Arabic Language Efficacy Questionnaire (ALEQ):
Assessing Self-Efficacy and Achievement

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ABSTRACT

Self-efficacy has long been a focus in language learning. Perceived as one's belief in his or her own capabilities in accomplishing a particular task, it affirms that personal behaviours, thoughts, beliefs and environmental conditions pose great impact on achievement. However, in Arabic language learning, research on self-efficacy is still at its infancy, what more of an instrument which precisely measures self-efficacy in Arabic language learning environment. Hence, this paper aims at verification of a newly-developed instrument, Arabic Language Efficacy Questionnaire (ALEQ), as well as to explore the relationship between self-efficacy and Arabic language achievement. A sample of 234 undergraduate students majoring in Arabic language was exposed to ALEQ, and a set of tests to determine their achievement in reading, writing and grammar. A principal components analysis with varimax rotation yields a 3-factor solution with satisfactory psychometric properties. The Pearson's *r* correlation analysis revealed a positive correlation between efficacy in reading, writing and grammar and students' achievement. Results clearly document that the ALEQ is a multidimensional measurement of Arabic language efficacy. It is concluded that although ALEQ has broad applicability, the scale herein may have relevance to the students' level of confidence in learning Arabic language and may be used in both research and teaching environments.

Keywords: self-efficacy; Arabic language; reading; writing; grammar

INTRODUCTION

Self-efficacy is a component of Social Cognitive Theory developed by Bandura (1986). The term 'self-efficacy' is perceived as one's belief in his or her own capabilities in accomplishing a particular task and affirms that one's behaviours, personal thoughts, beliefs and environmental conditions pose great impact on achievement. Within a

language learning context, self-efficacy refers to a learner's cognitive process in judging his or her language abilities and organizing them in order to perform specific language task. Thus, self-efficacy will determine the choice of the task, effort, perseverance, resilience and achievement in learning a language (Bandura, 1986).

Pajares (1996) and Zimmerman (1996) argued that general assessment of self-efficacy provided only a general sense of confidence. Participants who answered the general efficacy questionnaires will have their capabilities in language learning judged without actually knowing the specificity of the questions. It is pertinent to note that language learning differs across all language skills: reading, writing, listening and speaking, and throughout any language tasks such as writing letters, reading academic texts, listening to news and speaking to the public. Self-efficacy in one domain or one particular task cannot be generalized to another because results from these types of general assessments do not accurately measure the students' self-efficacy. Therefore, it is extremely crucial for self-efficacy measurement to be domain-specific, or more precise, task specific.

Taking this issue into consideration, many researchers have focused on self-efficacy in two main language skills: reading and writing. Shell, Colvin and Bruning (1995) examined self-efficacy for reading and writing among public schools' students and the relationship between the two skills and the students' grades and achievement levels. Results indicated that there were differences in self-efficacy in various grades and achievements. Low efficacious readers and writers did not only apply to younger ones but also to advanced and skilled readers and writers. This study also confirmed the role of self-efficacy in boosting and sustaining academic achievement. A qualitative study by Huang and Chang (1998) proved that high achievers in English as a Second Language scored highly in a self-efficacy questionnaire. It even found that their self-efficacy was significantly higher than their achievement. Walker (2003) stressed that students with high self-efficacy will be more engaged in learning language skills and better able in enhancing their achievements. Therefore, she provided some practical suggestions to cultivate self-efficacy in learning language skills with special concerns on low-performing students. A meta-analysis by Schunk and Zimmerman (2007) highlighted the positive effect of modeling in reading and writing in raising self-efficacy levels among language learners. This ultimately leads to better learning as well as improvement in academic performance.

