Influence of Technical, Social and Communication Skills on Perceive Arabic Language Proficiency in Online Distance Learning

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ABSTRACT

Online Distance Learning (ODL) has become essential in the Covid-19 era. In this context, understanding students' readiness to engage in online learning and its relationship with achievement is crucial. Factors that can contribute to excellence in learning include technical competence, social competence with lecturers and peers, and communication skills. However, the impact of these variables on Arabic language proficiency has not yet been empirically proven. Therefore, this study aims to analyze the influence of these variables on perceive Arabic language proficiency and to identify the most important factor that should be prioritized. A total of 220 questionnaires were distributed to Bachelor's degree students at UiTM Kelantan Branch, and 214 of these were used after data cleaning. The collected data was analyzed using SmartPLS 4.0 software. The results indicated that social competence with lecturers (β=0.328, t=3.796, $p<0.01$, f^2=0.082) and communication skills (β=0.222, t=2.259, $p<0.05$, f^2=0.042) positively influence perceive Arabic language proficiency. Social competence with peers and technical competence were found not to affect Arabic language proficiency. The IPMA analysis showed that social competence with lecturers is the most important factor influencing Arabic language proficiency. This finding clearly proves that active online interaction with lecturers and effective communication in learning are aspects that need to be prioritized to make learning more meaningful and ensure excellent success in learning.

Keywords: Technical competence, Social competence with lecturers, Social competence with peers, Communication skills, Perceive Arabic language proficiency.

INTRODUCTION

The implementation of online learning has long been practiced in developed countries due to its potential to offer various benefits. However, the COVID-19 pandemic has significantly altered the landscape of human life today. The enforcement of the Movement Control Order (MCO) has compelled schools and higher education institutions (HEIs) to fully transition their educational methods to online platforms. Consequently, the teaching and learning process in schools and HEIs began to be conducted entirely virtually through e-learning systems. Most local universities, both public and private, as well as schools in Malaysia, had no option but to adopt online teaching and learning methods to ensure the curriculum could be delivered effectively without delaying the learning sessions (Mohamad Idham, 2020).

Through online learning methods, students are responsible for directing their own learning process. Courses are designed flexibly to meet the needs of individual learning or student-centered learning (Ahmad, Philips, Santhi, Wahid, 2013). Online teaching can be conducted synchronously, involving the use of technology platforms that allow real-time interaction, such as Skype, Google Hangout, Google Meet, YouTube Live, Facebook Live, and Zoom Meeting. These technological platforms enable lecturers to conduct lectures as usual without the need to gather in a lecture hall. Asynchronous teaching, on the other hand, refers to learning

interactions that occur without the need for educators and students to be present at the same time, using platforms such as Google Classroom, YouTube, GMail, Facebook, Twitter, Microsoft Teams, Schoology, Padlet, and Edmodo.

To realize the effectiveness of the online learning process, students must be given opportunities to develop their competencies or skills for engaging in online learning. Competence in aspects such as knowledge, skills, or attitudes enables someone to perform specific expected activities or functions in a job (Spector, 2001). Competence is an individual's perception of their ability or capability. They need to possess social competence, communication competence, and technical competence to ensure the effectiveness of online learning.

However, to date, the effects of all these competence variables on online Arabic language learning remain unclear. Therefore, this study is conducted to identify the extent to which these variables can influence online Arabic language learning. Specifically, the first objective of the study is to measure the relationship between social competence with lecturers, social competence with peers, communication competence, and technical competence with online Arabic language learning. The second objective is to predict the most important factors affecting online Arabic language learning.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Online Learning

Online learning is defined as the use of information and computer technology to create an online course learning experience (Horton, 2006). Allen and Seaman (2011) define it as a course that delivers at least 80% of all course content online. Despite the differences in terminology used, an essential element that must be highlighted is the necessity for students to master computer and internet technology to ensure the sustainability of online learning.

There are many benefits associated with online learning methods. Students have access to high-quality educational resources through online learning. This method provides educational opportunities at a lower cost compared to face-to-face courses. Additionally, teaching becomes more flexible as the learning process can take place anytime and anywhere for the students (Sabella & Hart, 2014). Online learning can offer a personalized learning environment for students, allowing instructors to tailor their teaching methods and materials based on each individual's specific interests (Twigg, 2003).

Online Learning Competence

According to Kerka (1998), competence is an individual characteristic that emphasizes what a person knows and can do, outlining a flexible path to achieving results and providing a standard for measuring specific achievements. Learning competence is defined as the knowledge, skills, or attitudes that enable an individual to perform expected job activities or functions (Spector, 2001). In this study, competence refers to an individual's perception of their ability to socialize, communicate, and use technology. Social competence in this study is defined as the skills, abilities, and self-confidence to manage social situations and build and maintain social relationships. In the context of this study, social competence refers to students' social interactions with lecturers and their social interactions with peers. Communication competence is defined as the ability to demonstrate knowledge of appropriate communicative behavior in specific situations (Myllyla & Torp, 2010). Technical competence is defined as self-confidence in using technology (Heo, 2011).

