

STRATEGIES FOR IMPROVING ARABIC LANGUAGE SKILLS AT THE IBADURRAHMAN PUTRI ISLAMIC BOARDING SCHOOL IN STABAT, NORTH SUMATRA

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ABSTRACT

Speaking skills (mahārah al-kalām) are one of the main skills in mastering Arabic, which remains a challenge in the pesantren environment, especially for female students who come from a background where their mother tongue is not Arabic. The Ibadurrahman Putri Stabat Langkat Islamic Boarding School implements various familiarization strategies to improve the Arabic speaking skills of female students. This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach with data collection techniques through observation, interviews, and documentation. The purpose of this study is to describe the habit-forming strategies implemented by the boarding school and evaluate their effectiveness in creating a language environment that supports the process of acquiring speaking skills. The results of the study indicate that strategies such as the use of Arabic by female teachers, intensive training for new students during the first three months, daily vocabulary memorization, the implementation of tahkim and muhāwarah, the prohibition of using local languages, as well as regular musyāhadah and classroom vocabulary activities, are effective in increasing the students' activity, confidence, and vocabulary mastery in Arabic communication. These strategies not only create a lively and structured language environment, but also psychologically shape the motivation and confidence of female students to use Arabic in their daily lives. The conclusion of this study is that language habit formation through integrated and consistent strategies has proven effective in improving the Arabic speaking skills of female students in the pesantren environment.

Keyword: *Speaking Skills, Arabic Language, Habituation Strategies, language environment*

INTRODUCTION

Language has the main function as a communication tool used by humans to convey thoughts, ideas, and establish social interactions (Mahbub and Tauhidiah 2022). Among the many languages that exist, Arabic occupies a very special position because it is a language that is not only used in international communication but also the main language in Islam (Salida and Zulpina 2023). Arabic is the language used in the Qur'an, hadith, and various classical Islamic literature that is the source of Islamic laws and teachings (Khotimah et al. 2024). With its status as a religious language, Arabic has a high spiritual dimension and is a symbol of Islamic identity (Mahbub and Tauhidiah 2022).

Arabic is also widely used in various international forums and is the official language in many countries. With the spread of Islam to various parts of the world, the Arabic language also spread to various regions, including Indonesia, the country with the largest Muslim population in the world. The influence of Arabic in Indonesia can be seen from the many vocabulary absorbed in the Indonesian language and its use in the daily worship practices of Muslims. Therefore, learning Arabic has a strategic role, especially in the context of Islamic education

Islamic educational institutions in Indonesia, especially Islamic boarding schools, are institutions that play an important role in maintaining and developing Arabic language competence. In Islamic boarding schools, Arabic is not only taught as a subject, but also as a tool to understand the sources of Islamic teachings directly (Wardani and Hilmi 2021). The purpose of learning Arabic in Islamic boarding schools is so that students are able to understand and practice Islamic teachings

from their original sources. In addition, learning Arabic is also directed so that students can develop the ability to actively communicate in the language, both orally and in writing (Mahbub & Tauhidiah, 2022).

Arabic language learning in pesantren faces serious challenges, especially because of the diverse linguistic backgrounds of students, where the majority use their mother tongue such as regional or Indonesian languages. This makes it difficult to use Arabic in daily communication, especially if the pesantren has not implemented a language area system consistently. In fact, a conducive language environment is very important in developing language skills (Syaro and M 2021). In addition, many students also have difficulty speaking actively and confidently due to a lack of practice, psychological barriers, and inappropriate teaching methods. The skills of *mahārah al-kalām* are not enough to be developed through theory alone, but must be supported by habituation and continuous practice (Rahman and Maulani 2024).

This condition requires an appropriate and systematic learning strategy to improve students' Arabic language skills. The strategy in question is not only a teaching method, but includes all plans that are prepared to achieve learning objectives. Learning objectives should be the basis of all strategic decisions, as objectives serve as a direction and benchmark for the successful implementation of learning. In the context of learning Arabic, strategies should include four main skills, namely: *istimā'* (listening), *kalām* (speaking), *qirā'ah* (reading), and *kitābah* (writing), which are interrelated and inseparable (Fajrin, Walfajri, and Khotijah 2020). The Ibadurrahman Putri Stabat Langkat Islamic Boarding School as one of the Islamic educational institutions that integrates Islamic values and Arabic language learning, faces these challenges in the process of improving the Arabic language skills of students. With the diverse backgrounds of students and the need to make Arabic an active language in the pesantren environment, an appropriate, structured, and contextual learning strategy is needed so that learning goals can be achieved optimally.

METHODS

This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach, which aims to understand in depth a social phenomenon based on the perspective of the participants. This qualitative paradigm is often contrasted with the positivistic or quantitative paradigm, and emphasizes more on a naturalistic approach to capture the subjective meaning contained in an event or social action (Darmalaksana 2020). The descriptive qualitative approach allows the researcher to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the strategies used by teachers in improving the Arabic language skills of students at the Ibadurrahman Putri Stabat Langkat Islamic Boarding School.

This research also involves the activeness of researchers in the process of collecting and analyzing data, so that the results not only describe events that appear on the surface, but also examine the dimensions of hidden meaning. Descriptive analysis serves to answer questions about what happens during the learning process, as well as describe the various aspects that accompany it (Sugiono, 2019). This qualitative research method is used to explain and evaluate social phenomena related to learning approaches, such as teachers' strategies in developing *students' mahārah al-kalām* (speaking) skills. This method is a means to interpret real practices in teaching and learning activities, including the beliefs, views, and attitudes of individuals and groups towards learning Arabic.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The discussion in this study is focused on the strategies used by teachers at the Ibadurrahman Putri Stabat Langkat Islamic Boarding School in improving the Arabic speaking skills (*mahārah al-kalām*) of students. This ability is an important aspect in mastering the Arabic language, especially in the context of pesantren education that emphasizes religious understanding through the source language. The following are included in the Arabic language program at the Ibadurrahman Putri Islamic Boarding School:

Encourage all ustadzah to use the official language (Arabic) to all ibadurrahman students on a regular basis.