Mills, Pajares and Herron (2006) examined the relationship between self-efficacy, anxiety and French proficiency in both reading and listening skills. The results indicated that, in general, reading and listening self-efficacy were positively associated with reading and listening proficiency, though gender factor might intervene the association. A follow-up study by them (Mills, et al., 2007) also reiterated that intermediate French students' self-efficacy contribute to the achievement in their final grades. Pajares and Johnson (1996), Pajares (2003) and Schunk (2003) also suggested that self-efficacy in writing plays a vital role in directly or indirectly influencing writing performance. This was specifically detailed by Linnenbrink and Pintrich (2003) who posited that accurate feedback in classroom task especially in writing will develop reasonable efficacy beliefs. Self-efficacy belief is regarded as a mediating variable in accomplishing any language learning tasks. For self-efficacy in learning grammar, the only research in this specific area was one conducted by Collins and Bissell (2004). They studied self-efficacy among

community college students towards their performance in grammar during an introductory media writing course. Findings showed the emergence of a positive correlation between grammar self-efficacy and grammar performance on a pre-test grammar quiz, though it was rather weak (r=.30, p<.05). However, no significant correlation was reported from the post-test quiz. This study suggested that additional practice by language learners, however little it is, is an advantage for them in judging their performance and raising their self-efficacy and confidence level.

READING, WRITING AND GRAMMAR IN ARABIC

Arabic is one of the world's major languages, spoken in large parts of the world extending from the Arabian Peninsula to the Atlantic Ocean. It has become an interest for millions of non-Arab Muslims, who do not speak it as a native language, to learn it at different levels, mainly because it is the language of the holy book, the Quran, and all Islamic terms are in Arabic. In Malaysia, the Arabic language entered the country in line with the spread of Islam in the 15th century. Therefore, the purpose for learning Arabic language at the time was mainly due to religious obligation, that is, the understanding of the Quran. It has previously been taught informally at 'madrasah' and 'pondok' (Wan Azura Wan Ahmad, Lubna Abd. Rahman, Arnida Abu Bakar, & Ahmad Pangidoan Nasution Mandily, 2007). As Arabic is progressively becoming one of the most widely spoken languages throughout the world, it is now formally taught in government primary schools as a compulsory subject and in secondary schools as an optional subject. Besides, most of the public universities offer Arabic as part of their foreign language programs, or as a major language for Islamic studies. Learning a foreign language is not merely a matter of understanding some grammatical rules or memorizing vocabularies. Although these are important activities in language learning, they should not be mistaken as the end result of a language learning process. As a matter of fact, acquiring a language is supposed to be about learning speaking, listening, writing and reading skills.

READING

Though many students take reading for granted, research done in the field has proven that it is a complex cognitive process which involves the process of decoding written symbols and constructing meaning in order to comprehend what is read (Grabe, 2009). Therefore, reading and comprehension are two terms that complement each other; the former is the tool and the latter is the product. Throughout the process, many factors would intervene and influence the level of comprehension. Bernhardt (1991), for instance, concluded that the two major factors that affect reading are known as "text-driven operation" and "knowledge-driven operation".

The first factor consists of variables in text such as word recognition, vocabulary, syntax, phonology, and text structure; while the second is related to the readers, comprising of their prior knowledge, attitude toward reading, reading strategies used and others. Learning Arabic within the Malaysian context saw reading highlighted as the most important skill in gaining information as compared to listening, speaking and writing (Asmah Haji Omar, 1982). Hence, reading is regarded as the main activity in Arabic language learning in Malaysia as it fulfils the social needs in the current situation of Malaysia. As a result, the remaining skills seem to be less practiced and less needed

(Nik Mohd Rahimi Nik Yusoff, 1998). Research in Arabic language reading in Malaysia reported various findings regarding learners' reading comprehension. A research conducted on 80 students from two selected religious secondary schools concluded that the learners were poor readers (Raja Mohd Fauzi Raja Musa, Mowafak Abdullah Ahmad & Mohamed Amin Embi, 1999). In contrast, another research with data collected from 50 secondary school students showed the opposite findings, where 80% of them were excellent readers, while another 20% were average readers (Norazman Mohd. Nordin, 2006).

