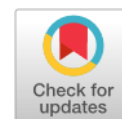


## Exam Anxiety in Online Oral Assessments: CEFR-Based Offline Arabic Oral Exams in High Schools



**<sup>1</sup>Marsekal Rahman Hakiem\*, <sup>2</sup>Muhammad Uwais Abdurrohman, <sup>3</sup>Muhammad Irfan Faturrahman, <sup>4</sup>Muchammad Fathoni Fanani**

<sup>1</sup>marsekalrh@umad.ac.id, <sup>2</sup>441038613@stu.iu.edu.sa, <sup>3</sup>muhammadirfanfaturrahman@gmail.com,  
<sup>4</sup>muchammadfathoni3@gmail.com

<sup>1</sup>Universitas Madani, Indonesia, <sup>2</sup>Islamic University of Madinah, Saudi Arabia, <sup>3</sup>Universitas Ahmad Dahlan, Indonesia, <sup>4</sup>UIN Raden Mas Said Surakarta, Indonesia

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### ABSTRACT

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\*Corresponding Author

Students reported experiencing higher anxiety when taking online oral tests compared to face-to-face, which directly impacted their performance. This study aims to reveal students' perceptions of the implementation and impact of offline oral exams and the results of students' oral exam assessments based on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) level. This study uses a qualitative descriptive approach with a case study method. The implementation of this research was at a Senior High School in Yogyakarta. The study subjects were 30 grade X SMA/MA students selected through purposive sampling. This concludes that implementing offline CEFR-based Arabic oral exams in high schools psychologically impacts students; out of 30 students, 23 felt anxious when facing the oral exam. However, 21 students felt ready to face the oral exam, 27 also believed it could assess their language skills fairly, and 28 students were more comfortable and chose offline oral exams than online.

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## 1. Introduction

Students often report experiencing higher levels of anxiety when taking online oral tests compared to face-to-face ones, which directly impacts their performance. These psychological factors, however, are often overlooked in the design of online assessment instruments (Elbalqis & Pradana, [2022](#); Goodarzi & Namaziandost, [2025](#)). Additionally, technical issues such as unstable internet connections and user-unfriendly platforms exacerbate the challenges associated with online exams, further compromising the experience (Abuhussein et al., [2023](#); Nyarko & Serwornoo,

[2022](#)). Consequently, these problems can undermine the objectivity and reliability of oral competency assessments (Abuhussein et al., [2023](#)).

In contrast, offline oral assessments offer a more natural interaction between the examiner and the learner, which enhances the accuracy of speaking skill evaluations (Cîrțiță-Buzoianu et al., [2022](#)). These face-to-face interactions also allow examiners to assess non-verbal communication, which is crucial in language learning (Hadley et al., [2022](#)). In the context of Arabic language learning for high school students, speaking skills are particularly vital for demonstrating fluency, pronunciation clarity, and communication responsiveness. Research indicates that online oral tasks can stifle spontaneity and make students more passive during assessments (Fischer & Yang, [2022](#)).

The CEFR (Common European Framework of Reference for Languages)-based exam provides an internationally recognized framework that structures language competence assessment, including in the oral domain (Shak & Read, [2021](#)). This framework offers a comprehensive and standardized approach to mapping students' language abilities (Sahib & Stapa, [2022](#)). However, the use of CEFR in the Indonesian secondary education system is still limited, especially in the context of offline oral assessment. On the other hand, Indonesia still greatly needs nationally applicable educational assessment standards (Baroroh & Sukiman, [2023](#)). Moreover, there is a notable gap in research regarding the adaptation of CEFR for non-native Arabic students, which urgently needs to be addressed (AlQbailat et al., [2025](#)).

The implementation of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) in Indonesia still faces various challenges related to educational institutions, teachers, and the CEFR itself. Although the CEFR is recognized as a very useful tool in language learning, its implementation in Indonesia is still limited. Research on the CEFR began to develop in 2016, but publications related to the CEFR peaked in 2020. Various challenges found include teachers' limited understanding of the CEFR and curriculum adaptation that has not fully accommodated local characteristics. Therefore, further research is needed to strengthen the implementation of the CEFR in accordance with the Indonesian cultural context (Robbani et al., [2023](#)).

Another challenge in speaking assessments is the potential subjectivity of the assessor (Palmour, [2024](#)). To address this, CEFR-based training and rubrics have been shown to improve consistency and reduce assessor bias (Mohamed, [2022](#)). In practice, direct oral assessments offer the advantage of providing real-time formative feedback, which significantly aids students' skill development (Bobykina & Pilipenko, [2023](#); Hakiem et al., [2025](#); Naila Nur 'Azizah et al., [2024](#)). Face-to-face assessments also facilitate authentic performance evaluations, allowing examiners to assess both the final results and the thought processes students employ when presenting arguments or answering questions (Amoah & Yeboah, [2021](#)).

