
- A specific time is allocated for each text, considering the difficulty level, length, and number of questions.

This skill aims to measure the candidate's ability to comprehend texts, whether found in academic books and references or in journals and newspapers. It intends to extract meanings and answer related questions. The competencies aimed for in this skill and measurable include:

- The ability to distinguish between sentences forming the texts and understanding the stylistic relationships linking them, through the use of supporting written symbols such as punctuation marks, logical links, logical paragraph arrangement, and understanding the mechanisms of composition and structure used in the text.
- The ability to extract ideas from the paragraphs constituting the text.
- The ability to extract the general content of the text.
- The ability to understand some of the suggestive meanings of the content of paragraphs and phrases.
- Understanding the meanings of some words in the contexts in which they appear.
- Distinguishing between main and sub-ideas presented in the texts.
- Recognizing the linguistic methods used in the text.
- Understanding the relationship between ideas and their sequence through linking tools indicating these relationships.
- Developing critical thinking skills by revealing similarities and differences between the facts presented in the questions and answers and comparing what is presented in the text with the candidate's previous experiences and ideas.

6. LISTENING SKILL

The listening skill has not received the same level of attention as other skills that constitute standardized tests for non-Arabic speakers, even though it is considered a key element in assessing any language. This skill has historically remained the least emphasized among skills, possibly due to the difficulty in addressing it, requiring significant infrastructure and various scientific and educational approaches.

Until recently, foreign languages were primarily taught through reading and translation skills. The second half of the twentieth century witnessed an increase in research on learning both first and second languages. Linguistics, sociology, and anthropology also saw advancements during this period. All these studies concluded that listening skills are fundamental to learning a second language, particularly as speaking skills fundamentally depend on listening skills.

Objectives of the Listening Skill:

The listening skill differs from other skills in the test in terms of its nature, underlying principles, and question-building methods. Therefore, its objectives differ from the rest of the skills. It is based on two types of texts that require a high level of technical proficiency in production: audio texts and visual texts, all presented in the form of passages revolving around specific topics. Each passage has a specific duration during which it is supposed to encompass the subject it addresses from all its aspects. The objectives of this skill include measuring candidates' ability to:

- Follow the conversation attentively and consciously.
- Differentiate between different sounds.
- Distinguish between main and secondary ideas.
- Acquire knowledge from what is heard or seen.
- Link between the conversation and its presentation method.
- Imagine the situations they go through.
- Extract a set of results from what they listen to.
- Use the context of the conversation to understand the meanings of new vocabulary.
- Develop some positive behavioral attitudes, such as respecting the speaker, showing interest in their speech, and interacting with them.

7. WRITING SKILL:

Writing is one of the fundamental language skills we practice in our daily interactions. Through writing, we can communicate with others, express different feelings and emotions, convey our thoughts, and carry out various transactions. Learning to write, especially in a second language, is more than just learning symbols and letters; it extends to understanding the culture of other individuals. Writing has always been one of the most complex and challenging skills to learn. Each language has its unique writing characteristics that distinguish it from other languages. These characteristics preserve the culture of civilizations throughout the ages, allowing us to reread and interpret them to build a new human civilization.

Writing relies on a set of highly skilled and organized patterns and strict rules that regulate the form of the written text in a specific language to avoid interference with other forms of writing. The objective of this skill is to enable learners of the Arabic language to become proficient writers capable of formulating a topic expressing their ideas with precise and eloquent phrases. It also involves organizing these ideas according to the logical structure of the sentence in the Arabic language.

Questions for this skill mostly consist of short texts that include topics that stimulate candidates' desire to compose texts related to them, whether to comment on, object to, or discuss. These texts are generally realistic, used to pose a prompting question that motivates the candidate to write.

Some questions may be presented directly without resorting to prompted texts. This type of question is called a writing-promotion question, where the candidate starts directly to write a text within the required word limit, adhering to globally recognized writing standards.

Notes on Question Structure for this Skill:

- The word limit for writing does not exceed 200 words.
- The allocated time for each question is 30 minutes, ensuring equality among candidates.
- Some questions are preceded by a brief text, followed by an explanation of the requirements, and then the central question that the candidate is required to write about.
- Some questions are direct and without introductions; the candidate must answer them in writing within the specified limits, both in form and content.
- Each question is followed by a set of conditions: language, style, arguments, coherence, etc.

Answering:

- The candidate answers the question within the specified frame on the question page, and this space expands according to the requirements of the question as the number of written words increases. There is a word counter for the candidate's written words.
- The candidate must use the Arabic language keyboard, so they need to make sure that their computer is equipped with this keyboard before starting the test.

Correction of Answers:

- The candidate's answer is automatically sent via the server as soon as they click the "Next" button to the test administration, which, in turn, sends it to accredited graders.
- The question is corrected according to specific criteria, including style, adherence to the question, language errors, coherence of the text's ideas, arguments used, punctuation marks, and text paragraphing.
- The correction results are sent to the test administration, which adds them to the candidate's score report.

