

Indicators For Arabic Language Lecturers' Competencies in Universiti Teknologi Mara on Teaching Effectiveness: A Hybrid PLS-SEM Modelling Approach

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ABSTRACT

Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modelling (PLS-SEM) has gained acceptance as the 2nd generation multivariate statistical procedure for education research in recent years. Although there is a growing amount of literature utilizing this statistical procedure, researchers may still find reporting PLS-SEM results and designing advanced models difficult. The aim of this study is to determine Arabic

language lecturers' competencies on teaching effectiveness using Smart PLS software. Based on the descriptive analysis, the results revealed that majority of the respondents were female, single, aged between 22-24 years old and currently study at degree's level. Additionally, most of the respondents were students from Faculty of Business and Management at Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM), Melaka Campus. Referring to the correlation analysis, the finding discovered that there is a positive and strong relationship between Arabic language lecturers' competencies on teaching effectiveness. In fact, e-learning tools also play an important role in influencing lecturers' competencies and affect teaching effectiveness. It can be summarized that, the indicators developed can measure the effectiveness of lecturers' teaching sessions and it can also be used as a benchmark (parameter) to Arabic language lecturers in other universities.

Keywords: Partial Least Squares, Arabic Language Lecturer indicators, COVID-19 pandemic, teaching effectiveness, Universiti Teknologi MARA.

INTRODUCTION

Teaching Arabic language to non-Arabic speaker in higher education institutions is a reality in a different context. Increasing attention is being given to the quality of teaching and learning at university level across the world [1] and there is increasing pressure both to ensure effective teaching in universities and to be able to demonstrate that effectiveness. University teaching is a scholarly activity that is based on extensive professional skills and practices and high levels of disciplinary as well as other contextual expertise. This shared understanding behind the meaning of an effective university teacher forms the basis to ensure teaching quality.

Effective higher education teaching is a 'contested concept' (Skelton, 2004) with varying definitions. Numerous attempts have been made to identify these characteristics, using a variety of theoretical perspectives, from qualitative and quantitative approaches, from various disciplinary standpoints [2] and from the student point of view [3], but there is no universally accepted definition of effective university teaching [4, 5].

Effective teaching has been broadly understood as teaching that is oriented to and focused on students and their learning. Beyond that fundamental assumption are two broadly accepted components of effective university teaching: that it requires a set of particular skills and practices as identified by research [6] and professional development [1].

LITERATURE REVIEW

The term 'competence' comes from the Latin verb 'competere' which means suitability [7]. Various definitions are given by researchers such as [8], [9] and [10] where they define competence as a set of behaviors required by a leader to perform his duties well. Meanwhile [11, 12], stated that competence is a basic characteristic that is related to the effectiveness or ability in performing a task. In addition, [10, 13-15] explained that competence is the ability of an individual to complete a task efficiently based on his skills and knowledge in an area of expertise. It is also the ability to handle any given responsibility in any situation as well as to perform the task according to certain standards accurately.

The Institutions of Higher Learning (IPT) education system outlines that lecturers need to fulfill their teaching responsibility in line with the goals of the National Education Philosophy (NEP) which includes knowledge, skills, morals, responsibility and the ability to achieve self-confidence and to support community understanding and national prosperity (Khalid & Ismail 2018). Moreover, lecturers are seen as the main pillars of the university in the educational process and they play an important role in

producing quality and competitive graduates [16]. Therefore, the selection of appropriate competencies and evaluation indicator criteria are crucial to improve competency achievement since competency-based education emphasizes behavior change [2].

Content knowledge

Content knowledge is defined as the key knowledge about the content that educators need to recognise as the main requirement in the expertise of the content, and necessarily beyond students' knowledge of the content [17]).

In Arabic language course, knowledge of the content is a deep understanding of the content taught and must be consistent with the specifications of the curriculum or syllabus (Shulman 1987; Wazir 2016). It is important as it is closely related to the teaching process [18]. This means that lecturers with inadequate content knowledge in Arabic language will mislead the teaching and learning process as students are fed with inaccurate information or superficial knowledge of the course content. In fact, they will also fail to address any misconceptions in students' understanding on the course and tend to use textbooks and reference materials religiously without making appropriate adjustment [19].

The familiarity of content knowledge allows lecturers to utilize audio visual materials, guide students' learning strategies, teach topics according to students' proficiency level while evaluating their progress in acquiring Arabic language. In highlighting these aspects, [20] argues that competent lecturers should be highly knowledgeable in Arabic language in order to prepare relevant lesson plans as well as to sufficient resources for content delivery.

Teaching skills

In this context, teaching skills are the expertise and ability of Arabic language lecturers to impart knowledge to students to enhance their understanding on the topics taught. This is usually established by adapting appropriate methodologies in order for the teaching and learning process to perform smoothly and effectively and the teaching objectives are achieved ([14, 21, 22].

[10, 18, 23] asserted that student-centered strategies are more appropriate for university students because these strategies are usually less structured, encourage students' involvement to understand the learning concepts and develop students' creative and critical thinking skills. This induces the sense of responsible in students to manage their leaning process. According [24], in Arabic language curriculum, student-centered teaching strategies are the most applicable and should be practiced by all lecturers because the nature of the language itself requires active interaction. This is especially fitting for university students as they have higher awareness on the teaching and learning process, are more diligent and outspoken compared to their younger self as high school students.