WRITING

Although writing is not considered a main activity in Arabic language learning in Malaysia, this does not necessarily mean that writing is not an important skill for Arabic language. Research has shown that the relationship between reading and writing has been a strong and important one. The processes involved in both cognitive activities share common knowledge-based strategies (Parodi, 2007). Both skills are, thus, vital to learning a new language. Despite the importance of writing skills in language learning, very few studies have been conducted in Arabic writing among Malaysian learners. Most of the researches focused on error analysis (for example, see Abdul Ghani Md. Hassan, 1999). Findings from these studies showed that the common errors made by Arabic language learners are found in sentence structure, language style, semantics and orthography.

GRAMMAR

Grammar is a part of linguistics that covers the rules governing the use of any language. It includes morphology and syntax, often complemented by phonetics, phonology, semantics, and pragmatics. Thus, grammar serves as a tool for accuracy in language communication. In the Malaysian context, syntax and morphology are the main components for syllabus in learning Arabic grammar. As a result, many studies have been conducted in both areas (for examples, see Noor Azizi Ismail, 1999). However, Nik Farhan Mustapha (2002) noted an increasing number of studies focusing more on syntax rather than on morphology. Arabic syntax covers themes such as verb and noun phrases, conjunctions, prepositions, adjectives, possessions, specifications, conditions and relative clauses. It also includes a morpho-syntactic aspect of Arabic flexi or widely known as *al-ᶜirab*, which plays a major role in structuring a sentence to arrive at the accurate meaning (Kamarul Shukri Mat Teh, 2006). On the other hand, an emphasis is placed on the teaching of derivation or *al-tasrif*, which is considered as a nucleus in Arabic morphology. This word-level analysis involves three components: root word, vocalization and auxiliaries.

THE PRESENT STUDY

While taking into consideration the importance of reading, writing and grammar in learning Arabic, this study intends to investigate self-efficacy among learners in these three components. Ghazali Yusri et al. (2011) examined self-efficacy among Malaysian university students in learning Arabic using The Motivated Strategies for Learning Questionnaire (MSLQ). However, the main focus of the study was only on the speaking

skill. Mohamad Azrien Mohamed Adnan and Shukeri Mohamad (2011) explored a broader scope by examining the relationship between language strategies and self-efficacy. They found that learners of Arabic are highly efficacious readers. Though the study revealed a positive correlation between reading strategy and reading efficacy, and a positive correlation between reading strategy and academic performance, no investigation has been conducted on the relationship between reading efficacy and performance. Based on the current literature, the development of an accurate measurement for assessing self-efficacy in the three main components of reading, writing and grammar in Arabic learning in Malaysia is of paramount importance. Thus, this study accepts the challenge in filling the gap in developing a specific measurement tool known as the Arabic Language Efficacy Questionnaire (ALEQ).

The aim of this study is twofold. First, it intends to verify ALEQ as an accurate measurement tool for self-efficacy in Arabic language learning in the three constructs of reading, writing and grammar. Second, it attempts to explore the relationship between self-efficacy in reading, writing and grammar with Arabic Language achievement using the newly-developed instrument (ALEQ). Thus, this study will test the following hypotheses:

H1: Items proposed in ALEQ are multi-dimensional.
H2: Self-efficacy in reading, writing and grammar correlates with achievement in Arabic language learning.

METHODOLOGY

PARTICIPANTS

Participants were 234 undergraduate students majoring in Arabic from an estimated total population of 1500 students. They were from five public universities in Malaysia. 79% were females (n=185) and males represented 18% (n=43) of the respondents. 3% (n=6) of them did not state their gender. As for level of study, the majority (58%) were in their second year (n=135), 23% were in their first year (n=53) while 19% were in their third and fourth years (n=46). The sample was deemed adequate based on the general rule of five respondents per item (Hair, Anderson, Tatham & Black, 1998).

