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Identifying the Professional Competencies of Arabic Language Teachers in Al-Muthanna

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A B S T R A C T

Purpose: This study aims to identify and categorize the professional competencies required for Arabic language teachers to enhance teaching effectiveness and student outcomes in Al-Muthanna.

Methods and Materials: This qualitative study employed thematic analysis based on Attride-Stirling's (2001) framework. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with 25 participants, including university educators and experts in educational sciences. Participants were selected via purposive sampling based on their expertise in teacher competencies. The data were analyzed to extract basic, organizing, and global themes, focusing on professional, aesthetic, democratic, and identity-building competencies.

Findings: The study identified key competencies categorized into four dimensions: (1) Professional Competencies: encompassing individual differentiation, effective communication, information literacy, and facilitative teaching; (2) Aesthetic Competencies: incorporating creative teaching styles, engaging tone, and artistic skills; (3) Democratic Competencies: emphasizing student monitoring, inclusive communication, and classroom management; and (4) Identity-Building Competencies: fostering enthusiasm for the Arabic language and its cultural significance. Additionally, general competencies (ethical and personal), educational competencies (content, pedagogical, and technological knowledge), and leadership competencies (self-leadership and leadership of others) were highlighted as essential.

Conclusion: Enhancing Arabic language teachers' competencies requires strategic planning, teacher development programs, and recognition of exemplary educators. Implementing a comprehensive competency framework can improve educational quality and position Al-Muthanna's educational system to compete on regional and international levels.

Keywords: Professional Competency, Teachers, Arabic Language, Education System of Al-Muthanna.

1. Introduction

The global community is continuously evolving economically, socially, and culturally, necessitating the development of competent human resources. The mechanism for achieving this lies in professional development within education. However, contemporary education systems lack individuals equipped to manage the complex interplay of local, national, and global systems that are rapidly evolving through science and technology (Kennedy, 2024). The rapid technological advancements of the 21st century have fundamentally altered the nature of jobs. Today's global labor market prioritizes individuals with multifaceted skills over those with single-specialty expertise, enabling organizations to adapt to environmental changes efficiently, rather than becoming liabilities (Doležalová, 2015; Saadu et al., 2024).

At the core of any educational system lies its human resources—teachers. In today's society, education's objective transcends the mere transmission of cultural heritage and human experiences to newer generations. Instead, education's mission involves fostering desirable changes in attitudes, cognition, and ultimately, behavior. Teachers play an essential and pivotal role in this mission. Beyond their guiding and supportive roles, teachers are responsible for cultural transmission and promoting desired transformations among children, adolescents, and young adults (Dumitru, 2015; Ganesan & Morales, 2024).

Professional competencies refer to the traits individuals possess and effectively utilize to achieve optimal performance. These traits encompass knowledge, skills, self-concept, social motivations, personality, thought patterns, and approaches to thinking, feeling, and acting (Dubois et al., 2004). Teacher competencies can be defined as a set of knowledge, attitudes, and skills enabling educators to support the physical, intellectual, emotional, social, and spiritual development of learners. These competencies are typically categorized into three domains: cognitive competencies, emotional competencies, and practical skills (Maleki, 2012; Smith, 2023; Yoon & Na, 2023; Zhu et al., 2023).

Overall, teachers are central to the teaching-learning process and significantly influence the quality of an education system. To deliver sustainable learning outcomes, educators need a repertoire of knowledge and professional competencies (Balakrishnan, 2005). While professional competencies may not always align with specific teaching contexts or cultural conditions, their development is crucial

for teachers' professional growth and students' academic achievement (Bürgener & Barth, 2018).

To ensure the education system employs such teachers, the recruitment, training, and utilization of human resources must be systematic and aligned with predefined goals. The absence of a suitable model for teacher training has resulted in confusion and inefficiencies within human resource management in education, leading to diminished effectiveness. This shortfall could potentially cause a sharp decline in teacher quality, exacerbating educational challenges in the years ahead (Balakrishnan, 2005).

Teacher competencies encompass the knowledge, skills, and attitudes enabling teachers to facilitate desirable changes in student behavior and actions during the learning process (Egitim, 2024; Saadu et al., 2024). These competencies are primarily associated with teachers' professional skills within the teaching-learning process. Regardless of the subject taught, all teachers require these skills to perform effectively in their professional roles (Heydari, 2014). Developing and reinforcing these professional teaching competencies necessitates well-designed teacher training programs. The goals of teacher education curricula should align with the required competencies, ensuring that curricular content and organization reflect these objectives (Maleki, 2012).

