

ENHANCING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF ARABIC LANGUAGE INSTRUCTORS IN TEACHING COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE IN BRUNEI DARUSSALAM: A CASE STUDY OF THE FACULTY OF ARABIC LANGUAGE AT SULTAN SHARIF ALI ISLAMIC UNIVERSITY (UNISSA)

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Abstract

This study examines the instructional effectiveness of Arabic language instructors in fostering communicative competence among first-year students at the Faculty of Arabic Language and Translation, Sultan Sharif Ali Islamic University (UNISSA), Brunei Darussalam. Utilizing a purposive sampling approach, data were collected from 14 students enrolled in the Communicative Arabic course during the 2024 academic year, representing 66% of the total cohort. A structured

questionnaire was employed to evaluate instructional performance across seven key dimensions: oral proficiency, written proficiency, training in oral and written communication, classroom management, and motivational strategies. Descriptive statistical analysis was conducted to interpret the responses. The findings reveal a consistently high level of instructional effectiveness, with the highest student agreement (94.3%) recorded in the areas of language proficiency, oral communication training, and classroom management. These outcomes underscore the instructors' strong pedagogical competence and mastery of linguistic content. However, slightly lower agreement levels (91.4%) were noted in the domains of motivational support for both oral and written communication, suggesting the need for enhanced learner engagement strategies. While technical proficiency and classroom organization are well-executed, the results highlight the importance of adopting more dynamic, student-centered approaches to encourage active participation and communicative confidence, particularly among passive learners. This study affirms the instructional strengths of Arabic language educators at UNISSA while identifying opportunities for targeted professional development aimed at further optimizing communicative language teaching outcomes.

Keywords: Arabic instruction, communicative competence, teacher effectiveness, UNISSA

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1. Introduction

Arabic occupies a unique position among world languages, serving not only as a vehicle of religious devotion but also as a central medium of intellectual discourse across the Muslim world. It is the liturgical language of Islam, the linguistic foundation of classical and modern Islamic scholarship, and the cultural thread uniting diverse Muslim societies (Albirini, 2016). Consequently, the effective acquisition of Arabic—particularly communicative competence—is not merely a linguistic achievement but a critical gateway to engaging with a vast heritage of religious, legal, literary, and scientific texts.

Communicative competence in Arabic entails the ability to use the language appropriately and effectively in a range of academic, professional, and social contexts. As Canale and Swain (1980) delineated, it involves not only grammatical accuracy but also sociolinguistic sensitivity, discourse coherence, and strategic flexibility. This multidimensional understanding is particularly significant in contemporary Arabic language education, which must balance the classical register of *al-fuṣḥā* with the evolving communicative demands of modern learners.

In higher education institutions such as Sultan Sharif Ali Islamic University (UNISSA) in Brunei Darussalam, the teaching of Arabic transcends basic literacy and centers on developing functional language skills. The Faculty of Arabic Language and Translation, in particular, is mandated to equip students with the communicative proficiency necessary for academic study, professional engagement, and intercultural exchange. Given this mission, the role of instructors becomes pivotal in shaping pedagogical practices that foster meaningful language use.

However, empirical evaluation of instructional effectiveness—particularly in communicative domains—remains underexplored in many Arabic language programs. As noted by Al-Seghayer (2017), teaching effectiveness in Arabic as a foreign language (AFL) contexts requires instructors to integrate interactive methodologies, manage diverse learner needs, and continually adapt to evolving educational technologies and standards. Therefore, assessing how effectively instructors facilitate communicative competence is essential for informed curriculum development and professional training.

This study seeks to examine the instructional effectiveness of Arabic language teachers at UNISSA in delivering communicative Arabic instruction. Specifically, it aims to identify key strengths in current teaching practices and uncover areas where further pedagogical development may be required. Through this investigation, the research contributes to the broader discourse on Arabic language education quality assurance in the Southeast Asian higher education context.

