

Evaluation of Arabic Listening Tests Based on The CEFR Framework: Level Classification and Competency Indicators

Evaluasi Tes Menyimak Bahasa Arab Berdasarkan Kerangka CEFR: Klasifikasi Level dan Indikator Kompetensi

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Abstract

Listening comprehension is one of the most challenging components of Arabic language learning due to auditory limitations, environmental distractions, and the rapid and non-repeatable nature of spoken language. To support the development of more standardized listening assessments, this study aims to analyze and classify 29 types of Arabic listening test items based on the Common European Framework of Reference for Language (CEFR). Using a descriptive-qualitative approach, data were collected through literature review and document analysis of 29 test types found in al-ikhtibarat al-lughawiyah. The findings reveal that these test types can be systematically mapped across the six CEFR proficiency levels (A1-C2), each reflecting distinct competency indicators ranging from basic word recognition to the interpretation of implicit meaning in complex spoken discourse. The result also demonstrate that the test variations cover a broad spectrum of listening abilities, offering a representative model for CEFR-aligned listening assessment in Arabic. This study contributes a practical classification framework that can serve as a reference for educators and test developers in designing more objective, transparent, and proficiency-oriented listening evaluations. Practically, this framework enables teachers to select, adapt, and construct listening test items that better align with learners' proficiency profiles and support more effective instruction and assessment of Arabic listening skills.

Keywords: Arabic Listening Skills, CEFR, Competency Indicators, Language Assessment, Test Design.

ملخص

يعد فهم الاستماع أحد أصعب مكونات تعلم اللغة العربية بسبب القيود السمعية والانحرافات البيئية والطبيعة السريعة وغير القابلة للتكرار للغة المنطوقة. لدعم تطوير تقييمات استماع أكثر توحيداً، تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى تحليل وتصنيف ٢٩ نوعاً من عناصر اختبار الاستماع باللغة العربية استناداً إلى الإطار الأوروبي المرجعي الموحد للغات (CEFR). باستخدام نهج وصفي نوعي، تم جمع البيانات من خلال مراجعة الأدبيات وتحليل الوثائق لـ ٢٩ نوعاً من الاختبارات الموجودة في الاختبارات اللغوية. تظهر النتائج أن هذه الأنواع من الاختبارات يمكن تصنيفها بشكل منهجي عبر مستويات الكفاءة الستة في الإطار الأوروبي المرجعي الموحد للغات (A1-C2)، حيث يعكس كل منها مؤشرات كفاءة متميزة تتراوح من التعرف على الكلمات الأساسية إلى تفسير المعنى الضمني في الخطاب المنطوق المعقد. تظهر النتائج أيضاً أن اختلافات الاختبارات تغطي نطاقاً واسعاً من قدرات الاستماع، مما يوفر نموذجاً تمثيلاً لتقييم الاستماع باللغة العربية المتوافق مع CEFR. تساهم هذه الدراسة في وضع إطار تصنيف عملي يمكن أن يكون مرجعاً للمعلمين ومطوري الاختبارات في تصميم تقييمات استماع أكثر موضوعية وشفافية وتركيزاً على الكفاءة. من الناحية العملية، يتيح هذا الإطار للمعلمين اختيار وتكييف وبناء عناصر اختبار الاستماع التي تتوافق بشكل أفضل مع ملامح كفاءة المتعلمين وتدعم تعليم وتقييم مهارات الاستماع باللغة العربية بشكل أكثر فعالية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: CEFR، تقييم اللغة، مهارة الاستماع باللغة العربية، تصميم الاختبارات، مؤشرات الكفاءة.