Despite the existence of various approaches to competency assessment, none has comprehensively captured the dimensions of human performance and competency. Therefore, competencies are not unidimensional but relational, representing the interplay between individual abilities and the satisfactory performance of assigned tasks. Changes in curricula, student demographics, and educational structures have placed professional identity under strain for many teachers. The lack of relevant competencies has created challenges in navigating these changes, leading to professional identity crises (Gilbert, 2013).

Given the above, identifying and defining teacher competencies remains a critical gap in Al-Muthanna's educational framework, particularly among Arabic language teachers. Recognizing these needs can enhance teacher quality and effectiveness across various domains, contributing to improved student outcomes and advancing Al-Muthanna's education system.

2. Methods and Materials

The research methodology employed in this study is qualitative, utilizing thematic analysis based on the Attride-

Stirling (2001) framework. The participants included teachers and academic experts with doctoral degrees in educational sciences, who were actively teaching and contributing to Al-Muthanna's leading universities and educational system. Each participant had at least one publication (article or book) relevant to the field of interest. Using purposive sampling, 25 interviews were conducted with participants selected based on their extensive knowledge in the area of competencies and until theoretical saturation was achieved. Among these, 10 participants were women, and 15 were men.

Data collection was carried out through semi-structured interviews. The interview questions were designed based on a thorough review of relevant literature and qualitative research findings. In the semi-structured approach, the researcher employed a standard set of questions to gather data but retained the flexibility to pose additional questions if new or intriguing topics emerged during the interviews.

During the interviews, participants were asked: "What competencies should an Arabic language teacher possess?" and "How can these competencies contribute to effective teaching and student impact?" Subsequent questions were tailored based on participant responses. Each interview lasted between 45 and 70 minutes. With the participants' consent, their responses were recorded, after which data analysis and coding began.

Initial coding involved organizing relevant codes from each segment of the interviews into separate tables. These codes were then compared to identify thematic similarities, resulting in the extraction of basic themes. These basic themes were categorized based on semantic similarities within the school environment and organized into broader themes. In the final step, the organized themes were synthesized into an overarching, abstract theme, culminating in the preparation of a final table of theme categorization.

The qualitative content analysis phase included reviewing all theoretical texts and studies related to professional competencies published between 2010 and 2023. Relevant materials were selected using purposive criterion-based sampling, focusing on keywords related to professional competencies, until data sufficiency was reached, and content analysis was conducted.

To ensure the accuracy and robustness of the findings, Guba and Lincoln's (1994) criteria were utilized. According to these researchers, four primary criteria are essential for evaluating the scientific rigor of qualitative studies: credibility (believability, plausibility), dependability, confirmability, and transferability. This study focused specifically on credibility and transferability as evaluation benchmarks for the data, both of which were validated and approved within the research.

3. Findings and Results

Research Question: What are the components of professional competencies for Arabic language teachers?

Table 1

Basic, Organizing, and Global Themes for the Model of Enhancing Teacher Competencies

Basic Themes	Organizing Themes	Global Themes
Understanding individual differences and guiding students; the ability to motivate students to learn; facilitative teaching skills; knowledge creation abilities; communication skills; concept delivery skills; information literacy.	Professional Skills	Multidimensional Competencies
Applying learning theories in practice; integrating teaching with poetry and proverbs; ability to draw and write neatly; having an engaging tone and voice.	Aesthetic Competencies	
Fair interactions regardless of beliefs; monitoring students' behavior and well-being; providing equal opportunities for expression; fostering a free and fearless classroom environment.	Democratic Relationship Competencies	
Teachers' ability to inspire enthusiasm for Arabic; promoting Al-Muthannai culture; fostering students' interest in Islamic culture and sciences.	Identity-Building Competencies	
Flexibility; humor; neutrality and impartiality; enthusiasm for work; appropriate intelligence.	Personality Competencies	General Competencies
Commitment to values, especially religion and Sharia principles; attention to societal and subcultural norms; impartiality and justice; respect for students, parents, and colleagues; serving as ethical role models.	Ethical Competencies	
Familiarity with concepts, principles, and rules of the subject; knowledge of eloquence, fluency, morphology, and syntax; familiarity with various topics in Arabic textbooks; understanding informational tools such as images, graphs, and charts.	Arabic Content Knowledge	Educational Competencies
Knowledge of teaching strategies; understanding students' characteristics and behaviors; familiarity with lesson planning stages; strategies for improving the learning environment; foundational psychology principles.	General Pedagogical Knowledge	
Familiarity with creating and using conceptual maps; integrating content with daily life and surroundings; knowledge of the internet, virtual networks, and online media; proficiency in educational software;	Technological Knowledge	