[13, 24, 25] stated that teaching methods through research texts, conference, site visit, interactive lectures, and classroom activities such as group discussion, simulation, roleplay, brainstorming, problem solving and games are indeed the best student-centered teaching strategies. Additionally, [24] revealed, these methods are ideal and proven of their effectiveness in the process of Arabic language teaching and learning session at UiTM in line with the university's focus on Outcome-Based Education and Student-Centered Learning (OBE-SCL). This is subjected to lecturers' experience and intelligence in figuring out how such methods can be applied in their teaching methodologies. Among the eight methods outlined, communication-based teaching methods through simulation and roleplay techniques are the most preferred by lecturers at UiTM and this is in line with the Arabic language curriculum itself. Language scholars have acknowledged that teaching communication via a

cooperative method is more effective and meaningful than the traditional teacher-centred methods because it engages meaningful and authentic use of language among students and incorporates a variety of activities that emphasize students' active involvement in the teaching and learning process ([24].

Professional Characteristics

Apart from content knowledge and teaching skills, lecturers should also bear some important personal characteristics to be effective educators and successful professionally. [26] defined the characteristics of a quality lecturer as possessing (1) personal traits and qualities such as kindness, great sense of humour, patience, responsibility, confidence and leadership; (2) professional traits and qualities such as inquisitive, professionally knowledgeable, active reader, well-versed in communication, have a good memory and aspire to continuously improve their teaching skills, and; (3) social traits and qualities such as good manners, friendliness, humbleness, devotion and honesty. With these characteristics, Arabic language lecturers can be effective educators and produce a generation of exceptional and remarkable students.

Furthermore, the role of the lecturer is not only limited to teaching and learning as exemplary lecturers are always aware of their behaviour and character. [27] found that excellent lecturers have high concern with the moral aspect of their lives. They choose to act trustworthy, honest and not hypocritical in their profession. Aside from that, they do not tend to deceive, lure or manipulate others to achieve a particular goal. These characteristics are very necessary in a lecturer because according to [28], lecturers must be true and trustworthy where every information presented by them must be based on truth and integrity, not lies and falsehoods.

This claim is further strengthened by [29] who stated that a lecturer is a '*muaddib*'; which is an individual who succeeds in manners. This is where every gesture, speech and action of the lecturers will be an example to their colleagues and students and with these well-mannered behaviours, will contribute good values in their relationship with all parties. In the meantime, they also prefer to be humble and avoid boasting about their success and achievements. This feature is in line with the view of [12] who shared that educators should practice modesty and virtuous personality, such as not boasting about one's own abilities. Preferred traits like these will be a great stimulus to students in effectively receiving imparted knowledge in classroom. In this regard, lecturers who have all these criteria are always admired by students and become their role models in their future workplace.

Tools for teaching in ODL Session

The outbreak of COVID-19 has restricted the traditional, face-to-face teaching and learning session worldwide and most educational institutions have resorted to open and distance learning (ODL). Other than location and time flexibilities, ODL also allows online sharing of learning sources as well as virtual interaction [30]). Though blended learning and e-learning need no introduction today as many higher learning institutions have adopted the method, the quest for the perfect e-learning tool is still debatable. Hence, lecturers or facilitators commonly employ a combination of few online platforms in their teaching and learning session.

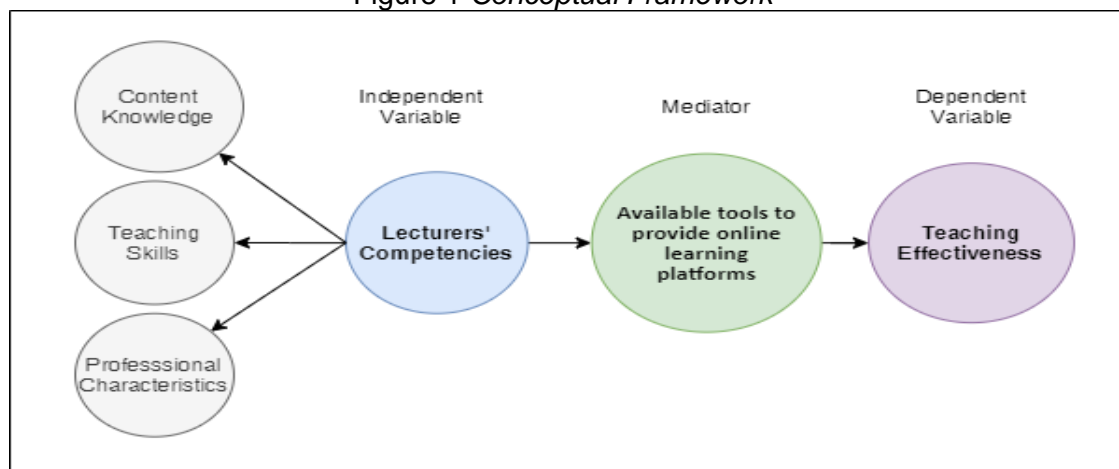
Currently, there are various e-learning tools available such as Google Classroom and Meet, Zoom, Webex, online platform developed by the institutions such as UFuture in UiTM, Facebook and YouTube. These platforms allow access at any time, hence, they are great to assist ODL sessions. [31] stated that the effectiveness of any technological-involved methods used in classroom is highly measured by the learning outcomes. A study by Bennett, [2] has found that e-learning tools provide more benefits compared to the traditional instruction. This is further supported by [32] where their

data reported that the integration of Google Classroom in the curriculum is needed to enhance student digital literacy,