Introduction

Listening skills are among the most complex aspects for learners to master in Arabic language learning.¹ Listening also serves as an essential foundation for other language skills, including speaking, reading, and writing.² According to Tarigan, "Listening is a process that involves activities such as hearing the sounds of language, identifying, interpreting, evaluating, and reacting to the meaning contained within it."³ However, despite its

¹ Abdulssalam Alqarni and Ali Alhramelah, "Designing a Smart Voice Assistant Based on Artificial Intelligence to Develop Listening and Speaking Skills in English for Elementary School Students," *EDUPIJ* 17 (2025): 2, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.22521/edupij.2025.17.403>.

² Larry Vandergrift, "Recent Developments in Second and Foreign Language Listening Comprehension Research," *Language Teaching* 40, no. 3 (2007): 191-210, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1017/S0261444807004338>.

³ Slamet Triyadi, "Efektivitas Penggunaan Media Audio-Visual Untuk Meningkatkan Keterampilan Menyimak Siswa Pada Mata Pelajaran Pendidikan Bahasa Indonesia," *Jurnal Pendidikan Unsika* 3, no. 2 (2015): 188-199, <https://journal.unsika.ac.id/index.php/judika/article/view/215>.

importance, listening skills often receive less attention compared to other language skills, especially in the evaluation process.⁴

The primary issue addressed in this study is the implementation of Arabic listening comprehension tests, which, in many cases, are not yet standardized and do not accurately measure learners' authentic communicative abilities. Most existing listening tests retain a conventional nature, emphasizing the recognition of vocabulary sounds rather than understanding the actual meaning and communicative context.⁵ Additionally, factors such as the lack of representative audio sources, variations in native speaker accents, speech rate, and environmental disturbances during testing also affect the validity of the listening test result.⁶ In response to these issues, the CEFR provides a systematic framework for evaluating listening proficiency across six levels (A1-C2). However, Previous research has explored CEFR applications in speaking and reading.⁷ Research specifically examining the classification of listening comprehension tests based on the CEFR remains limited. This gap highlights the need for more structured investigations that align listening test design with CEFR descriptors and competency indicators.

Based on the above discussion, this study aims to analyze and classify various types of Arabic listening comprehension tests obtained from the book "الاختبارات اللغوية" (al-ikhtibārāt al-lughawīyyah) according to the CEFR proficiency levels (A1-C2), the types of listening skills assessed, and the presentation formats of the test items. The results of this study are expected to provide a systematic, valid, and applicable classification framework for teachers, researchers, and Arabic language test developers, enabling the design of listening assessment instruments that align with international standards.

⁴ Roger Segura Arias and Karla Daniela Herrera Rodriguez, "Using Global Englishes to Improve Listening Comprehension in Pre- Intermediate English Learners," *Gist Education and Learning Research Journal* 29, no. 29 (2024): 81-98.

⁵ Harison Mohd Sidek and Ibrahim Mikail, "ARABIC AS A SECOND LANGUAGE LISTENING COMPREHENSION: Instruction and Assessment Analysis of Spoken Texts," *Ullum Islamiyah: The Malaysian Journal of Islamic Science* 20 (2017): 21-34, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.33102/uij.vol20no0.32>.

⁶ John Flowerdew and Lindsay Miller, *Second Language Listening: Theory and Practice* (Cambridge University Press, 2010), 88-162. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511667244>.

⁷ Budi Waluyo, Ali Zahabi, and Luksika Ruangsung, "Language Assessment at a Thai University: A CEFR-Based Test of English Proficiency Development," *REFlections* 31, no. 1 (2024): 25-47, <https://doi.org/10.61508/refl.v31i1.270418>.

Result and Discussion

This study is a critical and analytical investigation of Arabic listening tests within the framework of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), aiming to classify its proficiency levels and competency indicators. The research employs a descriptive-qualitative method, utilizing a literature review and content analysis of 29 listening test items drawn from *al-ikhtibārāt al-lughawīyyah*, which are analyzed in alignment with the CEFR proficiency descriptors.