understanding online testing and analytics; knowledge of artificial intelligence applications; familiarity with interactive digital whiteboards.		
Non-judgmental, experience-based perspective; positive energy; clarity in understanding phenomena and tasks; prioritizing time and planning; self-worth and professional pride; inner calm and composure.	Self-Leadership	Leadership Competencies
Understanding individual differences and guiding students; motivating students to learn; facilitating teaching.	Other Leadership	

As illustrated in Table 1, after reviewing and eliminating redundant basic themes, a total of 52 basic themes, 11 organizing themes, and 4 global themes were identified. Subsequently, a thematic network was developed.

Table 2

Examples of Text Segments and Basic Themes

Text Segment	Open Code	Basic Theme
First, a good teacher must demonstrate flexibility when dealing with students and workplace challenges. Given our country's current unrest and ongoing conflicts, a sense of humor in teaching is essential for effectiveness.	A teacher must demonstrate flexibility with students and workplace challenges; a sense of humor is essential in teaching.	Flexibility; Sense of humor
In my opinion, a teacher should remain neutral with students and avoid unjustified emotional biases.	A teacher should maintain neutrality with students and avoid unjustified biases.	Neutrality and impartiality
Enthusiasm in teaching is crucial and is a defining quality of effective teachers today. Naturally, general aptitude and intelligence are fundamental for teaching.	Enthusiasm in teaching is crucial; general aptitude and intelligence are fundamental.	Enthusiasm for teaching; Appropriate intelligence
Ethical competencies: A teacher should adhere to values, particularly religious principles and Sharia, and pay attention to the culture and subcultures of society.	Adherence to values, especially religious principles and Sharia; awareness of societal and subcultural norms.	Adherence to values, particularly religion and Sharia; Awareness of societal and subcultural norms
Avoiding discrimination and prioritizing fairness are moral imperatives for teachers. Respecting students, parents, and colleagues is part of a teacher's professional ethics.	Avoiding discrimination and prioritizing fairness; respecting students, parents, and colleagues.	Non-discrimination and fairness; Respect for students, parents, and colleagues
Arabic teachers should be familiar with the concepts, principles, and rules of their field, such as morphology, eloquence, and fluency.	Familiarity with the concepts, principles, and rules of the Arabic field.	Knowledge of Arabic content, including morphology, eloquence, and fluency
Teachers must be well-acquainted with various chapters of Arabic textbooks, ideally before entering the profession.	Familiarity with various chapters of Arabic textbooks.	Familiarity with Arabic textbook content
Teachers should know how to use informational tools like images, graphs, and charts effectively.	Knowledge of informational tools like images, graphs, and charts.	Familiarity with informational tools, including images, graphs, and charts
Teachers must be familiar with teaching strategies, students' personalities, lesson planning stages, and strategies to enhance the learning environment.	Familiarity with teaching strategies, student characteristics, lesson planning, and environmental improvement.	Knowledge of teaching strategies, psychology, and lesson planning
Teachers should know how to create conceptual maps and integrate content with real-life issues, making learning meaningful.	Familiarity with creating conceptual maps and integrating content with real-life issues.	Knowledge of conceptual maps; Integrating content with real-life applications
Familiarity with internet tools, virtual networks, and online media is a necessary competency for teachers.	Familiarity with internet tools, virtual networks, and online media.	Knowledge of internet tools and virtual networks
Teachers should be familiar with software relevant to Arabic education and be able to integrate technology into teaching.	Familiarity with Arabic education software; integration of technology into teaching.	Familiarity with Arabic education software; Technology integration
Teachers must know how to create and analyze online tests, a necessity emphasized during the COVID-19 pandemic.	Knowledge of online testing and analysis.	Proficiency in online testing and analysis
Teachers should utilize artificial intelligence and interactive digital whiteboards in their teaching practices.	Knowledge and use of AI and interactive whiteboards.	Familiarity with AI and interactive whiteboards
Teachers must maintain a non-judgmental, experience-based perspective, radiate positive energy, and organize tasks with clarity and precision.	Non-judgmental perspective; positive energy; organized and precise task management.	Non-judgmental perspective; Positive energy; Organizational clarity
Teachers should feel self-worth and possess inner peace, along with valuing time and effective planning.	Self-worth; inner peace; valuing time and planning.	Self-worth; Inner peace; Effective time management
Teachers must recognize individual differences and guide students accordingly, motivating them to learn.	Recognizing individual differences; motivating students to learn.	Recognition of individual differences; Motivation for learning
Teachers must facilitate learning by maintaining a supportive teaching demeanor and developing students' learning enthusiasm.	Supportive teaching demeanor; fostering student enthusiasm.	Facilitative teaching; Fostering student enthusiasm
Teachers today need to create knowledge and build relationships with students, parents, and colleagues.	Creating knowledge; building relationships.	Knowledge creation; Relationship building
Teachers should integrate teaching with poetry, proverbs, and historical references to improve student understanding of rules and principles.	Integrating teaching with poetry, proverbs, and historical references.	Integration of learning theories with cultural elements