At the upper secondary level, students are at a critical stage of cognitive and social development. Offline oral exams serve as a valuable platform for fostering self-confidence, critical thinking, and communication skills (Muñoz-Alcón et al., [2023](#)). Furthermore, direct assessments strengthen the teacher-student relationship through more personal interactions, indirectly supporting long-term learning outcomes (Rasti Amalia & Ratnawati, [2024](#)). Given the various constraints of online assessments and the potential benefits of CEFR-based offline evaluations, this study aims to explore the effectiveness of offline Arabic oral exams in high school settings as an authentic assessment method that supports the development of language skills and global readiness.

Various studies have shown that online oral assessments offer advantages such as flexibility of access (Nyarko & Serwornoo, [2022](#)). Although previous studies have shown that online oral assessments offer flexibility, they also present significant obstacles such as student anxiety, reduced spontaneity, and technical issues that hinder the accurate measurement of speaking skills (Muñoz-Alcón et al., [2023](#)). In contrast, offline oral exams provide more natural and authentic interactions, allowing examiners to observe both verbal and non-verbal communication cues, which enriches the assessment data (Cîrțiță-Buzoianu et al., [2022](#)). Furthermore, the use of CEFR rubrics has been demonstrated to enhance the objectivity and consistency of evaluations (Mohamed, [2022](#)).

Despite the advantages of offline oral assessments, most studies have focused on college students or adult learners, with limited research addressing the adaptation of CEFR for secondary school students, particularly in the context of Arabic language learning in Indonesia. This gap in the literature highlights the need for further investigation into the implementation of CEFR-based offline oral exams for high school students, specifically in Arabic as a foreign language. Therefore, this study seeks to answer two key research questions: (1) How can the CEFR assessment be applied to the offline Arabic oral exam? Moreover, (2) How is the psychological condition of students in facing offline oral exams based on CEFR?

To address this gap, this study proposes the implementation of CEFR-based oral evaluation in face-to-face meetings at the senior high school level, using a questionnaire instrument to measure students' psychological conditions when they are about to face an offline oral exam. This study will also use a CEFR rubric adjusted to the context of Arabic language learning. The novelty of this study lies in its comprehensive approach, which combines the evaluation of students' affective perceptions with cognitive measurements based on international standards in a context that has not been widely studied: senior high school students in Indonesia.

This research will make a significant contribution to the development of authentic oral assessment models in secondary education. It will enrich Arabic language assessment practices by

incorporating a global approach (CEFR) and provide an empirical basis for designing more valid, reliable, and responsive speaking assessments that meet students' needs.

## **2. Method**

This study uses a qualitative descriptive approach with a case study method to explore students' perceptions of implementing offline oral exams and assess their performance results based on the CEFR (Common European Framework of Reference for Languages) level (Creswell & Poth, [2018](#)). The primary focus of the study is directed at two questions: (1) How can the CEFR assessment be applied to the offline Arabic oral exam? Moreover, (2) How is the psychological condition of students in facing offline oral exams based on CEFR?

The study was conducted at a Senior High School (SMA) in Yogyakarta, Indonesia, which has implemented Arabic language learning with a communicative approach. Oral exams were conducted face-to-face (offline) in a series of end-of-semester evaluations.

The study subjects were 30 grade X SMA/MA students, selected through a purposive sampling technique based on their active involvement in Arabic language learning and readiness to take oral assessments (Palinkas et al., [2015](#)). All participants had received Arabic language learning for at least two semesters.

The data in this study were collected through two main instruments. First, students took an offline oral exam assessed using a CEFR-based rubric, with key indicators including fluency, grammatical accuracy, vocabulary breadth, and interaction skills—all adjusted to levels A1 to C2. This instrument was used to answer the first problem formulation, namely, what is the form of offline oral exam based on CEFR in high school.

Second, the researcher distributed questionnaires to students to determine the level of anxiety of students when facing oral exams, including aspects of students' readiness to take Arabic oral exams, anxiety when facing oral exams, confidence that oral exams can assess language skills fairly, and students' comfort in facing offline oral exams compared to online. This instrument is intended to answer the second question: What is the psychological condition of students facing offline oral exams based on CEFR?