Previous research has indicated a connection between social competence, communication skills, and technology usage with the academic performance of students involved in online studies (Yu & Richardson, 2015; Cho & Jonassen, 2009) and their capacity to fulfill program requirements (Santhi, Mohd Ghazali & Loo, 2015). The findings from the study by Yu and Richardson (2015) demonstrated that all elements of their model—social, communication, and technical competence—were significantly linked to academic outcomes and student satisfaction in online learning contexts. Similarly, an earlier investigation by Cho and Jonassen (2009) revealed that students' social competence in engaging with instructors and peers in online settings was significantly related to their performance in those environments. Strong social competence, which

encompasses the ability to interact effectively with both peers and instructors, is a major predictor of academic success in online learning scenarios. Research shows that students with strong social skills generally achieve higher academic results due to their capacity for meaningful interaction and collaboration with others (Li et al., 2022; Naseem et al., 2024). The CASEL model emphasizes the significance of social-emotional competencies, such as self-awareness and relationship management, in reaching academic objectives. These competencies aid students in managing the challenges of online learning more effectively (Naseem et al., 2024).

Investigations into interpersonal and communication competence have established that these are among the strongest predictors of academic achievement (Yu & Richardson, 2015; Betermieux & Heuel, 2009; Dabbagh, 2007; Volery & Lord, 2000; Williams, 2003). Furthermore, technical competence is deemed a crucial element necessary for success in online education (Yu & Richardson, 2015; Osika & Sharp, 2002; Selim, 2007) and serves as an important predictor of success in online learning (Herrera & Mendoza, 2011; Cho, 2012; Ben-Jacob, 2011; Selim, 2007). Mastering technical skills is essential for thriving in online learning environments, as students must be adept at using digital tools and platforms to access course content and engage in online activities (Chaw & Tang, 2023; Romi, 2024). Moreover, effective communication is crucial for ensuring student satisfaction and performance in online courses. The ability to communicate clearly and effectively with both instructors and peers can significantly enhance learning experiences and outcomes (Li et al., 2022; Mohammed et al., 2024). Communication and collaboration have been recognized as vital digital competencies that improve student learning performance, facilitating better interactions and engagement in online educational settings (Chaw & Tang, 2022).

Based on the studies conducted by the aforementioned scholars, the following hypotheses have been formulated:

H1: Technical competence positively influences Arabic language proficiency.

H2: Social competence with lecturers positively influences Arabic language proficiency.

H3: Social competence with peers positively influences Arabic language proficiency.

H4: Communication competence positively influences Arabic language proficiency.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study, which employs a quantitative approach, was conducted on students pursuing Arabic as a third language at the Bachelor's degree level at UiTM Kelantan Branch. A total of 240 respondents were selected using simple random probability sampling, stratified by gender, Arabic language proficiency level and prior experience learning Arabic. A questionnaire form containing 20 items from the SOLR instrument by Yu and Richardson (2015) was used to measure technical, social, and communication competence, while 10 items adapted from the UiTM Entrance-Exit Survey were used to measure perceive Arabic language proficiency.

Before data analysis was performed, a data cleaning process involving several tests for missing data and the detection of outliers was conducted. Out of the 240 distributed questionnaires, 214 valid responses free from the aforementioned issues were retained for further analysis. The collected data were then analyzed using SmartPLS 4.0 software, following the Partial Least Square Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) procedures, which involved two stages of analysis: the measurement model and the structural model. Convergent validity and discriminant validity were ensured at the measurement model stage, while the four formulated hypotheses were analyzed in the structural model stage.

STUDY FINDINGS

Demographic Profile of Respondents

The study respondents consisted of 52 (24.3%) male students and 162 (75.7%) female students at UiTM Kelantan Branch. They were students enrolled in three levels of Arabic language at the Bachelor's degree

level: TAC401 (106 respondents, 49.5%), TAC451 (61 respondents, 28.5%), and TAC501 (47 respondents, 22.0%), representing five faculties: the Faculty of Business Management (142 respondents, 66.3%), the Faculty of Computer Science and Mathematics (35 respondents, 16.3%), the Faculty of Accounting (22 respondents, 10.2%), and the Faculty of Information Studies (15 respondents, 7.0%). The majority of the respondents were from the state of Kelantan (82 respondents, 38.3%), followed by Terengganu (42 respondents, 19.6%), Pahang (27 respondents, 12.6%), and Johor (27 respondents, 12.6%). The remaining 36 respondents (16.9%) came from other states in Peninsular Malaysia. A total of 175 respondents (81.7%) received their education at regular secondary schools, while only 39 respondents (18.2%) attended religious secondary schools. Additionally, 139 respondents (65.0%) had prior experience in learning Arabic, while 75 respondents (35.0%) had never studied the language.