Figure 1

Thematic Network of Components for Enhancing Professional Competencies of Arabic Language Teachers
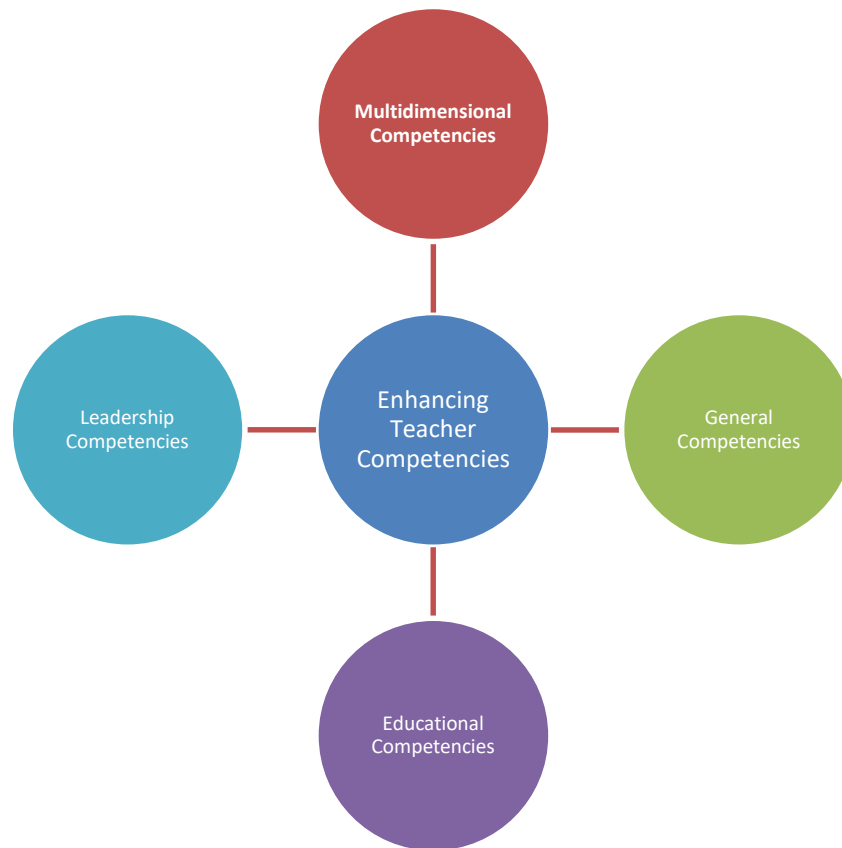
4.   Discussion and Conclusion

In this study, professional competencies have been categorized into professional competencies, aesthetic competencies, democratic competencies, and identity-building competencies. The results are in line with prior findings (Balakrishnan, 2005; Bürgener & Barth, 2018; Doležalová, 2015; Dubois et al., 2004; Dumitru, 2015; Gilbert, 2013; Heydari, 2014; Kennedy, 2024; Keramati, 2021; Maleki, 2012; Marzoughi et al., 2020; Miri Rami et al., 2022).