A. CEFR Level Classification And Indicators

CEFR is an alternative for foreign language learning in Europe for non-native English speakers; this theory can be applied to Arabic language learning, as well as 40 other foreign languages besides English.⁸ The CEFR serves as a source of inspiration and guidance, providing a collection of descriptive examples that facilitate understanding of language proficiency, its application, and practical implementation in language teaching and assessment.⁹

The CEFR describes language learners' abilities in listening, reading, speaking, and writing along the vertical dimension, which consists of six levels, ranging from A1 to C2, and is divided into three main groups: Basic Users, Independent Users, and Proficient Users. Each level defines the skills students are expected to achieve and uses statements indicating that they can do.¹⁰ Below is the classification of Arabic listening skill proficiency levels based on the CEFR and their indicators:¹¹

Table 1. CEFR Level Competency and Indicators

CEFR level competency indicators in listening tests	
A1	recognize fundamental words and phrases related to oneself, one's family, and one's surroundings
	Understand basic information from conversations spoken slowly and clearly.
	capturing conversation content related to personal identity, such as name, address, and occupation

⁸ Talqis Nurdianto and Noor Azizi bin Ismail, "Pembelajaran Bahasa Arab Berbasis Common European Framework Of Reference For Language (CEFR) Di Indonesia," *Al Mahāra: Jurnal Pendidikan Bahasa Arab* 6, no. 1 (2020): 13, <https://doi.org/10.14421/almahara.2020.061-01>.

⁹ (Waluyo et al., 2024)

¹⁰ Sivakorn Tangsakul and Kornwipa Poonpon, "Aligning Academic Reading Tests to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR)," *REFlections* 31, no. 2 (2024): 614–638, <https://doi.org/10.61508/refl.v31i2.275057>.

¹¹ Sudaryanto Sudaryanto and Pratomo Widodo, "Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) Dan Implikasinya Bagi Buku Ajar BIPA," *Jurnal Idiomatik: Jurnal Pendidikan Bahasa Dan Sastra Indonesia* 3, no. 2 (2020): 80–87, <https://doi.org/10.46918/idiomatik.v3i2.777>.

	spell or repeat simple phrases that are heard
	understand commonly used sentences and expressions related to immediate needs, such as directions, locations, and daily activities
A2	able to recognize and repeat words and phrases related to routine situations in conversation
	Identify the content of the listening comprehension related to practical and simple information
	understanding the main points of a conversation in a broader context, such as in schoolwork or daily activities
B1	able to routinely grasp the meaning of conversations containing complex sentences
	following instructions, responding to information, and understanding conversations in general situations
	understanding the main ideas of complex discussions, both concrete and abstract
B2	can follow detailed arguments and explanations in discussions
	understanding various types of spoken languages, including native and fast languages
	understand most extended and demanding spoken discourse and texts
C1	capturing implicit meanings and subtle details in complex conversations or discussions
	able to participate in academic or professional discussions fluently
	understand almost all forms of spoken language with ease
C2	Summarize and reconstruct information from various oral sources.
	capturing nuances of meaning in complex and spontaneous communication situations

B. Evaluation Of Arabic Listening Test Based On CEFR Levels And Indicators

Evaluation instruments are used to collect or process data on how students learn. In addition to observing communication aspects, listening skills can also be measured through learning evaluations using various types of tests. Students' ability to understand and respond to spoken discourse is measured through listening skill tests.¹²

Children also acquire listening skills through various phases, including auditory perception, which is the ability to perceive and understand what is heard, this is followed by auditory discrimination, which allows to distinguish between different sounds, whether they are from friends, teachers, or people around you, Children will learn to remember sequences of sounds in words or sentences after they can distinguish between the sounds they hear, in the next stage, auditory memory, children learn to connect the words or sounds they hear with their own experiences, as well as objects, thoughts, and

¹² Sherly Yustuti, Masrun Masrun, and Hikmah Hikmah, "Development of Listening Skills Evaluation Instruments," *Mantiq Tayr: Journal of Arabic Language* 3, no. 1 (2022): 1-10.

feelings, the final stage is rhyming skills, where they learn to recognize sounds and create rhyming sounds.¹³ These phases are designed to create listening tests that are tailored to the child's stage of learning development.