Table 1: Respondent Profile

Respondent Profile	**Category**	**Frequency**	**Percentage**
Gender	Male	52	24.3
	Female	162	75.7
Level of Arabic Language	TAC401	106	49.5
	TAC451	61	28.5
	TAC501	47	22.0
Faculty	Business Management	142	66.3
	Computer Science and Mathematics	35	16.3
	Accounting	22	10.2
	Information Studies	15	7.0
Origin State	Kelantan	82	38.3
	Terengganu	42	19.6
	Pahang	27	12.6
	Johor	27	12.6
	Other States in Peninsular Malaysia	36	16.9
Type of Secondary School	Regular Secondary School	175	81.7
	Religious Secondary School	39	18.2
Prior Experience in Learning Arabic	Yes	139	65.0
	No	75	35.0

Source: Author (2025)

Measurement Model Assessment

In this section, the validity and reliability of the data are assessed. Three criteria are required in this part: convergent validity, discriminant validity, and internal reliability of the study items (Ramayah et al., 2018). Convergent validity refers to the extent to which multiple items can measure the same concept. This validity is achieved when all Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values exceed 0.50 and Composite Reliability (CR) exceeds the minimum threshold of 0.7 (Hair et al., 2011). The reliability of the constructs or factors studied is tested using Cronbach's alpha and rhoA values. The minimum required value is 0.7 (Cronbach, 1951). The study findings indicate that the minimum requirements for convergent validity, discriminant validity, and reliability of the questionnaire items have been met. The results of the analysis are summarized in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Convergent Validity

Construct	Item	Loading	Cronbach's Alpha	CR	AVE
CC	CC1	0.843	0.859	0.905	0.704
	CC2	0.799			
	CC3	0.889			
	CC4	0.821			
SCL	SCL1	0.798	0.860	0.899	0.641
	SCL2	0.823			
	SCL3	0.816			
	SCL4	0.756			
	SCL5	0.808			
SCP	SCP1	0.882	0.929	0.946	0.779
	SCP2	0.860			
	SCP3	0.871			
	SCP4	0.909			
	SCP5	0.89			
TC	TC1	0.818	0.896	0.92	0.657
	TC2	0.825			
	TC3	0.812			
	TC4	0.810			
	TC5	0.848			
	TC6	0.745			
ALP	ALP1	0.862	0.966	0.971	0.807
	ALP2	0.894			
	ALP3	0.897			
	ALP4	0.899			
	ALP5	0.887			
	ALP6	0.914			
	ALP7	0.923			
	ALP8	0.908			

CC: Communication Competence, SCL: Social Competence with Lecturers, SCP: Social Competence with Peers, TC: Technical Competence, ALP: Perceive Arabic Language Proficiency, CR: Composite Reliability, AVE: Average Variance Extracted

Source: Author (2025)

Discriminant validity was examined using the Heterotrait-Monotrait ratio (HTMT) method (Henseler et al., 2015). If the HTMT value is 0.90 or less (Gold et al., 2001), it indicates that discriminant validity has been achieved. As described in Table 3, the discriminant validity among the study constructs is below the established value of 0.90. All obtained values were below the HTMT threshold of 0.90 (Gold et al., 2001), indicating that discriminant validity has been achieved.

Table 3: Heterotrait-Monotrait (HTMT) Ratio

	CC	SCL	SCP	TC	ALP
CC					
SCL	0.649				
SCP	0.7	0.725			
TC	0.314	0.485	0.428		
ALP	0.523	0.579	0.49	0.274	

CC: Communication Competence, SCL: Social Competence with Lecturers, SCP: Social Competence with Peers, TC: Technical Competence, ALP: Perceive Arabic Language Proficiency.

Source: Author (2025)

Structural Model Assessment

This study was conducted to examine the influence of technical competence, social competence with lecturers, social competence with peers, and communication competence on the Arabic language proficiency of students at UiTM Kelantan Branch. To this end, four hypotheses were formulated among the study variables. The bootstrapping function in SmartPLS 4.0 was used to test the significance level and t-values for all path coefficients in the study model. The analysis results proved that two path coefficients were found to be significant at the 0.05 level with t-values ≥ 1.645, except for social competence with peers and communication competence, which were found not to influence students' Arabic language proficiency.