8. SPEAKING SKILL:

The speaking skill is one of the most commonly used language skills in standardized tests, following closely behind the listening skill. This skill represents the primary form of communication for humans and is the most common way to express the level attained by Arabic learners. It is also the most direct way to translate feelings. Therefore, linguists agree that speech is the language.

On the other hand, the purpose of this skill is to measure the candidate's ability to immerse themselves in the language system and culture of native speakers orally. This comes after assessing their skills in reading, listening, and writing. This skill, in particular, highlights the candidate's communicative ability across various aspects of society through oral expression.

Objectives of the Speaking Skill:

- Understanding and issuing commands, directions, and instructions.
- Pronouncing numbers and figures correctly and using them accurately.
- Engaging in thoughtful dialogue with peers with proper pronunciation.
- Mentioning key elements, sequential ideas, ongoing events, and relevant topics in various materials with correct Arabic intonation and rhythm.

- Clarifying things using specific modern means orally.
- Describing individual and societal situations, including knowledge, positions, and current events, orally, in accordance with proper Arabic intonation and rhythm.
- Narrating a short story related to personal life or a specific incident.
- Discussing a topic presented for discussion using argumentation for persuasion.
- Formulating meaningful questions about a specific topic and answering them.

9. LANGUAGE SKILL

Language is a system of signals and symbols, serving as a means of expression, communication, and knowledge. It conveys ideas, emotions, and feelings, allowing them to be communicated to others. Language is closely tied to thought; human ideas are always formulated within a linguistic framework, even in subconscious thinking. Through language, ideas gain their tangible existence. Additionally, it is a crucial means of acquiring and transmitting scientific knowledge, and without language, cognitive activity for humans becomes difficult.

The definitions of language vary, with one of the most famous being by Ibn Jinni: "Language is the sounds used by each people to express their purposes." Modern definitions have struggled to surpass this objective definition. However, defining language based on its function differs from defining it based on its reality and its relationship with humans. Language is humanity itself, resulting from thought, representing home and family. It is what distinguishes humans from animals.

From this brief introduction to language, it is evident that this skill is related to all other skills: listening, reading, writing, and speaking. All these skills rely on proper language expression, whether orally or in writing, to convey thoughts, share emotions, exchange knowledge, and meet the oral and written expression requirements. For a complete understanding of all these skills, a well-formed Arabic language, free from all errors, is essential, emphasizing the central position of language in all these skills.

This relationship is determined by the following four aspects:

The Relationship of Language to the Listening Skill: It was previously mentioned that the listening skill measures the candidates' ability to understand the content of oral (heard) speech uttered by others. This skill is closely related to the reading skill, but the relationship of the latter to language differs from listening. In listening skill, candidates must listen carefully to audio or visual clips, focus on the heard sounds, comprehend the content, and then identify the appropriate answer among the four presented options. Understanding these stages is fundamental for candidates during the test. However, the challenge lies not only in the stages but also in dealing with the language they are listening to. How do they interact with it? How do they determine the boundaries between sentences and their meanings in audio clips, and how do they write words and their meanings?

Candidates may be asked in the listening skill about the structure of words and the roots of their linguistic vocabulary. Knowledge of these matters is only acquired by referring them back to their phonological foundations. The candidate is expected to have mastered this during the two-year learning phase at specialized educational centers. The language skill addresses these

difficulties faced by candidates during the listening test, serving as a benchmark measuring their linguistic proficiency when tested in the listening skill.

The Relationship of Language to the Reading Skill:

The test for the reading skill is built upon measuring candidates' proficiency in understanding written texts and comprehending their ideas. This is based on a set of stylistic, linguistic, and technical criteria, which can be clarified as follows:

A) Stylistic Criteria: These are the linguistic expression methods, including:

- Types of structures: Interrogative, conditional, praise, criticism, etc.
- Meanings: Explicit, direct, figurative, metaphorical, etc.

B) Linguistic Criteria: Connected to the Arabic lexicon, this measures candidates' ability to understand the vocabulary and words comprising the test texts, considering them as keys to these texts.

C) Technical Criteria: A set of symbols and marks used to understand the texts of the reading skill. These include punctuation marks that allow recognizing and understanding the relationships between sentences and paragraphs in the texts. All these elements contribute to understanding the texts, and without them, comprehension would be hindered.

The understanding of texts in the reading skill is linked to candidates' ability to comprehend the stylistic and expressive criteria of the Arabic language. The criterion allowing the measurement of their proficiency in the reading skill is their excellence in the language skill.

The Relationship of Language to the Writing Skill:

The writing skill represents the actual implementation of the language skill. It serves as a precise measure of how well candidates embody the structure of the Arabic language in its phonetic, morphological, and structural aspects. In the writing skill, candidates are required to write specific content, considering the basic conditions of this skill:

- Clarity of style: Presenting ideas sequentially and in a linguistic style consistent with sentence structure in the Arabic language.
- Freedom from linguistic and spelling errors: Mastering the writing of Arabic words and their structures.
- Consideration of appropriate punctuation marks: Adjusting the meanings of written texts by placing the appropriate punctuation marks.

