

Implementation of Teaching Arabic Speaking Skills at MI Mu'awanah

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Received: August 1 2026

Revised: August 14 2026

Accepted: August 31 2026

Abstract

This study examines the implementation of Arabic speaking skills instruction (mahārah al-kalām) at MI Mu'awanah, an Islamic elementary school in Lamongan, East Java, Indonesia, with particular attention to the instructional techniques employed by the teacher and the challenges encountered in classroom practice. Although mahārah al-kalām is a fundamental component of Arabic language learning that requires systematic and active practice, its implementation at the elementary level remains constrained by limited methodological variation, differences in students' abilities, and inadequate opportunities for Arabic language use beyond the classroom. This study employed a qualitative descriptive approach. Data were collected through classroom observations, semi-structured interviews with the Arabic language teacher, and documentation of instructional materials and media. The data were analyzed through data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing, with triangulation across observation, interview, and documentary evidence to enhance the credibility of the findings. The findings indicate that Arabic speaking instruction predominantly employs the ghinā' (singing) technique, integrated with the direct method and supported by picture media. This approach is considered practical and engaging for elementary learners and helps maintain students' attention during speaking practice. However, the study identifies three major challenges: limited variation in instructional techniques and media, substantial differences in students' linguistic abilities and psychological readiness, and an insufficient Arabic-speaking environment that encourages students to return to their local language outside Arabic lessons. To address these challenges, the study recommends diversifying instructional activities through the use of realia and appropriate digital media, implementing peer tutoring in small ability-based groups, and gradually extending structured Arabic use beyond the classroom. The study contributes context-specific empirical insights into the implementation and

challenges of Arabic speaking instruction at the elementary madrasah level and highlights practical strategies for creating more varied, inclusive, and communicative learning environments.

Keywords: Arabic speaking skill; Madrasah Ibtidaiyah; Language teaching problems.

INTRODUCTION / المقدمة

Arabic language instruction in Indonesia has been inseparable from the history of Islam in the archipelago, beginning as the language of worship through the recitation of Qur'anic texts before gradually expanding into the study of religious literature and, eventually, into a communicative language taught across educational institutions from classical to modern forms (Rovi'in, 2013, as cited in Nurhidayati & Ridhwan, 2014). As a communicative tool, Arabic is conventionally understood to comprise four integrated aspects: listening (istima'), speaking (kalam), reading (qira'ah), and writing (kitabah). Although these four aspects function together in authentic communication, they are commonly separated in classroom presentation according to time allocation and instructional focus (Nurhidayati & Ridhwan, 2014).

At the Madrasah Ibtidaiyah (MI) level, Arabic is taught as a foreign language from grade I through grade VI, developing learners' oral and written communication skills to understand and express information, thought, and feeling, while simultaneously supporting religious, general, and socio cultural knowledge. The 2003 competency based Arabic curriculum for MI sets an explicit target of active and passive mastery of approximately 300 vocabulary items and idiomatic expressions, arranged in graded sentence patterns intended to function as tools of communication and comprehension of contemporary texts (Kurikulum Berbasis Kompetensi Bahasa Arab MI, 2003).

Among the four language skills, maharah al kalam (speaking skill) occupies a central place because it is the skill most directly tied to learners' ability to interact

with others and to understand a speaker's intention (Rosikh, at. All, 2023.). Its instructional goals extend beyond mere pronunciation accuracy to include fluency and ease of speaking, clarity of articulation and diction, responsibility toward the content and context of speech, the formation of critical listening, and crucially for elementary learners the formation of a speaking habit sustained through consistent, committed interaction (Mustofa, n.d.). Reaching these goals requires varied instructional strategies direct strategies, jigsaw, small group presentation, and gallery/poster session strategies as well as diverse media, particularly vocabulary and pattern drill cards realized in several forms (Rosyidi & Ni'mah, 2012).

In practice, however, many madrasah rely on a narrow set of techniques dictated more by classroom convenience than by pedagogical variety. Preliminary observation at MI Mu'awanah indicated that Arabic speaking instruction is delivered almost exclusively through the *ghina'* (singing) technique paired with a direct method and picture cards, chosen by the teacher primarily because it is simple to apply and consistently enjoyed by students, who report lower boredom during practice. While this preference is pedagogically understandable given young learners' developmental need for playful, low anxiety practice, an overreliance on a single technique risks limiting the range of speaking sub skills pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, and comprehension that a genuinely communicative *maharah al kalam* program should develop (Rosyidi & Ni'mah, 2012; al Ghali & Abdullah, 1981).

Few empirical studies have specifically documented, from direct classroom observation and teacher interview, the concrete problems that emerge when a single technique such as *ghina'* dominates elementary level Arabic speaking instruction, together with context grounded solutions feasible for a resource limited madrasah. The novelty of this study lies in providing such a grounded, problem–solution mapping specific to MI Mu'awanah, contributing a practical reference for madrasah

facing similar methodological constraints rather than a general theoretical account of speaking skill pedagogy.