INSTRUMENTS

Two types of measurement tools used in this study were administered during the Arabic language classes, where consent was obtained prior to the data collection. The first was the newly-developed questionnaire, Arabic Language Efficacy Questionnaire, (ALEQ) which measured students' efficacy. The instrument (ALEQ) was self-constructed based on the importance of reading, writing and grammar in the Arabic language learning. It was divided into two parts: A and B. A total of 22 items which captured the underlying three constructs (reading, writing and grammar) were designed for part A. Students were asked to indicate their level of agreement on a 7–point Likert scale, ranging from 1= very strongly disagree to 7 = very strongly agree. Part B provided the demographic description of the respondents. To further establish the psychometric value of self-efficacy in Arabic language learning, all 22 items were subjected to content-related validation. They were reviewed by two experts in Arabic language teaching. The experts viewed all the 22

items that corresponded to the underlying constructs. However, they noted a few repetitive and vague items. These items were then reworded. Finally, all the items were critically examined for readability and clarity.

The second measurement tool comprised a set of test to determine students' achievement in those three constructs. The first question tested their reading comprehension. Based on an Arabic text, they were required to answer a cloze test as well as a set of 'right' or 'wrong' questions four different pictures were presented in the second question,. Students were required to choose only two pictures and to write five sentences for each picture. This question was meant to assess their writing skill. The last question which dealt with grammar contained seven sentences, which were extracted from the same text. Students were asked to vocalize all the words. It is important to note that all these questions were carefully scrutinized by lecturers concerned to ensure that they meet the students' academic level. Answers were then marked and calculated in the form of percentage.

PROCEDURE

Data collection took place in Arabic language classes in the selected universities. All participants were informed that they will be given a questionnaire to respond to and to sit for a set of tests. It was emphasized that they were free to withdraw from the study at any time. Verbal instructions and explanation were also given to the participants before they respond to both instruments. The participants took no more than one hour to complete them.

INITIAL FACTORIAL ANALYSIS

The analysis used is Principal Component Analysis (PCA) where varimax rotation was conducted to determine the construct validity of the data collected from the students. The analysis adopted an exploratory approach where no assumed structure is to be confirmed. In order to identify the underlying dimensions of the variables, factor analysis test was conducted on the inter-variable correlations matrix. This is a data reduction technique used to determine whether there is a smaller number of underlying dimensions which account for the major sources of variation in the participants' responses. From the initial 22 items, principal component analysis with varimax rotation retained only items with eigenvalues greater than 1.0, thus producing an initial 3-factor solution for 16 items. Items were assigned to factors based on the highest loadings (minimum acceptable loading of .40). All 16 items loaded substantially on the 3 factors and these factors were interpretable. Any item which is loaded to more than 1 factor (cross-loading) will be discarded and would not be considered to represent any of the factors. According to Stevens (1996), in order to be eligible for a factor, there should be more than 3 items loaded for each factor. Thus, the low-loaded factors were discarded from further analysis. In addition, a reliability test was performed on each of the 3 factors. Prior to assessing assumptions, a visual inspection was done by looking at the correlation matrix to see patterns of relationship among the items. The table shows that a considerable number of correlations were greater than 0.3, ranging between 0.331 and 0.743. This correlation value indicates that the matrix was suitable for factoring and suggested the appropriateness of the principal component analysis for the data. In assessing

assumptions for correlated variables in the initial solution, three tests were conducted. First, for Bartlett's Test for Sphericity, it was found that χ^2 (234) = 2884, p =.001. The result shows statistically significant correlation among items. Secondly, the overall Keiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy was 0.927, demonstrating that the sample was sufficient to support PCA and since it is greater than 0.7, it shows that there was good correlation among the items as shown in Table 1.

TABLE 1. KMO and Bartlett's Test

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		.927
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	2883.562
	Df	210
	Sig.	.001

Next, the measure of Communality of items indicates that a majority of scores are 0.47 and greater (between 0.47-0.78).It can be stated that the results of the entire statistical test above pointed to the appropriateness of using PCA in the study as displayed in Table 2.