Here are 29 types of listening tests along with their level classifications and competency indicators within the CEFR framework:¹⁴

Table 2. Types of Listening Test

No	Type of Test	Implementation Explanation	CEFR Indicator	CEFR Level
1	Picture & words test	Students see a picture and hear four similar-sounding words. They choose the word that matches the picture.	Can recognize familiar words and phrases when spoken clearly and slowly.	A1
2	Pictures & word test	Students see four pictures labeled A through D. The teacher says a word; students choose the picture that matches it.	Can identify familiar words and objects from short utterances.	A1
3	Different word test	The teacher says three words – two identical and one different. Students identify the word that differs.	Can distinguish between familiar phonemes and words.	A1
4	Word matching test	This test is similar to the “different words” test, but here you are asked to identify two words that match, rather than words that are different	recognizing fundamental words and phrases, understanding basic information from conversations spoken slowly and clearly	A1
5	Final sound test	The teacher pronounces several words, emphasizing their final sounds. Students identify the final sound heard.	Can recognize familiar word endings and simple pronunciation contrasts.	A1
6	First word test	Students listen to short sentences and identify the first word spoken.	Can identify single words at the beginning of short utterances.	A1

¹³ Tri Rahayu Adiyani, “Meningkatkan Kemampuan Menyimak Melalui Kegiatan Bercerita Dengan Media Gambar Seri,” *JIV* 8, no. 1 (2013): 55–61, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.21009/jiv.0801.8>.

¹⁴ محمد علي الخلي, (الاختبارات اللغوية) الأردن: دار الفلاح للنشر والتوزيع, ٢٠٠٠, ٢٢٢

7	Last word test	Students listen to sentences and identify the last word spoken.	Can catch individual familiar words when clearly pronounced.	A1
8	Auditory sound test	The teacher pronounces words containing target sounds (e.g., /s/, /z/). Students identify which sound they hear.	Can distinguish familiar sounds and simple phonetic differences.	A1
9	Pair word test	Students hear two similar-sounding words and decide whether they are the same or different.	Can discriminate between simple minimal pairs and short sounds.	A1
10	Command & movement test	The teacher gives simple oral commands (e.g., "Stand up," "Open the book"), and students perform them.	Can understand short, simple instructions involving physical actions.	A1
11	Number writing test	Students hear numbers and write them down correctly.	Can recognize and write familiar numbers when spoken slowly.	A1
12	Sentence type test	Students listen to sentences spoken by the teacher or recorded and are asked to determine whether the sentence is declarative, interrogative, or exclamatory by listening to the tone. Here, students do not read the sentences but only listen to them	understanding sentences and expressions commonly used in direct needs, able to recognize and repeat words and phrases related to routine situations in conversations	A2
13	Sentence matching test	Students listen to short sentences and match them with corresponding pictures.	Can understand simple sentences related to familiar topics.	A2
14	Sentence & picture test	A picture with a number is shown. Students hear a sentence and decide if it matches the picture (✓/X).	Can understand short, simple sentences describing pictures.	A2
15	Picture & sentence test	Four pictures are shown. The teacher reads one sentence; students choose the matching picture.	Can understand common sentences and select visual representations.	A2