In the dimension of professional competencies, Arabic language teachers must understand individual differences among learners. This enables them to tailor their teaching to the abilities and talents of each student, thereby enhancing their progress and motivating them to learn Arabic. Additionally, effective and efficient communication skills with students, colleagues, and educational professionals, both domestically and internationally, can facilitate teachers' professional growth and familiarize them with modern educational advancements. Effective communication requires information literacy skills and knowledge creation,

as today's world revolves around communication. A competent teacher avoids isolation and enhances their information literacy to establish effective interactions both in and outside the classroom, aligning with students' digital literacy. Teachers who foster a facilitative teaching approach can simplify complex concepts in Arabic by integrating modern teaching methods and tools such as virtual reality, promoting deeper student understanding.

In the dimension of aesthetic competencies, Arabic teachers who utilize teaching styles that align with the needs and interests of today's students, such as incorporating Arabic poetry, proverbs, an engaging tone, and artistic skills like neat handwriting, can enhance student interest, motivation, and learning outcomes.

In the dimension of democratic competencies, an effective Arabic teacher should diligently monitor students' behavior and well-being in and outside the classroom and discuss their findings with colleagues. This helps address individual learning barriers within the classroom or, if necessary, refer students with specific challenges to relevant authorities. Monitoring students' behavior also enhances classroom management, lesson planning, and overall

educational outcomes. Teachers who create a safe and stress-free classroom environment promote creative thinking, problem-solving, and enthusiasm among students.

In the dimension of identity-building competencies, a teacher's passion for the Arabic language can inspire similar enthusiasm in their students. By fostering a dynamic and engaging classroom environment, teachers can motivate students to appreciate the significance of learning Arabic as a key global language. Teachers should emphasize its cultural and religious importance to encourage students to learn it comprehensively.

Another key competency is general competencies, divided into ethical and personal competencies. Today's teachers can no longer impose rigid classroom rules without flexibility or student input. A flexible teaching approach, combined with humor and impartiality, fosters positive teacher-student relationships and encourages a supportive learning environment. Teachers should also cultivate their intellectual capacities to inspire students, as learners tend to admire teachers with diverse talents and consider them role models.

Ethical competencies involve adhering to values, particularly those aligned with Al-Muthanna's Islamic traditions, fostering respect among students. Ethical consistency between a teacher's words and actions builds trust and increases students' acceptance of them as role models. Furthermore, fairness, non-discrimination, and respect for diverse cultural, linguistic, and social backgrounds are critical ethical principles that teachers must uphold in schools.

Educational competencies include content knowledge, general pedagogical knowledge, and technological knowledge. Teachers must understand Arabic principles, textbook content, eloquence, morphology, and syntax while being familiar with informational tools such as graphs and charts. Mastery of content fosters creativity in teaching, improving student engagement and learning. Familiarity with learning strategies, basic educational psychology, student characteristics, and non-verbal communication skills is also essential. Given today's digital age, Arabic teachers must integrate artificial intelligence tools, educational software, and everyday life into lessons to foster deep and sustainable learning.

The final competency is leadership, encompassing self-leadership and leadership of others. Arabic teachers who radiate positive energy, adhere to lesson plans and schedules, and exhibit inner calm and composure can enhance their performance in classrooms and schools.

In conclusion, enhancing the professional competencies of Arabic teachers requires effective planning and management. Al-Muthanna's educational system must prioritize cultivating competent teachers to elevate the quality of education locally, regionally, and internationally. This requires a strategic long-term plan with clear vision, mission, goals, values, and action plans, coupled with evaluations of implementation outcomes. Recognizing and rewarding competent teachers not only highlights their importance but also inspires further professional growth and serves as a model for others.

Authors' Contributions

Authors equally contributed to this article.

Declaration

In order to correct and improve the academic writing of our paper, we have used the language model ChatGPT.

Transparency Statement

Data are available for research purposes upon reasonable request to the corresponding author.

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Declaration of Interest

The authors report no conflict of interest.

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Ethical Considerations

All procedures performed in studies involving human participants were under the ethical standards of the institutional and, or national research committee and with the 1964 Helsinki Declaration and its later amendments or comparable ethical standards.

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