TABLE 2. Communalities

Time	Extraction
Comprehend word meanings	.701
Comprehend difficult texts	.639
Relate to prior knowledge	.719
Achieve good result in comprehension test	.743
Write competently	.465
Able to convey message to readers	.634
Possess sufficient orthographic knowledge	.660
Acquire sufficient vocabulary	.776
Build correct sentence structure	.684
Achieve good result in writing test	.707
Understand syntax	.783
Apply syntax rules	.733
Good command of morpho-syntactic aspects	.779
Good command of word forms	.676
Use correct derivation	.632
Achieve good result in grammar test	.687

FACTOR STRUCTURE OF ALEQ

The three-factor solution obtained from the principal components analysis with varimax rotation accounted for 68.9% of the total variance, based on the ALEQ survey questionnaires, as seen in Table 3.

TABLE 3. Total Variance Explained

Component	Initial Eigenvalues	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	8.752	27.4	23.4
2	1.224	22.2	49.6
3	1.041	19.3	68.9

Table 4 showed the rotated component matrix. It explained the loading of each of the items as well as the similarity of the items that could be grouped together to form a component or factor.

TABLE 4. Rotated Component Matrix

	Component		
	1	**2**	**3**
Comprehend word meanings			.773
Relate to prior knowledge			.763
Comprehend difficult texts			.637
Achieve good result in comprehension test			.528
Acquire sufficient vocabulary	.842		
Possess sufficient orthographic knowledge	.747		
Build correct sentence structure	.727		
Achieve good result in writing test	.724		
Write competently	.572		
Able to convey message to readers	.439		
Good command of morpho-syntactic aspects		.817	
Understand syntax		.753	
Apply syntax rules		.703	
Good command of word forms		.671	
Achieve good result in grammar test		.567	
Use correct derivation		.459	

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.
Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.

The first factor is labelled as Reading Efficacy, while the second factor is labelled Writing Efficacy and the third factor is named Grammar Efficacy. These three factors consisted of 16 items altogether were retained for further analysis, which accounted for 68.9% from the total variance explained.

The first factor, Reading Efficacy, had four items. It concerned students' reading ability and their confidence level in understanding the meaning of the words, vocabulary, words in context and ability to perform well in examination. The second factor, Writing Efficacy had six items loaded to the factor and the questions dealt with their belief of their ability to write efficiently, others can understand their writing, having enough vocabulary, being sentence structure and achieving high marks for their writing skill. The third factor, labelled as Grammar Efficacy, had six items loaded to the factor and dealt with Arabic language grammar and their ability to practically use grammatical

techniques. The students also believe in their ability to master wazan, *i'rab*, derivation and other grammatical problems.

The reliability test was conducted using Cronbach's Alpha (α). It is a common measure of scale reliability (Field, 2009). After the analysis was done, the values were acceptable, ranging between 0.840 and 0.899. It indicated that the newly formed subscales were internally consistent (see Table 5).

TABLE 5. Cronbach's Alpha for 3-factor analysis

Factors	Cronbach's Alpha
Reading Efficacy	0.840
Writing Efficacy	0.883
Grammar Efficacy	0.899

SELF-EFFICACY AND ACHIEVEMENT

An examination of the data from the Arabic Language Efficacy Questionnaire (ALEQ) revealed that students' efficacy in the three components were slightly above the moderate level, with grammar efficacy appeared to be the highest ($M = 4.66$, $SD = 0.86$), followed by writing efficacy ($M = 4.45$, $SD = 0.85$), and finally reading efficacy ($M = 4.42$, $SD = 0.80$). Meanwhile, results from students' test showed that the overall students' achievement also appeared to be above the moderate level ($M = 66.31$, $SD = 12.10$).

TABLE 6. Mean of reading efficacy, writing efficacy, grammar efficacy and overall achievement (N = 234)

	Mean	Std. Deviation
Reading efficacy	4.42	0.80
Writing efficacy	4.45	0.85
Grammar efficacy	4.66	0.86
Overall achievement	66.31	12.10

Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient (r) was calculated to determine the strength and direction of relationship between self-efficacy in the three main components: reading, writing and grammar, with achievement in Arabic language learning. The results indicate that there is a positive correlation between reading efficacy and overall achievement ($r = .21$, $p < .05$). In addition, writing efficacy is found to be positively associated with overall achievement ($r = .22$, $< .05$). However, grammar efficacy shows a slightly weaker positive association with overall achievement ($r = .19$, $p < .05$). In general, these findings as displayed in Table 7, support the second hypothesis which states that there is a significant correlation between self-efficacy in reading, writing and grammar, with students' achievement.