This approach aims to provide a comprehensive picture of students' performance in the CEFR-based oral exam and their perceptions of implementing the online and offline exams. Before the exam, students were given socialization regarding the exam structure and CEFR assessment indicators. Each student took the oral exam individually for 3–5 minutes, with questions referring to the themes that had been studied. The test was conducted as an open dialogue (guided interview) to assess students' spontaneity, fluency, and argumentation skills (Shak & Read, [2021](#)). Qualitative data from the questionnaire were analyzed using thematic analysis techniques (Braun & Clarke, [2006](#)).

The qualitative data collected from the questionnaires were analyzed using thematic analysis techniques (Braun & Clarke, [2006](#)). Thematic analysis is a method that involves identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns (themes) within the data. By using thematic analysis, the study ensured that the subjective experiences and psychological conditions of students were systematically analyzed, providing valuable insights into how students approached and responded to offline oral exams based on CEFR standards.

### 3. Results and Discussion

#### 3.1. CEFR-Based Oral Exam Assessment Criteria

The oral exam assessment uses a CEFR (Common European Framework of Reference for Languages)-based rubric, which measures five main aspects: language range, grammatical accuracy, fluency, interaction, and discourse coherence,

- A1 (Beginner): Can convey simple utterances.
- A2 (Elementary): Can exchange basic information and have simple conversations.
- B1 (Intermediate): Can speak clearly on familiar topics.
- B2 (Upper-Intermediate): Can interact fluently in discussions and express points of view.
- C1 (Advanced): Can speak fluently and in a structured manner about complex subjects.
- C2 (Proficient): Can communicate spontaneously, flexibly, and accurately in complex contexts.

**Table 1.** CEFR Oral Exam Assessment Criteria

	<b>Range</b>	<b>Accuracy</b>	<b>Fluency</b>	<b>Interaction</b>	<b>Coherence</b>
C2	Shows great flexibility in reformatting ideas in different linguistic forms to convey more precise nuances of meaning to emphasize, differentiate, and eliminate ambiguities. He also has a wide command of idiomatic and colloquial expressions.	Maintains consistent grammatical control of complex language, even when attention is being used (e.g., in planning or monitoring the reactions of others).	Can express himself spontaneously throughout with a natural flow of everyday language. Avoids or retreats from difficulties so smoothly that the interlocutor is unaware of them.	Can interact easily and skillfully, picking up and using non-verbal cues and intonation with ease. He can weave his contributions into shared discourse in a natural tone—references, allusions, etc.	Can create coherent and cohesive discourse by making complete and appropriate use of various organizational patterns, connectors, and other cohesive devices.
C1	Has a good command of a range of languages that enables him to choose	Consistently maintains a high level of grammatical accuracy that is rare, difficult to	Can express himself fluently and spontaneously, almost effortlessly. Only	Can select appropriate phrases from various available discourse	Can produce clear, flowing, and well-structured speech, showing controlled use of organizational

	formulations to express himself clearly in an appropriate style on a range of general, academic, professional, or recreational topics without limiting what he wants to say.	recognize, and generally corrected when it does occur.	conceptually complex subjects impede the natural and fluent flow of language.	functions to initiate remarks to gain or defend an opinion and relate his contribution skillfully to other speakers.	patterns, connectors, and cohesive devices.
B2	Has a sufficient range of language to give clear descriptions and express views on most general topics without much searching for flashy words, using some complex sentence forms.	Shows a relatively high level of grammatical control. He does not make errors that lead to misunderstandings and can correct most of his errors.	He can produce stretches of language at a fairly even pace, although he hesitates when searching for patterns and expressions, with only a few noticeable pauses.	He can initiate conversations, take the initiative when necessary, and end conversations when necessary, although he does not always do this elegantly. He can also contribute to discussions in familiar places, confirm understanding, invite others, etc.	Can use a limited number of cohesive devices to link other utterances into clear, coherent discourse, although there may be some "fidgeting" in long contributions.
B1	Has sufficient language to be understood, with sufficient vocabulary to express oneself when hesitant and circumlocutory on topics such as family, hobbies and interests, work, travel, and current events.	Uses a repertoire of frequently used "Youtines" and patterns associated with more predictable situations with reasonable accuracy.	Can keep up a precise flow, although pauses for planning and grammatical and lexical revision are evident, especially in longer free productions.	Can initiate, maintain, and conclude a simple face-to-face conversation on familiar or personal topics. Can repeat back part of what someone has said to confirm shared understanding.	Can link a series of shorter, separate simple elements into a connected linear sequence of dots.
A2	Uses basic seriality patterns with memorized phrases, word groups, and formulas to communicate limited information in everyday	Uses some simple structures correctly but systematically creates basic masks.	He can make himself understood in short utterances, although incorrect initial pauses and reformulations are noticeable.	Can ask and answer questions and respond to simple statements. He can show when he is following but rarely understands enough to keep	Can link word groups with simple connectives such as "and, but, and because."