Nevertheless, it is significant to ensure that lecturers are well-versed in using the online platforms to aid their ODL sessions. In order to effectively adopt these platforms in their classroom, they need to consider class size and the availability of the equipment [23] such as laptop, smartphones as well as a stable internet connection. Although poor internet connection may disrupt the process of ODL for language learning, the online learning platforms are still able to help them to acquire new vocabularies, understand the course content and practice the language skills [33]). Overall, e-learning tools are essential in ODL sessions as they assist the lecturers to have a more effective teaching sessions.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND RESEARCH HYPOTHESES

Figure 1 *Conceptual Framework*



Based on this conceptual framework, lecturers competencies was the independent variable (IV), student performance was the dependent variable (DV) and online learning platforms were the mediator. The IV and mediator indicators were designed around each latent construct of interest. Using a measurement likert scale from 0 to 5 (totally disagree to fully agree), student performance was evaluated by lecturers' competencies and online learning platforms. The indicators for both variables were as listed in Table 1.

Table 1

Indicator for Arabic language Lecturers' Competencies (Reflective construct)

Construct	Sub Construct	Item No	Item
Competencies	Content Knowledge	B1	Lecturer explains the outcomes of the course before teaching and learning session
		B2	Lecturer is well-versed in every topic taught
		B3	Lecturer is proficient in Arabic language
		B4	Lecturer focuses on communication skills as the main skills in Arabic language
		B5	Overall, lecturer is highly knowledgeable in teaching Arabic language course
	Teaching Skill	C1	Lecturer acts as a facilitator during teaching and learning session

		C2	Lecturer incorporates collaborative teaching and learning by engaging students in a variety of Arabic language activities
		C3	Lecturer uses simulation methods as teaching strategies
		C4	Lecturer employs role play method as teaching strategies
		C5	Lecturer adopts drilling methods as teaching strategies
	Professional Characteristics	D1	Lecturer's frequent encouragement boosts my interest me to learn Arabic language
		D2	Lecturer creates a positive and effective learning environment
		D3	Lecturer diligently teaches Arabic language to ensure I understand the topic
		D4	Lecturers establishes interpersonal relationships with students
		D5	Lecturer is always responsive to students' questions
Available tools to provide online learning platforms	E1	Lecturer uses the UFuture platform to administer Arabic language assignments	
	E2	Lecturer uses other learning management systems than UiTM such as Google Classroom	
	E3	The lecturer encourages students to solve Arabic language online quizzes through Kahoot and Quizziz	
	E4	Lecturer develops instructional videos through Screencast o Matic or Powtoon	
	E5	Lecturer adopts live meeting technology such as Google Meet, Zoom, Cisco Webex, Microsoft Teams, GoToMeeting and Facebook Live	
	E6	Lecturer encourages students to watch cartoons/movies/dramas to improve their Arabic language skills	
	E7	Lecturer encourages students to demonstrate speaking skills through social media sites such as Facebook	

Source: Researchers, 2022

A total of 32 items were developed and luckily, the collected items contain no missing data. However, only 22 items left as the remaining 10 had low outer loading (below 0.6).

Hypotheses Developmen

Once the conceptual framework was finalized, the next step was the hypotheses development. The first hypothesis was developed to explore the relationship between content knowledge and teaching effectiveness.

H1: Content knowledge significantly influences teaching effectiveness.

The second hypothesis was developed to examine the relationship between teaching skills and teaching effectiveness:

H2: Teaching skills significantly influences teaching effectiveness.

The third hypothesis was created to test the linkage between professional characteristics and teaching effectiveness:

H3: Professional characteristics significantly influences teaching effectiveness.

The fourth hypotheses were created to explore the relationship tools to provide online learning platforms between lecturers' competencies and teaching effectiveness:

H4: Online learning platforms significantly influences lecturers' competencies on teaching effectiveness.

PLS-SEM DESIGN CONSIDERATIONS

Sample Size

The sample comprises of UiTM students who were taking the third level Arabic language course (TAC501). These students were selected because they were representing the final product of the Arabic language curriculum at UiTM. They have undergone all three levels of Arabic language courses at UiTM within three semesters. The student population at this level is estimated at 3000 for the entire UiTM campuses in Malaysia and they came from various faculties who were taking Arabic language as a compulsory elective course with two credit hours per semester. Collectively, they are divided into three major faculties namely the Science and Technology, the Social Science and Humanities and the Management Science. Based on this population, the total sample proposed by [34] was 341 students through stratified random sampling technique (disproportionate). Since a total of 357 students participated in this study, the minimum sample size requirement has therefore been met.