TABLE 7. Correlations of reading efficacy, writing efficacy, grammar efficacy with overall achievement

		Achievement	Reading Efficacy	Writing Efficacy	Grammar Efficacy
Overall achievement	Pearson Correlation	1	.213**	.217**	.188**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.001	.001	.004
	N	234	234	234	234

**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

Although the correlation is statistically significant, the values of correlation coefficient (r=.21), (r=.22) and (r=.19) reveal weak correlations as the higher the absolute value of the correlation coefficient, the stronger the relationship (Taylor, 1990). Therefore, the coefficient of determination is used to fully interpret r which are ($r^2 = 0.04$), ($r^2 = 0.05$) and ($r^2 = 0.04$). This means that even though the r_s correlations are statistically significant at $\alpha < .05$, with a large sample ($n = 234$), it can be seen that only 4% of the total variation in achievement was accounted for by variation in reading and grammar, and only 5% of the total variation in achievement was accounted for by variation in writing.

DISCUSSION

The factor structure obtained from the analysis documents that ALEQ is a multidimensional scale, which dealt into relevant dimensions of Arabic learning efficacy. Validation by principal component analysis further established each measured construct of self-efficacy. Empirically, it demonstrates the ability of this instrument in measuring efficacy level of Arabic learners in three different components: reading, writing and grammar towards their performance.

This study implies that when investigating self-efficacy in learning Arabic, reading, writing and grammar deserve to be prioritized. Their emergence as separate distinctive dimensions lends support to the importance of these three components to the Malaysian context. Both comprehension and reading stand on a single dimension in self-efficacy; thus echoes what has been proposed by Grabe (2009). On the other side, orthographic knowledge, message conveyed, competent writing, vocabulary, sentence structure, and writing test contribute to writing efficacy component. Meanwhile, grammar efficacy component covers aspects of syntax, morpho-syntactic, word forms, derivation and grammar test. An overall analysis of 234 respondents revealed that high efficacious students in these components are found to attain better results than their counterparts. However, among the three components, self-efficacy in reading and writing tend to be more closely associated with achievement as compared to grammar efficacy. Hence, evidence from this study supports the previous studies which focused more on these two dimensions of efficacy (Huang & Chang, 1998; Shell et al., 1995; Schunk & Zimmerman, 2007). The weak association between efficacy in grammar and learners' performance is consistent with findings by Collins and Bissell (2004).

Weak correlations found in this study between achievement and reading, writing and grammar could be attributed to the language itself. In Malaysia, Arabic language comes after the Malay, English, Chinese and Tamil languages. In fact, the Malaysian Ministry of Education has classified Arabic language as a foreign language which

supports the teaching of Islamic education. In public domain, Arabic is much associated with rituals and religious aspects. With the restricted role assigned to Arabic, mastering this language might not be perceived as important as other languages. In addition, other factors which are not included in this study might have relevance to this weak correlation.

CONCLUSION

To conclude, the present investigation showed a relevance in establishing the psychometric characteristic of the instrument in documenting and determining the validity and reliability of ALEQ. However, further empirical study should be done on a wider context to cover all scope of Arabic language learning. In addition, measuring students' efficacy on specific language task will enhance the instrument and see its specific impact on students' achievement. This instrument would then have a direct practical impact on the teaching and learning processes. When Arabic learners believe that they are good readers, writers and able to use correct grammar in their communication, the effect of these beliefs is observed in the improvement of their performance. This requires teachers' monitoring and awareness of students' personal development in any learning context. Positive reinforcement and motivation towards students' capabilities in learning, without focusing too much on their failure, will eventually ease the learning tasks. Hence, better results are derived as the optimum output.

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