	situations.			a conversation going at his own pace.	
A1	Has a fundamental repertoire of simple words and phrases relating to specific personal details and concrete situations.	Shows only limited control of a few simple grammatical structures and sentence patterns within a memorized repertoire.	Can manage short, isolated, mostly pre-packaged utterances, with plenty of pauses to search for expression, articulate unfamiliar words, and correct communication.	Can ask and answer questions about personal details. They can interact, but communication relies heavily on repetition, rephrasing, and correction.	Can link words from word groups with basic linear connectors such as "and" or then.

### 3.2. Psychological Conditions of Students in Facing Offline Arabic Oral Exams Based on CEFR

#### 3.2.1. Anxiety Level and Causative Factors

Students facing CEFR-based oral exams generally experience moderate to high levels of anxiety. This anxiety impacts speaking performance, especially on the speaking component. The leading causes of anxiety include lack of self-confidence, fear of assessment, and lack of preparation for facing the oral exam situation directly (Zulkflee et al., [2023](#)).

High anxiety during oral exams can reduce students' performance in terms of fluency and the ability to deliver answers effectively. Studies show that students with higher levels of anxiety tend to use strategies such as message reduction and message modification to overcome their anxiety (Kessler, [2010](#)). In addition, there are differences in strategies between students from different education levels, for example, diploma students and advanced students.

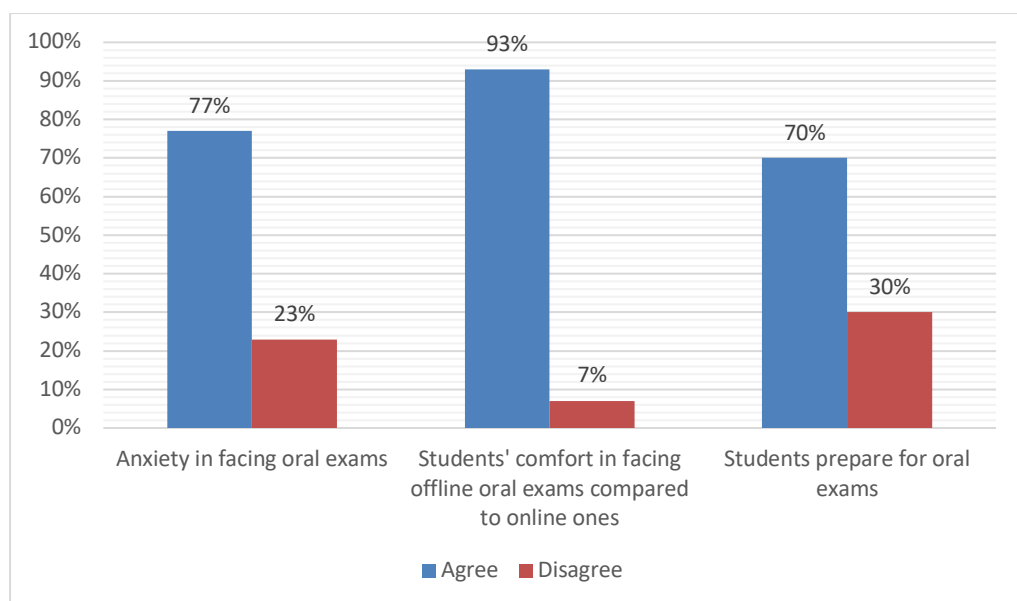


Figure 1. Anxiety Level and Causative Factors



Through the diagram above, it can be concluded based on data taken from 30 respondents who filled out the questionnaire, there were 21 respondents (70%) who were ready to take the offline Arabic oral exam and 9 respondents (30%) were not ready to take the offline Arabic oral exam. In terms of anxiety in facing the offline Arabic oral exam, it shows that 23 respondents (77%) feel anxious in facing the offline oral exam and 7 other respondents (23%) do not feel anxious in facing the offline oral exam.

The data presented in the image above highlights the psychological condition of students related to the offline Arabic oral exam. Specifically, 70% of students reported feeling prepared for the offline oral exam, indicating a high level of preparedness. This is in contrast to 30% who felt unprepared, indicating that some students may be experiencing anxiety or lack confidence in their abilities. This finding is in line with a study titled *Portraying Students' Speaking Foreign Language Anxiety Level during Online and Offline Learning* (Elbalqis & Pradana, [2022](#)), which highlights the importance of psychological preparedness in language assessment, especially in oral exams.