A five-point Likert-based scales were used to represent most suitable answer of the from the respondents. The description of the Likert scales used include, 1-Strongly Disagree, 2-Disagree, 3- Neutral, 4-Agree and 5-Strongly Agree. To test the reliability of the answers of the questionnaires, reliability analysis is used in the study. The reliability analysis has been conducted by referring to the rule of thumb made by [6]). They described that Cronbach’s alpha (α) 0.90 and above shows excellent reliability, 0.70 to 0.90 shows high reliability, 0.50 to 0.70 shows moderate reliability and 0.50 and below shows low reliability. The descriptive analysis have been tested using SPSS 27.0 and three independent variables factors (content knowledge, teaching skill and professionalism characteristic), mediating (e-learning tools) and dependent variables (teaching effectiveness) have been tested using Smart PLS 3 [35]. The study used mean, standard deviation, correlation analysis to examine the relationship between all the variables (students’ attitude, lecturers’ professionalism, family-role and other factors) with teaching effectiveness. Besides, the analyses also have been carried out to identify the most influential factors that give impact on teaching effectiveness during ODL session in UiTM.

Figure 2 Cronbach Alpha’s

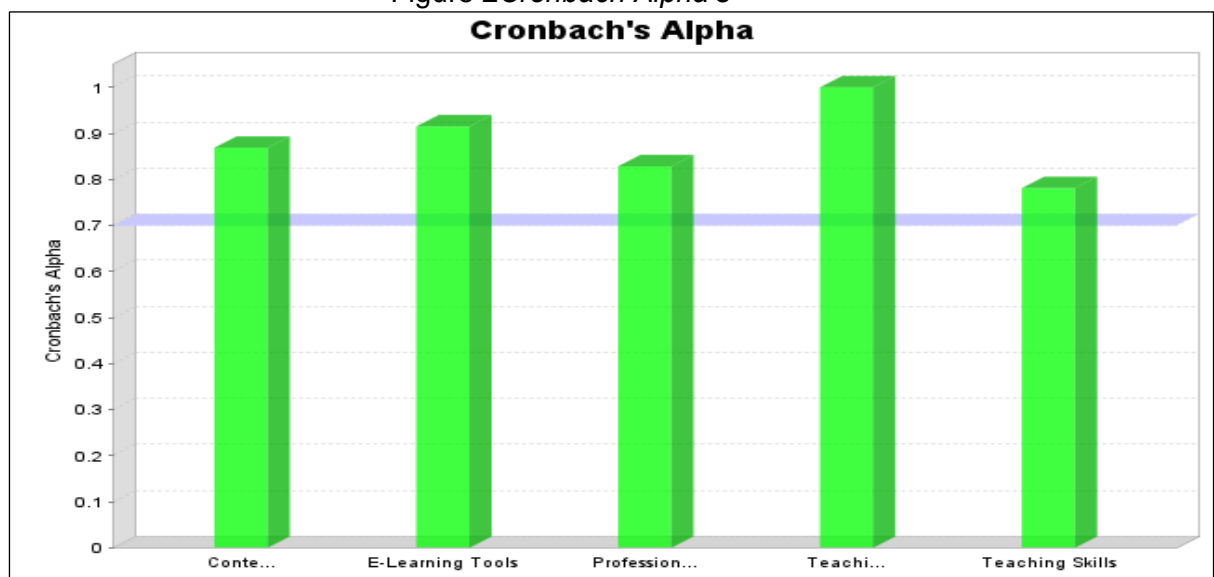


Figure 3 Composite Reliability

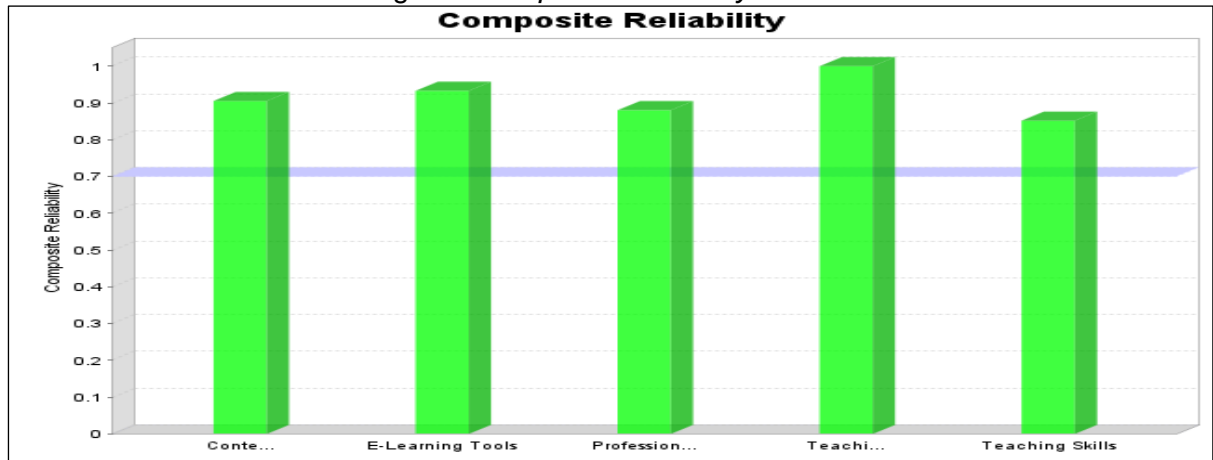
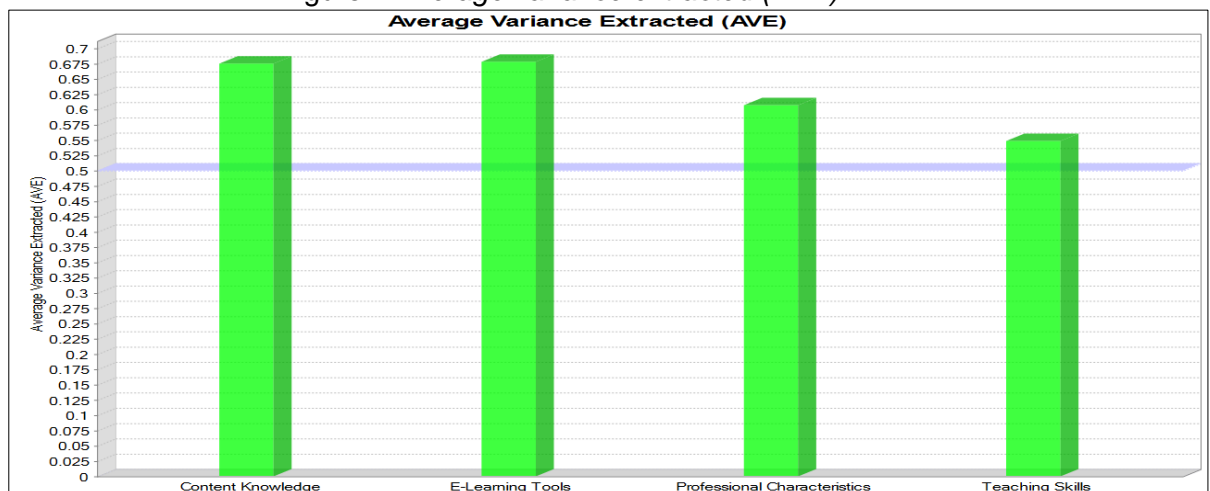


Figure 4 Average variance extracted (AVE)



DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

Descriptive Analysis

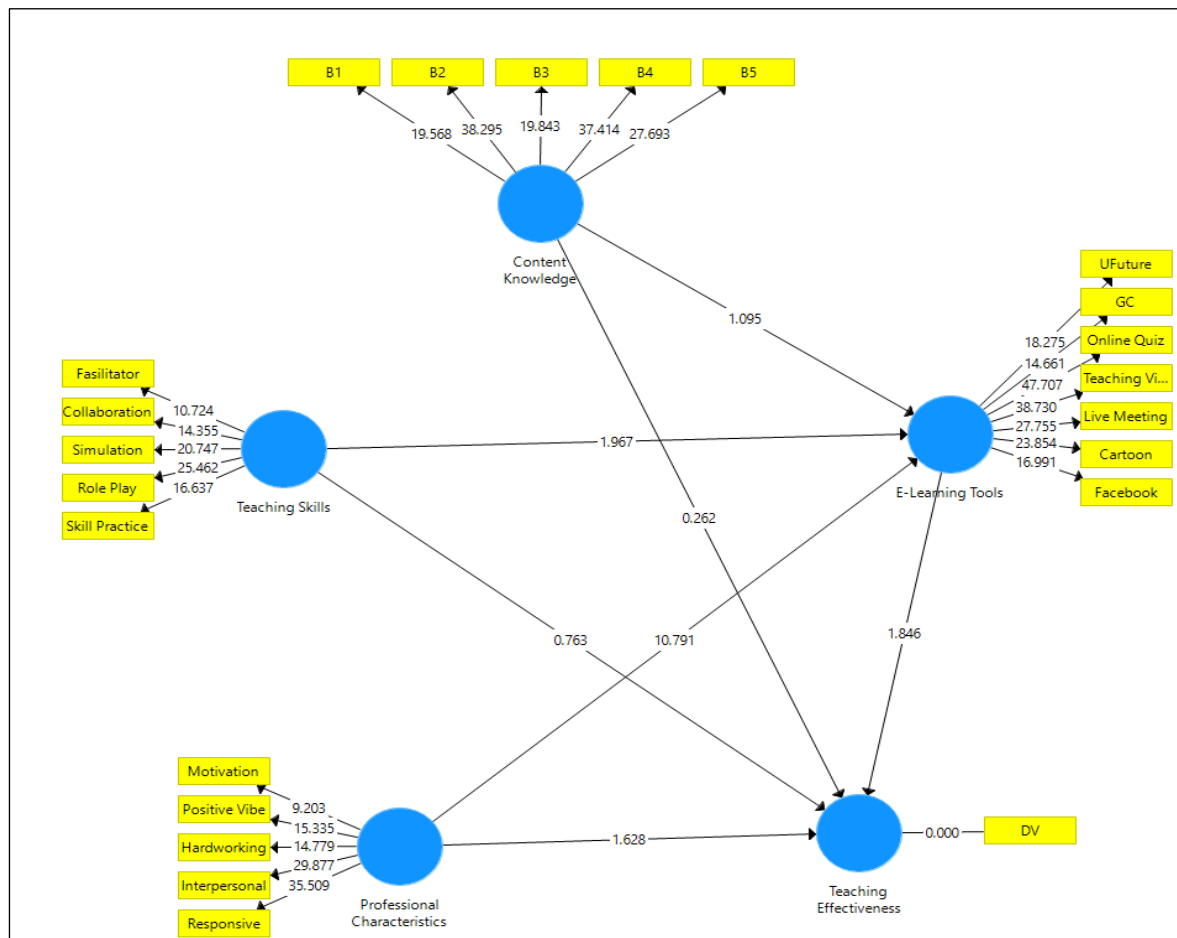
The data was collected from 342 respondents through questionnaires. This study represented students from various faculties in UiTM. Majority of respondents were female (n=249, 72.8%), and the rest were male (n=93, 27.2%). From all of the respondents, majority were full time study (n= 339; 99.1%) and only 3 of them; 0.9% were part time. The biggest respondents were from Faculty of Business and Management (n=148; 43.3%), followed by Faculty of Computer and Mathematical Science (n=93; 27.1%), then Faculty of Accountancy (n=56; 16.4%), Faculty of Administrative Science and Policy Studies (n=33; 9.6%), Faculty of Hotel and Tourism Management (n=10; 2.9%) and Faculty of Sports Science and Recreations (n=2; 0.7%). They are from Semester 5 (n=158; 46.2%), Semester 3 (n=100; 29.2%), Semester 2 (n=54; 15.8%), Semester 1 (n=18; 5.3%), Semester 4 (n=9; 2.6%) and part 6 (n=3; 0.9%).