This study is therefore directed at two objectives: (1) to describe the implementation of teaching maharah al kalam at MI Mu'awanah; and (2) to identify the problems teachers face in that instruction and to propose feasible, context appropriate alternative solutions.

METHOD / المنهجية

This study employed a qualitative descriptive approach to obtain a comprehensive and contextually grounded account of the teaching of Arabic speaking skills (mahārah al-kalām) in its natural classroom setting. Qualitative description is appropriate when the purpose of a study is to provide a detailed account of events, practices, and participants' experiences while remaining relatively close to the data rather than developing a highly abstract theoretical interpretation (Sandelowski, 2000). Accordingly, the present study focused on describing how mahārah al-kalām was implemented, the instructional techniques and media employed, and the practical challenges encountered during classroom instruction.

The research was conducted at MI Mu'awanah, Lamongan Regency, East Java, Indonesia, focusing on the teaching and learning process of Arabic speaking skills in the elementary grades. The primary data source was the Arabic language teacher, Ibu Nur Sholihah, together with direct observations of her classroom practice. Secondary data included relevant scholarly literature on Arabic speaking pedagogy, curriculum and instructional documents, teaching materials, and previous studies concerning Arabic language teaching strategies and instructional media. The use of multiple sources enabled the researchers to examine classroom practices from complementary perspectives and strengthen the credibility of the findings.

Data were collected using three complementary techniques. First, non-participant classroom observation was conducted to document the instructional

methods, learning activities, media, teacher–student interactions, and classroom dynamics involved in mahārah al-kalām instruction. Observation was used to capture actual instructional practices rather than relying solely on participants’ retrospective accounts. Second, a semi-structured interview was conducted with the Arabic language teacher to explore instructional objectives, teaching strategies, instructional media, assessment practices, and the challenges experienced in teaching speaking skills. Semi-structured interviews allow researchers to maintain a common set of topics while providing sufficient flexibility to explore participants’ experiences and explanations in greater depth. Third, document analysis was conducted on teaching materials, vocabulary cards, lesson-related materials, and thematic content used during instruction. The combination of observation, interviews, and documentation provided multiple forms of evidence for understanding the phenomenon under investigation.

Data analysis followed the interactive model of qualitative data analysis proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014), consisting of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. Data condensation involved selecting, focusing, simplifying, and organizing relevant information from observation notes, interview data, and documents. The condensed data were then organized and displayed according to emerging categories related to instructional methods, learning media, classroom implementation, and teaching challenges. Conclusions were subsequently drawn and continuously verified by comparing patterns across the different data sources. The analysis was supported by source triangulation, in which information obtained from classroom observations, teacher interviews, and instructional documents was compared to identify areas of convergence and discrepancy. Triangulation was used to enhance the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings rather than to assume that all data sources would necessarily produce identical accounts.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION / نتائج البحث و المناقشة

Teaching Arabic Speaking Skills (Maharah Al kalam) at MI Mu'awanah

Instruction in maharah al kalam at MI Mu'awanah begins after students have mastered the sounds of Arabic letters and can distinguish between phonemically similar sounds, in line with the sequential objectives outlined by Mustofa (n.d.): ease of speaking, clarity, responsibility, critical listening, and habit formation. According to the class teacher, Ibu Nur Sholihah, the operational objectives pursued at the MI level are more modest and concrete than these general goals, namely: (a) students can correctly pronounce a sentence after the teacher's model, and (b) students can demonstrate comprehension of the teacher's spoken instruction through appropriate physical response for example, opening a book upon hearing the command *iftah kutubakum* ("open your books").

Thematically, speaking instruction at MI Mu'awanah follows topics considered close to students' daily environment: self introduction (*ta'aruf*), school equipment, occupations, addresses, family (*usrati*), body parts (*a'dha' al insan*), colors (*anwa' al alwan*), time (*al sa'ah*), and daily activities. This thematic organization mirrors the broader principle that vocabulary and speaking practice for young learners should be anchored in concrete, familiar referents rather than abstract or decontextualized material (Nurhidayati & Ridhwan, 2014).

Observation confirmed that the dominant instructional strategy is the direct strategy realized through physical response: the teacher issues a spoken instruction or expression such as "open your books" while simultaneously demonstrating the corresponding action, allowing students to infer meaning directly from the paired verbal and physical cue. This is complemented by what the teacher terms a manual strategy, in which real objects or pictures relevant to the lesson theme are shown while students repeat the teacher's utterance until they can recall and comprehend it independently. Of the several strategies documented in the literature direct, jigsaw, small group presentation, and gallery/poster session (Mustofa, n.d.) only the direct

and manual strategies were observed in active, regular use at MI Mu’awanah, indicating a narrower strategic repertoire than the range recommended in the literature.

In terms of media, vocabulary cards (*bithaqah al mufradat*) constitute the primary instructional tool, alongside picture media. Cards are reported by the teacher to be more easily understood by students than other media because the written vocabulary is paired directly with a thematic image, allowing students to read, repeat, and internalize new words without needing to analyze grammatical structure (Rosyidi & Ni’mah, 2012). Evaluation of speaking ability follows the general framework of pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, and comprehension (al Ghali & Abdullah, 1981), operationalized at MI Mu’awanah mainly through short storytelling, retelling, and simple question and answer exchanges rather than the full range of possible speaking test formats such as free conversation or interview (Nabilah & Rosikh, 2025).