In addition, the figure reveals that 77% of students experience anxiety when facing offline oral exams. This level of anxiety is much lower compared to findings in studies on online assessments, where students often report higher levels of anxiety due to the lack of face-to-face interaction and technical challenges (Goodarzi & Namaziandost, [2025](#)). The level of anxiety in offline assessments can still be considered substantial, emphasizing the need for effective preparation and anxiety-reducing strategies in the classroom.

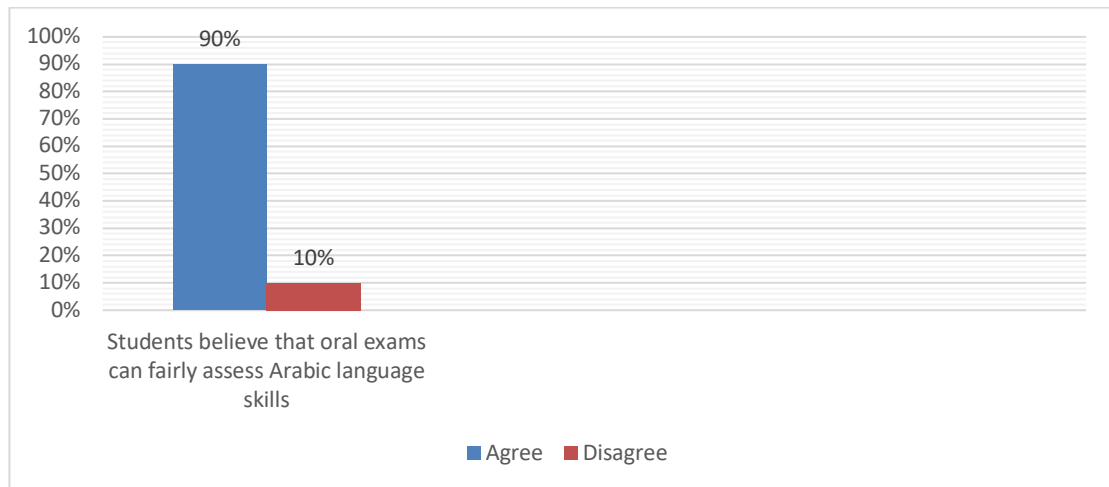
Furthermore, 93% of students who felt more comfortable with offline exams compared to online assessments underscore the importance of human interaction in language learning. As suggested by Hadley et al. ([2022](#)), face-to-face communication encourages more natural interactions that can contribute to better performance in speaking assessments.

### **3.2.2. Emotions and Their Relationship to Exam Results**

Analysis of emotions during oral exams shows that students are often in a neutral emotional state. However, negative emotions such as sadness and anxiety appear when they hesitate or stop speaking. However, no direct correlation was found between emotional states and



exam scores, but a higher ratio of speaking time correlates with better scores (Plonsky et al., 2022).



*Figure 2. Emotions and Their Relationship to Exam Results*

The questionnaire results show that 27 respondents (90%) believe that the oral exam can assess their ability to speak Arabic fairly and 3 other respondents (10%) do not believe that the oral exam can assess their language skills fairly. The high level of confidence (90%) among students who believed that offline oral exams could fairly assess their Arabic language skills suggests that offline environments are perceived as more authentic and reflective of their true abilities. This perception supports the findings in the article *Evaluation of Online and Offline Communication Skills in Higher Education* (Cîrțiță-Buzoianu et al., 2022), which found that face-to-face interaction in oral exams allows examiners to evaluate non-verbal cues, which are important in assessing language proficiency.

These findings contribute to the ongoing debate about the effectiveness of offline versus online oral exams. While online assessments offer flexibility, they present challenges in terms of anxiety, spontaneity, and technical barriers, which are less prevalent in offline environments. Therefore, this study reinforces the need for offline oral assessment in secondary school Arabic language subjects to improve linguistic competence and psychological well-being.

#### **4. Conclusion**

This study concludes that the implementation of offline CEFR-based Arabic oral exams in high schools has a psychological impact on students, out of 30 students, 23 students felt anxious in facing the oral exam. However, 21 students felt ready to face the oral exam, 27 of them also believed that this oral exam was able to assess their language skills fairly and 28 students were also more comfortable and chose offline oral exams compared to online. This method can answer the curriculum's need for structured oral assessment and provide standardized evaluations according to international references. However, its implementation still faces challenges, such as

limited trial practice of oral exams to compare online and offline exams. Therefore, further research is recommended to conduct a more in-depth application of CEFR-based oral exam assessments on students' Arabic language abilities.

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