Overall, students from UiTM Melaka had the highest number of respondents (n=77; 22.5%), UiTM Negeri Sembilan (n=62, 18.3%), UiTM Terengganu (n=49;

14.3%), UiTM Kedah (n=36; 10.5%), UiTM Perlis (n=35; 10.2%), UiTM Selangor (n=28; 8.2%), UiTM Pahang (n=23; 6.7%), UiTM Johor (n=11; 3.2%), UiTM Kelantan (n=9; 2.6%), UiTM Perak (n=7; 2%) dan UiTM Sarawak (n=5; 1.5%). In regard to Pulau Pinang and Sabah campuses, currently Arabic language courses were not offered to the Engineering Faculty and there were no TAC501 students on campus, respectively. All of the respondents were undergraduate students (n=342; 100%). The majority of age group was 22 to 24 years old (n=222; 64.9%), followed by 19 to 21 years old (n=115; 33.6%) and 25 to 27 years old (n=5, 1.5%). Hence, based on the frequency analysis of the overall demographic background of the respondents, it can be claimed that most of the respondents were from Faculty of Business and Management were currently study at UiTM Melaka, female, aged between 22 to 24 years old, study in degree level, semester 5 and full time.

Results

Figure 5 The PLS-SEM Modelling analysis showed the relationship between Arabic Language lecturer’s competencies on teaching effectiveness. The e-learning tools were the mediator in this model.



The model in Figure 1 is the result of an integrated analysis of students’ perceptions. Content knowledge, teaching skill and professional characteristics were independent variables (IV) while e-learning tools were the mediator in this research. All the variables showed the teaching effectiveness of Arabic language lecturers at UiTM. Accordingly, the following tables display the relationships between all latent variables.