Problems in Teaching *Maharah al Kalam* at MI Mu’awanah and Proposed Solutions

Beyond describing current practice, this study identified three interrelated problems that the teacher experiences in delivering *maharah al kalam* instruction, together with alternative solutions grounded in both teacher testimony and the literature. These are summarized in Table 1.

*Table 1. Problems in Teaching *Maharah al Kalam* at MI Mu’awanah and Proposed Solutions*

Problem	Manifestation	Proposed Solution
Limited variation of method and media	Reliance on the direct method with picture	Introduce varied, modern methods/media (e.g.,

	media only, causing repetitive sessions	realia, outdoor learning) already accessible online
Heterogeneous student ability and psychology	Fast learners feel bored during repetition for slower peers	Peer tutoring in small groups; advanced students re explain material to peers
Unsupportive language environment	Local/regional language dominates outside the Arabic lesson hour	Teacher led compulsory Arabic use during lessons, extended gradually to specific days/activities

The teacher acknowledged awareness that a wider range of varied and engaging methods exists for teaching Arabic speaking skills, but explained that classroom routine has settled on the direct method with picture media commonly delivered through ghina' (singing) activities because of its simplicity and the students' evident enjoyment. This finding echoes Rosyidi and Ni'mah's (2012) observation that song based and direct techniques are attractive precisely because they minimize learner boredom, but it also illustrates a common pedagogical trade off: techniques selected primarily for engagement value may, over time, narrow the range of speaking sub skills actually practiced. A feasible solution proposed in this study is for teachers to progressively diversify their repertoire exploring freely available modern methods and digital media, substituting picture cards with real objects when appropriate (for example, bringing real fruit for a fruit vocabulary lesson), and occasionally relocating practice outdoors to sustain novelty and attention.

A second problem concerns the heterogeneity of students' ability and psychological readiness. Because emotional states and comprehension speed vary considerably among young learners, teachers face a persistent dilemma: introducing new material risks leaving slower students behind, while repeating earlier material to accommodate them risks boredom among students who have already mastered it. This is consistent with the well documented challenge of mixed ability instruction in early childhood and elementary foreign language classrooms. The solution identified through this study and already informally practiced at MI Mu'awanah is a peer tutoring arrangement in which students who have grasped the material are grouped with and asked to re explain it to peers who have not, transforming a pacing problem into an additional speaking practice opportunity for the more advanced students while providing more comprehensible, less intimidating input for their peers.

The third problem is an unsupportive language environment outside the Arabic lesson itself: students at MI Mu'awanah predominantly use their regional/local language in daily interaction at school, so vocabulary and expressions acquired during Arabic lessons are rarely reinforced through authentic use, weakening retention and normalized active application. This finding aligns with the broader principle, echoed in the companion study of the "Arabic Everyday" habituation program at a neighboring Madrasah Ibtidaiyah, that durable vocabulary and speaking gains depend on habituation embedded in the learner's daily environment rather than confined to a single lesson hour (Al Faruqi, 2015, as cited in related habituation literature). The alternative solution proposed is teacher modeled compulsory Arabic use, beginning within the Arabic lesson hour itself and gradually extended to designated days or specific school activities once students demonstrate sufficient comfort, so that classroom gains are not immediately lost to the dominant language environment outside the lesson.

Taken together, these findings suggest that the central constraint on maharah al kalam instruction at MI Mu'awanah is not a lack of teacher awareness or

willingness but a combination of practical classroom conditions limited time, mixed ability groups, and an unsupportive linguistic environment that channel instruction toward a single, convenient technique. The proposed solutions are deliberately low cost and teacher manageable, consistent with the resource constraints typical of madrasah ibtidaiyah, and are intended to diversify practice incrementally rather than to demand a wholesale change in teaching philosophy.

Conclusion

This study describes the teaching of Arabic speaking skills (maharah al kalam) at MI Mu'awanah and identifies three principal problems constraining its effectiveness: limited variation in method and media, heterogeneous student ability and psychological readiness, and an unsupportive language environment outside the Arabic lesson hour. The dominant reliance on the ghina' technique combined with the direct method and picture media reflects a reasonable response to young learners' need for enjoyable, low anxiety practice, but it also narrows the instructional repertoire relative to the range of strategies recommended in the literature. This study proposes three corresponding, low cost solutions: diversifying methods and media (including realia and outdoor learning), implementing peer tutoring within mixed ability groups, and gradually expanding teacher modeled compulsory Arabic use beyond the lesson hour. These findings offer a context specific empirical contribution to the pedagogy of maharah al kalam in madrasah ibtidaiyah and a practical, replicable reference for teachers facing similar constraints. Future research is recommended to test the proposed solutions through classroom based action research with pre and post intervention speaking assessments across a full semester, in order to quantify their impact on students' speaking proficiency.

CONCLUSION / الخلاصة

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