16	Drawing test	The teacher reads simple sentences, and students draw what they hear. Drawing skill is not assessed.	Can follow short, simple spoken instructions.	A2
17	Picture completion test	Students hear short descriptions of an incomplete picture and complete it by adding missing details	can understand short utterances describing simple visual details	A2
18	Question & answer test	The teacher reads a sentence aloud, and students choose the correct meaning from three or four written options on their answer sheet.	Can understand the main points in familiar questions and respond appropriately	B1
19	Sentence & meaning test	Students hear a sentence and choose its correct meaning from several written options	can understand the main points of clear standard speech on familiar matters	B1
20	Map test	Students follow oral directions on a city map to navigate to a specific destination.	Can follow straightforward spoken instructions involving several steps	B1
21	Picture completion test	Students listen to longer spoken descriptions to fill in missing information on a picture or chart.	Can understand the main ideas of clear speech describing objects or places	B1
22	Audio text & question test	Students listen to a spoken or recorded text and answer questions (MCQ, T/F, or short answer)	Can understand the main ideas of extended speech and lectures on familiar or academic topics	B2
23	Listening comprehension question & tests	Students listen to passages (one or several paragraphs) and answer comprehension questions.	Can identify main ideas and supporting details in longer spoken texts	B2
24	General topic test	Students listen to a conversation on general topics and summarize the main idea.	Can understand extended speech and identify the main theme and key points	B2

25	Listening test	Students listen to one or two sentences at a time and write them down exactly.	Can accurately transcribe short sentences and understand the detailed meaning	B2
26	Different sentence test	The teacher reads three sentences, two identical and one different. Students identify the different ones.	Can recognize differences in similar spoken structures and infer meaning	B2
27	Stressed word test	Students listen to sentences and identify which word carries the main stress.	Can understand emphasis, rhythm, and implied meaning in spoken discourse.	C1
28	Fast speaking test	Students listen to relatively fast and demanding speech and identify key information.	Can understand a wide range of longer texts and recognize implicit meaning.	C1
29	General topic test	Students listen to complex spoken material and interpret the implied meaning and the speaker's attitude.	Can understand virtually everything heard with ease and interpret subtle nuances.	C2

The results of this study show that the 29 listening tests in al-ikhtibārāt al-lughawiyyah closely match the stages of listening skill development outlined by Yustuti et al. (2022), ranging from auditory discrimination and basic information recognition to comprehension of longer and more complex spoken texts. This connection implies that various test kinds represent a methodical development of listening skills. Additionally, the CEFR-based classification validates the findings of Nurdianto and Ismail (2020), who contend that when competency indicators are regularly employed, CEFR can be successfully applied to Arabic language evaluation. As a result, this study's classification offers factual proof that Arabic listening assessments can be accurately correlated with CEFR competence levels.

C. Advantages of applying the CEFR to Arabic

1. Standardized framework for language proficiency: the CEFR provides a standardized and internationally recognized scale (A1-C2) for describing language

proficiency. Applying the CEFR to Arabic helps establish standard benchmarks that facilitate comparison between Arabic and other world languages.¹⁵

2. **Emphasis on communicative competence:** The CEFR prioritizes communication skills, including listening, speaking, reading, and writing, over the memorization of grammatical rules. Musthofa highlights that integrating the CEFR into Arabic language teaching shifts the focus from rote grammar learning to functional language use, aligning Arabic pedagogy with global communicative standards.¹⁶
3. **Guidance for Curriculum and Assessment Design:** The CEFR offers explicit descriptors for various proficiency levels, enabling educators to structure curricula and learning outcomes effectively. As Maulani argues, aligning Arabic language proficiency tests with the CEFR improves test reliability and transparency, particularly in formal education systems.¹⁷
4. **International Recognition:** CEFR-aligned Arabic proficiency certifications are more easily recognized by global academic and professional institutions., Pratama notes that such alignment enhances the credibility of Arabic programs and facilitates student mobility in higher education.¹⁸

D. Limitations of applying the CEFR to Arabic

1. The CEFR is challenging to apply consistently to Arabic because the language is diglossic, with modern standard Arabic coexisting alongside numerous dialects. The CEFR does not distinguish between these varieties, making proficiency levels unclear.¹⁹
2. Many CEFR descriptors are abstract and Eurocentric, which complicates their adaptation to Arabic's structural and sociolinguistic characteristics. Teachers often

¹⁵ Talqis Nurdianto, Yayat Hidayat, and Vicky Adetia Wulandari, "CEFR-Based Arabic Language Learning Competency," *Izdihar : Journal of Arabic Language Teaching, Linguistics, and Literature* 3, no. 3 (2021): 229–48, <https://doi.org/10.22219/jiz.v3i3.14123>.