Furthermore, the quality of the study model was determined through effect size (f^2), R^2 value, and Q^2 value (Hair et al., 2017). The analysis findings indicated that the effect size (f^2) ranged from small (0.042) to large (0.082). The R^2 value was substantial at 0.323, while the Q^2 value, which exceeded 0, indicated that the study model had adequate predictive relevance (Hair et al., 2017). All results from the hypothesis testing and model quality analysis are detailed in Table 4 below:

Table 4: Path Coefficient Test

Hypothesis	Relationship	Beta	SE	t-value	Decision	R^2	f^2	Q^2
H1	TC -> ALC	0.020	0.074	0.270	Not Supported	0.323	0.000	0.247
H2	SCL -> ALC	0.328	0.086	3.796	Supported		0.082	
H3	SCP -> ALC	0.108	0.097	1.109	Not Supported		0.008	
H4	CC -> ALC	0.222	0.098	2.259	Supported		0.042	

CC: Communication Competence, SCL: Social Competence with Lecturers, SCP: Social Competence with Peers, TC: Technical Competence, ALP: Perceive Arabic Language Proficiency.

$p<0.01$, t-value greater than 2.33.

$p<0.05$, t-value greater than 1.645.

Source: Author (2025)

DISCUSSION

This study was conducted to examine the influence of technical competence, social competence with lecturers and peers, and communication competence on Arabic language proficiency online. The study found that social competence with lecturers was the primary contributor to Arabic language proficiency (ß=0.328, t=3.796, $p<0.01$, $f^2=0.082$), followed by communication competence (ß=0.222, t=2.259, $p<0.01$, $f^2=0.042$). In other words, only two hypotheses were supported, while the others - social competence with peers and technical competence - did not influence Arabic language proficiency. In this study, 32.3% of the Arabic language

proficiency among students taking Arabic courses at UiTM Kelantan Branch was explained by technical competence, social competence with lecturers and peers, and communication competence. However, the strength of the relationships varied.

Social competence with lecturers was found to have the greatest contribution to Arabic language proficiency. The findings of this study indirectly support the research by Cho and Jonassen (2009), which stated that the ability to interact with instructors affects the achievement of students in online courses. However, contrary to their findings, this study did not support the notion of a relationship between students' interaction competence with peers and their academic performance which shows that students with strong social skills generally achieve higher academic results due to their capacity for meaningful interaction and collaboration with others (Li et al., 2022; Naseem et al., 2024). This situation may be due to the fact that academic interactions among students regarding coursework or learning materials are not as active as their interactions with lecturers. The relationship with lecturers online typically occurs through long lectures and small group tutorials. Additionally, communication via email, frequent brief feedback, and discussions over mobile phones fosters a closer relationship between students and lecturers.

Communication competence emerged as the second most important factor influencing Arabic language proficiency. Students were observed to be comfortable expressing their opinions in writing to others, responding to others' ideas, and providing constructive and proactive feedback, even when they disagreed. These findings align with previous studies showing that communication competence is the most influential predictor of academic achievement (Li et al., 2022; Mohammed et al., 2024; Betermieux & Heuel, 2009; Dabbagh, 2007; Volery & Lord, 2000; Williams, 2003). Consistent with the findings of Rafiza (2013), students' behavior changes through different learning techniques. Students prefer to interact and feel more comfortable sharing their thoughts when they do not have to face instructors or classmates directly.

Technical competence was found not to influence students' Arabic language performance. This finding contradicts earlier studies that showed a positive impact on online learning (Chaw & Tang, 2022; Romi, 2024; Osika & Sharp, 2002; Selim, 2007) and identified it as a key predictor of online learning success (Herrera & Mendoza, 2011; Cho, 2012; Ben-Jacob, 2011; Selim, 2007). This contradictory finding may be due to the focus of technical competence in this study being more on the aspects of knowledge, skills, and confidence in engaging with online learning specifically through computer technology. In reality, many students rely heavily on electronic media besides computers, such as mobile phones or iPads, due to inadequate internet access when using home computers or laptops.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The results of this study indicate that social competence with lecturers and communication competence are crucial factors that ensure excellent student achievement in online Arabic language learning. The significant contributions of social competence with lecturers and communication competence to student achievement demonstrate that these factors need to be prioritized in implementing online learning during the Covid-19 pandemic. Although technical competence and social competence with peers were found not to have a significant impact on student achievement, it does not mean that these factors should be overlooked, as students need to master all the necessary skills and competencies to achieve more effective and meaningful learning.

This research expands our understanding of factors that can contribute to excellence in learning include technical competence, social competence with lecturers and peers, and communication skills, and exploring impact of these variables on Arabic language proficiency. Future research should explore the mediating role of specific communication strategies (e.g., active listening, providing constructive feedback, engaging in collaborative discussions) on the relationship between social competence and Arabic language proficiency in online distance learning. Investigating the impact of different technological platforms and their features on students' perceived technical competence and learning outcomes would also be beneficial. Furthermore, a longitudinal study tracking student progress over a longer period could reveal more nuanced insights into the evolving relationships between these skills and Arabic language acquisition. Finally, comparative studies

examining the influence of these factors across different cultural contexts or educational systems could enrich understanding of online Arabic language learning.

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