2. Literature Review

Communicative competence, as defined by Canale and Swain (1980), comprises four core dimensions: grammatical competence (knowledge of syntax and vocabulary), sociolinguistic competence (appropriateness in social contexts), discourse competence (cohesion and coherence), and strategic competence (compensatory strategies for communication breakdowns). This multidimensional framework underscores that language proficiency alone is insufficient for meaningful interaction—learners must be equipped to navigate complex communicative environments effectively.

To operationalize communicative competence in the classroom, instructors must integrate pedagogical strategies that prioritize interaction, contextual relevance, and student engagement. Richards and Rodgers (2014) stress that communicative language teaching (CLT) requires teachers to move beyond traditional grammar instruction towards interactive methodologies that simulate real-life communication. In this regard, the teacher's role transitions from transmitter of knowledge to facilitator of learning experiences.

Arabic language instruction presents additional complexities due to its diglossic nature—the coexistence of Modern Standard Arabic and various regional dialects—which demands a high level of instructional adaptability. Albirini (2016) asserts that Arabic educators must not only navigate this linguistic duality but also guide students in bridging formal and informal registers. Therefore, teacher preparation programs must emphasize both linguistic mastery and methodological flexibility.

Motivational strategies and classroom dynamics further influence learning outcomes. Dornyei (2001) identifies motivational scaffolding—goal-setting, relevance-building, and fostering learner autonomy—as crucial to sustaining language acquisition. Brophy (2010) supports this by emphasizing the impact of positive classroom climate and teacher responsiveness on student engagement.

In Arabic as a foreign language (AFL) contexts, active learner involvement is essential. Al-Busaidi (2013) argues that oral and written communicative tasks not only reinforce grammatical understanding but also empower learners to use Arabic in authentic scenarios. Furthermore, recent studies highlight that technology-enhanced instruction can improve student participation and interaction. For instance, Al-Seghayer (2017) found that multimedia tools significantly increased learners' spoken output and contextual understanding in AFL classrooms.

In sum, the literature underscores that effective communicative Arabic instruction relies on the interplay between instructor competence, context-sensitive pedagogy, student motivation, and learner-centered engagement.

3. Methodology

This study adopted a quantitative, evaluative research design aimed at assessing the effectiveness of Arabic language instructors in teaching communicative skills at Sultan Sharif Ali Islamic University (UNISSA). Quantitative methods are particularly suitable for educational assessment studies that seek to measure perceptions, frequencies, and performance indicators across specific dimensions (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

A purposive sampling technique was employed to select 14 first-year students from the Faculty of Arabic Language and Translation, representing 66% of the total cohort enrolled in the Communicative Arabic course during the 2024 academic year. The selected participants had completed one full semester of instruction and were considered adequately exposed to the teaching methods under evaluation.

Data were collected through a structured, researcher-designed questionnaire consisting of closed-ended items. The instrument was developed based on pedagogical literature in communicative language teaching and instructor evaluation frameworks. It comprised seven core dimensions aligned with instructional effectiveness in communicative language pedagogy:

1. Instructor's oral proficiency in Arabic
2. Instructor's written proficiency in Arabic
3. Ability to train students in oral communication
4. Ability to train students in written communication
5. Classroom management skills
6. Motivation for oral communication
7. Motivation for written communication

Each item in the questionnaire was measured using a five-point Likert scale, ranging from Strongly Agree (5) to Strongly Disagree (1). This widely adopted psychometric instrument enabled the transformation of subjective perceptions into quantifiable ordinal data, allowing for systematic evaluation across multiple instructional dimensions. The Likert scale format ensured consistency in responses, facilitated the identification of prevailing trends, and enhanced the statistical reliability and interpretability of the collected data (Joshi, Kale, Chandel, & Pal, 2015).

Data analysis was conducted using descriptive statistics, specifically frequency distributions and percentage calculations, to determine the prevalence of student agreement or disagreement with each dimension. The choice of descriptive statistical techniques allows for clarity in interpreting trends and identifying areas of instructional strength and weakness (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2012).