¹⁶ Tulus Musthofa, "CEFR-Based Policy in Arabic Language Teaching and Cultural Dimension in Indonesian Islamic Higher Education," *Eurasian Journal of Applied Linguistics* 8, no. 2 (2022): 96–107, <https://doi.org/10.32601/ejal.911545>.

¹⁷ Hikmah Maulani et al., "Investigation of the Reference Level Description for Arabic Proficiency Tests in Indonesia," *Jurnal Al-Bayan: Jurnal Jurusan Pendidikan Bahasa Arab* 16, no. 1 (2024): 1–15, <https://doi.org/10.24042/albayan.v16i1.21566>.

¹⁸ Arya Wahyu Pratama et al., "Opportunities and Challenges of Common European Framework of Reference for Language (CEFR) Standardization in Arabic Language Learning," *Journal of Arabic Studies* 9, no. 1 (2024): 33–42, <https://doi.org/http://dx.doi.org/10.24865/ajas.v9i1.774>.

¹⁹ Aziza Zaher, "Application of the CEFR to an Arabic Corpus: A Case Study," *CEFR Journal: Research and Practice* 7 (2020): 100–111, <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.37546/JALTSIG.CEFR7-5>.

struggle to convert these general descriptors into concrete learning outcomes for Arabic.²⁰

3. Several Arabic translations of CEFR documents contain inaccuracies and inconsistent terminology, leading to misunderstandings in curriculum design and assessment practices.²¹
4. The CEFR reflects Western communicative norms, which do not always align with Arabic cultural, religious, and pragmatic contexts. CEFR-based Arabic textbooks often meet linguistic levels but fail to represent authentic Arabic communicative situations.²²
5. Empirical studies mapping Arabic to CEFR levels are still limited. Research shows that Arabic's root and pattern morphology, distinctive grammar, and separation of spoken and written varieties make direct CEFR alignment challenging.²³

Conclusion

The six CEFR competence levels (A1–C2) were used in this study to categorize 29 different Arabic listening examinations from al-ikhtibārāt al-lughawīyyah. From basic sound recognition to comprehending implicit meaning in complex language, the classification demonstrates a clear correlation between each test type and the related competency indicators. These results offer a methodical summary of how the CEFR framework can be used to map listening assessment tools in a quantifiable manner.

By providing a structured classification framework that serves as a basis for creating listening evaluation tools aligned with the CEFR, this study theoretically advances Arabic language assessment. In practice, the framework enables educators and test designers to select and create listening test items that are suitable for students' skill levels.

To ensure better alignment between CEFR descriptors and the linguistic features of Arabic, future research is recommended to test the implementation of this model in various

²⁰ Musthofa, "CEFR-Based Policy in Arabic Language Teaching and Cultural Dimension in Indonesian Islamic Higher Education."

²¹ Bjorn Norrbom and Jacob Zuboy, *Some Practical Consequences of Quality Issues in CEFR Translations: The Case of Arabic* (Singapore: Springer, 2021), https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-33-4232-3_30.

²² Khambali et al., "Analysis of Teaching Materials for Arabic Textbooks for Islamic Junior High School Based on CEFR Standards Arabiyât," *Arabiyat: Jurnal Pendidikan Bahasa Arab Dan Kebahasaaraban* 10, no. 1 (2023): 88–105.

²³ Salwa Mohamed, "The Development of an Arabic Curriculum Framework Based on a Compilation of Salient Features from CEFR Level Descriptors," *The Language Learning Journal* 51, no. 1 (2023): 33–47, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09571736.2021.1923781>.

instructional contexts, develop advanced-level listening materials (C1–C2), and incorporate authentic audio sources.

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