While these conditions are linguistic rules and patterns, candidates are tested on them as a whole in the writing skill. However, in the language skill, candidates are asked to identify the correct methods of writing vocabulary and words (both in language and spelling) and determine their morphemic structures.

Regarding the abilities tested in the writing skill, they are as follows:

- Grammatical ability: Writing correct sentences in classical Arabic.
- Stylistic ability: Various uses of the sentence and words in Arabic.
- Technical ability: Writing a topic free from linguistic and spelling errors, with appropriate punctuation marks.
- These abilities are also tested in the language skill, but with greater precision to assess candidates' competence in dealing with different uses of stylistic, grammatical, and technical abilities at the Arabic language test levels.
- In summary, the language skill tests the extent to which candidates comprehend the rules of writing in the Arabic language and evaluates their stylistic, grammatical, and technical uses when writing.
- The Relationship of Language to the Speaking Skill:
- If language is the sounds used by each people to express their purposes, speaking is the actual realization of those sounds. Speaking is a natural, innate ability shared among individuals of the human species, but it varies in terms of each individual's ability to activate and achieve it. This activation and achievement manifest in what is called "language."
- The variation in achieving the language skill when activated in oral expression lies in the following criteria:
- Accurate pronunciation of sounds, considering their articulation and features (phonetic level).
- Pronunciation of words and vocabulary according to the structure of the Arabic language (morphological level).
- Expression of ideas in sentences that align with the sentence structure of the Arabic language (structural level).
- Adherence to the semantic and discursive structure of the Arabic language.

When candidates are tested in the speaking skill, these criteria are effectively checked only in their oral expression. A candidate may succeed in oral expression, but some linguistic details of the Arabic language, whether phonetic, morphological, structural, semantic, or discursive, may be absent. These details are compensated for individually in the language skill test, making this skill a correction for the speaking skill and other skills.

CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, the proficiency test presented demonstrates a comprehensive and meticulous approach to assessing Arabic language skills across various domains. The iBit family of tests, consisting of both the Placement Test and the Main Test, offers a thorough evaluation of candidates' abilities in reading, listening, writing, speaking, and language. The commitment to creating a robust testing environment is evident in the provision of detailed technical specifications, test durations, and the utilization of the Google Chrome operating system for global accessibility.

The establishment of the Erfaan Foundation's testing center, named the "Dhad Center," underlines a commitment to academic excellence. This center not only facilitates accreditation from relevant authorities but also ensures the availability of essential infrastructure for testing, including facilities and equipment. Moreover, the specialization of test creation tasks and the assembly of a knowledgeable team, consisting of researchers and experts in global test design, contribute to the creation of a reliable and credible test database.

It is noteworthy that the Erfaan Foundation's proficiency test has undergone rigorous testing and validation, with over twenty thousand candidates globally participating in the trials. The results

reflect the effectiveness of the two tests—Placement and Main—in assessing Arabic language proficiency, and the commitment to continuous improvement is evident in the ongoing efforts for international accreditation.

The Erfaan institute's initiative is not merely a local endeavor but holds global significance, evident in the accreditation process by various international bodies. The dedication to promoting the Arabic language extends beyond linguistic evaluation, as evidenced by the incorporation of international standards, such as CEFR criteria, ensuring the alignment of the test with global language proficiency benchmarks.

In essence, the Erfaan institute's proficiency test emerges as a robust, internationally recognized instrument for evaluating Arabic language skills. As the foundation moves forward in its mission, it is anticipated that the results and accreditation processes will further solidify its position as a leading authority in the assessment of Arabic language proficiency on a global scale.

To achieve this test, it is necessary to establish a testing center in the country, referred to as the "Dhad Center." This center, in turn, will enable us to obtain academic accreditation from relevant testing authorities (within and outside the country). Additionally, it will provide the infrastructure for the test, including buildings and facilities, to facilitate its recognition. Agreements should be signed with entities benefiting from the test, both locally and internationally.

It is also essential to provide specialized frameworks in test development, distributing their tasks across the test components, and establishing an intellectual structure composed of researchers and experts in designing international tests. This aims to build a database of questions that the test will be based on. Moreover, a promotional booklet about the test and the center should be created and distributed to potential beneficiaries, along with collaborating with international organizations overseeing tests in various languages.

Collaboration should be established with experts in the field of test development worldwide to organize a scientific seminar. This seminar would focus on designing a specialized website on the international network (the Internet). The test has been tried on more than twenty thousand candidates worldwide, including the proficiency test and the comprehensive test. The test is accredited by several official bodies globally, including the Russian Federation, where there is significant interest in learning Arabic.

Papers in this format must not exceed twenty (20) pages in length. Papers should be submitted to the secretary AIRCC. Papers for initial consideration may be submitted in either .doc or .pdf format. Final, camera-ready versions should take into account referees' suggested amendments.

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