The methodological approach aligns with established practices in educational evaluation research, ensuring both internal validity and replicability in similar institutional contexts.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Instructor Language Proficiency

- Oral Proficiency: 71.4% of students strongly agreed, and 22.9% agreed that instructors speak Arabic fluently, totaling 94.3% agreement.
- Written Proficiency: Identical results to oral proficiency (94.3% agreement).

These figures suggest that instructors possess a high level of language mastery, forming a solid foundation for delivering communicative instruction.

4.2 Instructional Practices in Communication Skills

- Training in Oral Communication: 94.3% agreed that instructors effectively train students in spoken Arabic.
- Training in Written Communication: Slightly lower at 92.9%, with 64.3% strongly agreeing and 28.6% agreeing.

These results point to strong, but not flawless, instructional competence. The lower percentage in written communication suggests a need to strengthen pedagogical strategies for writing tasks.

4.3 Classroom Management

- Classroom Management: A total of 94.3% believed instructors managed the class effectively. Classroom organization, discipline, and interaction were seen as conducive to learning, contributing to the success of communicative teaching.

4.4 Motivational Strategies

- Oral Motivation: 91.4% agreed that instructors encouraged speaking in Arabic.
 - Written Motivation: The same 91.4% reported that instructors encouraged writing in Arabic.
- While these are still high scores, they are slightly lower than language proficiency and instructional practices, indicating an area for pedagogical enrichment, particularly in fostering student confidence and active use of Arabic.

4.5 Summary Table of Responses

The table below presents the percentage of agreement and disagreement among respondents regarding each instructional competency dimension assessed in the study:

Instructional Dimension	Agreement (%)	Disagreement (%)
Oral Proficiency	94.3%	5.7%
Written Proficiency	94.3%	5.7%
Oral Communication Training	94.3%	5.7%
Written Communication Training	92.9%	7.1%
Classroom Management	94.3%	5.7%
Encouraging Oral Communication	91.4%	8.6%
Encouraging Written Communication	91.4%	8.6%

These findings indicate a consistently high level of instructional effectiveness, with all dimensions scoring above 90% in positive responses. In particular, competencies related to language proficiency, communication training, and classroom management received the highest agreement levels at 94.3%, suggesting strong foundational teaching skills among instructors.

However, the slightly lower scores in the motivational domains—91.4% for both oral and written encouragement—suggest potential areas for targeted improvement. This may reflect challenges in actively engaging passive learners or promoting spontaneous language use, which are critical for building communicative confidence. Addressing these aspects through enhanced instructional strategies or interactive classroom techniques may further elevate the effectiveness of Arabic language instruction at UNISSA.

5. Conclusion

The findings of this study reveal that Arabic language instructors at the Faculty of Arabic Language and Translation, Sultan Sharif Ali Islamic University (UNISSA), demonstrate a consistently high level of instructional effectiveness in cultivating students' communicative competence. The most significant levels of student agreement—94.3%—were reported in the areas of oral and written language proficiency, oral communication training, and classroom management. These results affirm the instructors' robust command of both linguistic content and pedagogical practices, reflecting a well-structured and proficient instructional framework.

Nonetheless, slightly lower agreement scores were observed in the domains of motivational support for oral and written communication (91.4%), suggesting areas in which pedagogical enhancement is warranted. While technical competence and classroom organization appear well-established, these findings highlight the importance of enriching learner engagement through motivational strategies that promote spontaneous interaction and communicative confidence—particularly among less proactive or passive learners.

To maintain and further enhance instructional quality, this study advocates for the institutionalization of continuous professional development (CPD) programs, with a focus on interactive pedagogies, student-centered methodologies, and the integration of digital technologies. Professional workshops that emphasize peer collaboration, formative assessment, and communicative task-based learning can significantly expand instructors' capacity to activate learners' oral and written expression in Arabic. Furthermore, the study recommends that future research adopt longitudinal, mixed-method, or comparative research designs to examine the sustained impact of instructional practices on student outcomes over time and across different educational contexts. Such approaches would contribute to a more nuanced understanding of best practices in Arabic language pedagogy and inform the development of comprehensive, evidence-based instructional standards for communicative Arabic in non-native settings.

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