Figure 6 Path coefficient

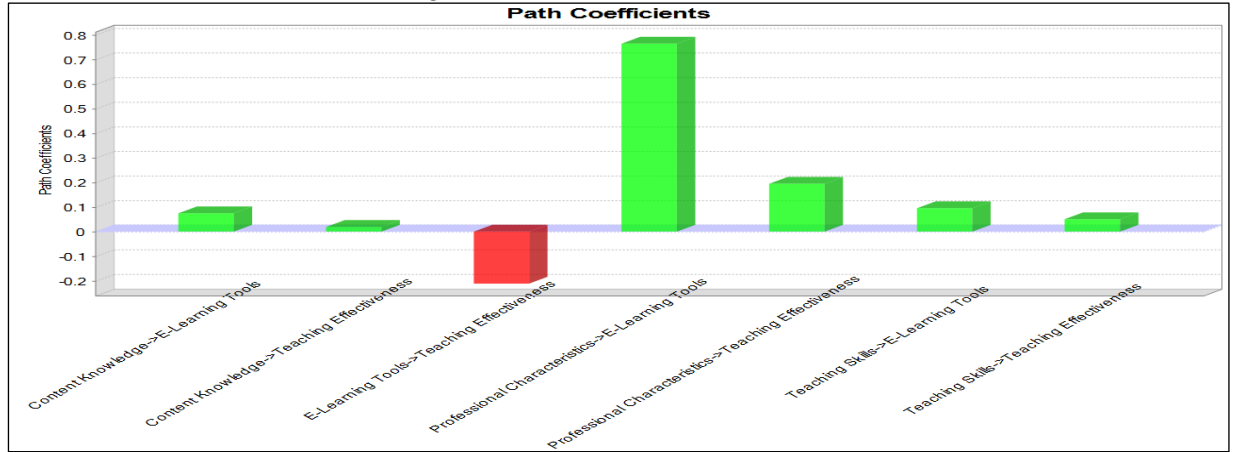


Figure 7 Total effect

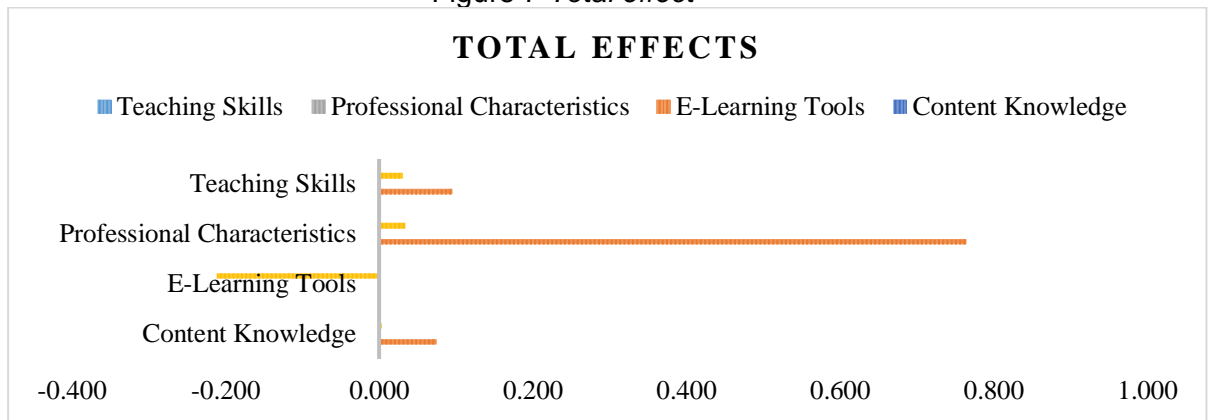


Table 2

Latent Variable Correlations

	Content Knowledge	E-Learning Tools	Professional Characteristics	Teaching Effectiveness	Teaching Skills
Content Knowledge	1.000	0.633	0.656	0.044	0.594
E-Learning Tools	0.633	1.000	0.871	0.001	0.606
Professional Characteristics	0.656	0.871	1.000	0.054	0.610
Teaching Effectiveness	0.044	0.001	0.054	1.000	0.053
Teaching Skills	0.594	0.606	0.610	0.053	1.000

Table 3

Latent Variable Covariances

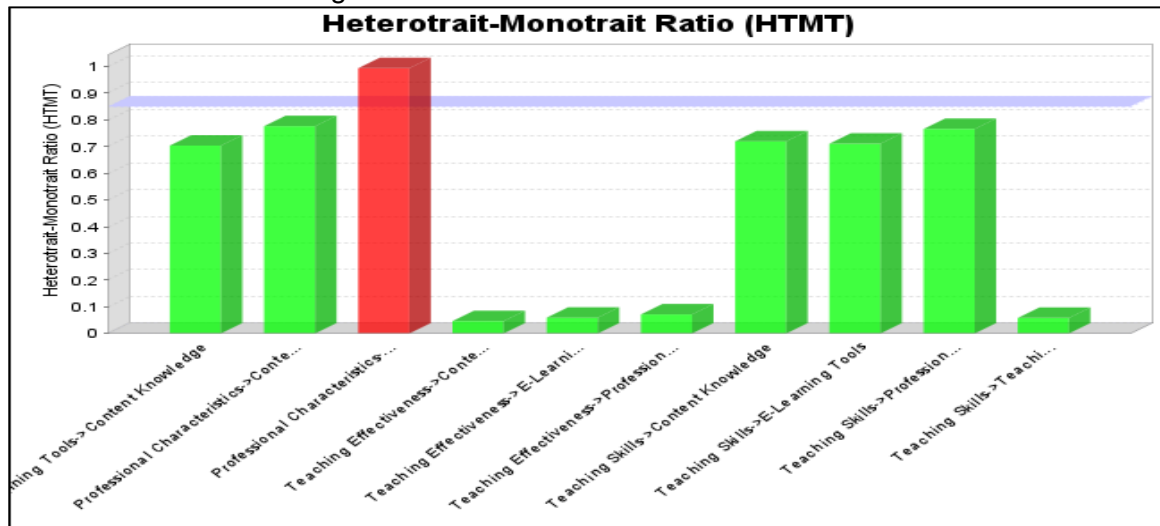
	Content Knowledge	E-Learning Tools	Professional Characteristics	Teaching Effectiveness	Teaching Skills
Content Knowledge	1.000	0.633	0.656	0.044	0.594
E-Learning Tools	0.633	1.000	0.871	0.001	0.606
Professional Characteristics	0.656	0.871	1.000	0.054	0.610
Teaching Effectiveness	0.044	0.001	0.054	1.000	0.053
Teaching Skills	0.594	0.606	0.610	0.053	1.000

Table 4

Latent Variable Descriptive

	Mean	Median	Min	Max	Standard Deviation	Excess Kurtosis	Skewness	Number of Observations Used
Content Knowledge	0.000	0.640	-4.957	0.640	1.000	4.125	-1.976	342.000
E-Learning Tools	0.000	0.488	-6.694	0.671	1.000	6.583	-2.105	342.000
Professional Characteristics	0.000	0.454	-6.350	0.707	1.000	6.277	-2.125	342.000
Teaching Effectiveness	0.000	0.005	-1.727	1.726	1.000	-1.201	0.000	342.000
Teaching Skills	0.000	0.312	-4.644	0.983	1.000	0.997	-1.060	342.000

Figure 8 Heterotrait and monotrait ratio



Hypothesis 1: Content knowledge significantly influences teaching effectiveness.

In order to establish the relationship between content knowledge and teaching effectiveness, five statements with the higher outer loading were taken into consideration. Students highly agreed that lecturers who are well-versed (B2; 0.866) and highly knowledgeable (B5; 0.857) in the Arabic language course are measured as competent lecturers. It was also found that lecturers who focus on communication skills as classroom activities (B5; 0.857) are favoured by students and perceived as competent as the lecturers are also able to demonstrate the language well with high content knowledge, hence, higher teaching competencies. Acquiring a third language can be a challenge to students and lecturers' content knowledge helps to motivate students to further improving themselves with the language. In addition, content knowledge also allows lecturers to comprehend students' predicaments better and eventually students are able to meet the desired learning outcome (Long, Ibrahim & Kowang, 2014) which in this case, the mastery of the Arabic language.

Hypothesis 2: Teaching skills significantly influences teaching effectiveness.

Surprisingly, the respondents did not rate lecturers' teaching skills as high as content knowledge though teaching skills still significantly influence teaching effectiveness. [36] stated that effective communication system between lecturers and students is crucial for students to recognise their expectations. Almost similar to one of the items under content knowledge, students highly agreed that lecturers who employ role play as one of the teaching strategies in classroom (C4; 0.844) have effective teaching and learning session. Other than that, teaching skills such as drill method and simulation adopted by lecturers were also identified as effective in Arabic language classroom with 0.770 (C5) and 0.756 (C3), respectively. These strategies focus on student-centred classroom activities where students have the opportunity to display their language skills in a more authentic environment with their classmates. This practice also builds students' confidence level in the language knowledge.

Hypothesis 3: Professional characteristics significantly influences teaching effectiveness.

Lecturers professional characteristics revolve around lecturer-student relationship and good rapport results in students feeling more comfortable and motivated in the learning session. Based on the data analysis, the respondents highly rated lecturers who establish interpersonal relationship with students (D4; 0.871) and they also agreed that effective teaching and learning session is also derived from lecturers who are always responsive towards students' inquiries (D5; 0.863). According to [37], an essential element to a conducive student learning and student satisfaction is the interaction between lecturers and students. As shown in the data analysis, the students agreed that effective teaching skills are also related to positive and conducive learning environment created by the lecturers (D2; 0.786).

Hypothesis 4: Online learning platforms significantly influences lecturers' competencies on teaching effectiveness.

Online learning platforms provide both lecturers and students to experience creative and interactive teaching and learning sessions. As students these days eminently rely on electronic gadgets and the Internet, the online platforms such as Google Classroom, Kahoot, Zoom Meeting, Cisco Webex, Facebook Live, among others, offer great assistance to both lecturers and students in language courses. This is shown in the data analysis where most lecturers have utilised these platforms as assessed by the respondents through the survey. Lecturers competencies should not only include communication skills and problem solving but also the ability to work with ICT or other support tools [16]. Conducting online quizzes can be a challenge since students may succumb to cheating but platforms like Kahoot and Quizziz allow lecturers to monitor their students and vary the questions and at the same time, the respondents really enjoyed these platforms (E3; 0.9). Apart from that, the respondents also highly agreed to statements where lecturers develops teaching videos using Screen O Matic and Powtoon (E4; 0.887) as well as using live meeting technology such as Google Meet, Zoom Meeting, Cisco Webex and Facebook Live to conduct online teaching and learning session (E5; 0.885). These online learning platforms significantly influence teaching effectiveness because they are interactive and manage to retain students' attention span throughout the session.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study suggests that Arabic language lecturers' competencies are indicated by their content knowledge on the language, teaching skills and professional characteristics. Eventually, these also help to determine their teaching effectiveness towards students' understanding on the language. It is also found through this study that e-learning tools plays an important role in influencing lecturers' competencies and affect teaching effectiveness. The findings can immensely become a benchmark for other aspiring lecturers by providing more attention towards factors such as lecturer-student rapport, communication-based teaching skills or student-centred classroom activities and to have a well-versed content knowledge. As ODL is widely adapted into all levels of education nowadays, this study has also identified the online learning platforms that can be effectively used in teaching and learning session such as Google Meet, Google Classroom, Powtoon and Kahoot.

In order to further strengthen the findings of this study, future researchers could have a wider sampling group but including Arabic language students from other public and private higher learning institutions. It would also be an interesting research to have respondents from urban and rural areas since ODL can be challenging to students from the area with poor Internet connection. Other than that, a study can also be conducted to identify the relationship between lecturers' competencies, teaching effectiveness, student motivation and student achievement.

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