One of the crucial strategies in improving the speaking skills (*mahārah al-kalām*) of students at the Ibadurrahman Putri Stabat Langkat Islamic Boarding School is to encourage all ustadzah to use Arabic as the official language in every daily interaction on a regular basis. The implementation of this strategy is not only symbolic, but is part of a real effort in forming a bi'ah lughawiyah or a lively and functional Arabic environment. When the ustadzah, as authoritative and exemplary figures in the learning process, consistently use Arabic in daily conversations—whether when supervising activities in the dormitory, leading informal discussions, or giving instructions to the students, they are automatically encouraged to respond in the same language. This strategy has a great influence in creating a communication atmosphere that supports habituation, where Arabic is used not only in academic contexts, but also in real, spontaneous situations. (Zayuda et al., 2023). This is strengthened by research conducted by (Suryadi Nasution, 2021) which states that direct practice in the language environment encourages a significant improvement in students' language skills in salafiyah-based and modern Islamic boarding schools.

The consistency of the use of Arabic by ustadzah strengthens the linguistic input of the students, namely the process of language exposure needed in the acquisition of a second language. The theory of language acquisition developed by Stephen Krashen, especially in the concept of comprehensible input, explains that a person can master a language naturally if he gets language input that can be understood in a real and meaningful context. The effectiveness of this strategy is also in line with the opinion (Agustina, Hunainah, and Syarif 2023), which emphasizes the importance of the role of teachers as a language model in behavioristic approaches. The teacher's example in language provides a stimulus for students to imitate and try to communicate, which ultimately accelerates the language acquisition process. An environment that allows students to actively hear and imitate Arabic on a daily basis helps to foster the courage to speak, reduce anxiety in making mistakes, and strengthen mahārah al-kalām (speaking skills). In addition, the success of this strategy is highly dependent on consistency and oversight in its implementation. If carried out systematically and sustainably, the habituation of Arabic through the role of ustadzah can be an important foundation in forming students who have active and confident competence in speaking Arabic.

This approach also has a strong psychological effect. When the students witnessed firsthand how Arabic was used as a daily communication tool by the ustadzah, they grew up with confidence, courage, and internal motivation to imitate the use of the language. An environment that is consistent with the expectation of Arabic language use creates positive social pressure, so that students feel a responsibility to participate actively. In addition, it can reduce affective barriers such as shyness, fear

of being wrong, or awkwardness when speaking, because all parties in the pesantren environment use the same language naturally.

Every new student must practice Arabic from the beginning of the year until the first three months of entering the pesantren.

For the first three months after being accepted as a new student at the Ibadurrahman Putri Islamic Boarding School in Stabat Langkat, each student is required to participate in an intensive Arabic language orientation program as an initial effort to establish the foundation of mahārah al-kalām (speaking skills). This program is designed to instill the habit of using Arabic in daily life since the beginning of the arrival of students at the Islamic boarding school. In its implementation, students are accustomed to interacting using Arabic in various forms of daily activities, such as muhādatsah (light conversation), halaqah lughawiyyah (language discussion circle), the use of certain vocabulary when praying, greeting friends or ustadzah, and carrying out instructions and commands in Arabic. These interactions are packaged in stages, starting from simple phrases to complex communicative sentences. The main goal is for students to get used to absorbing and using Arabic as a functional communication tool, not just as academic material.

The strategy of accustoming Arabic from the beginning is in line with the concept of language immersion, which is a method of acquiring a second language that is carried out by immersing learners in an environment that only uses the target language. This approach is similar to the Arabic language habituation program at MTs Pesantren Al-Ma' tuq Sukabumi, where the Arabic sensory environment consistently shapes students' communication habits and increases students' confidence from the beginning of entering the pesantren (Rosyadi and Alim 2022).

Through this intensive orientation program, new students are encouraged to actively speak Arabic in various situations, from learning to daily life. This process not only accelerates language acquisition, but also builds a strong language culture, creating a psychological foundation for students to be brave and consistent in using the target language. With a directed program structure and periodic evaluation, this three-month orientation pattern is prospective to be used as a superior strategy in developing speaking skills and forming bi'ah lughawiyyah that supports long-term learning goals in Islamic boarding schools. Through the strategy of implementing a full three-month habituation period for new students, Pondok Ibadurrahman Putri was able to build a strong foundation of Arabic, students were accustomed to speaking from scratch, reduced dependence on the mother tongue, and gradually developed into more confident and competent speakers. In the context of the Ibadurrahman Putri Islamic Boarding School, this program is also a medium for equalizing the level of ability of new students who come from diverse educational and language backgrounds. By strengthening exposure and repetition from the beginning of the mondok period, the process of forming bi'ah lughawiyyah becomes more solid and effective. This orientation activity is not only directed to grow linguistic skills, but also to build discipline, confidence, and readiness of students to participate in all Arabic-based pesantren programs.

Holding tahkim every day for shigar students (MTS) and kibar (SMA) for violators.

The implementation of tahkim in the form of ta'zīr or punishment of educating every day for shigar (MTS level) and kibar (high school level) students at the Ibadurrahman Putri Islamic Boarding

School aims to strengthen discipline and morals through direct sanctions that educate. This method is similar to the practice at the At-Tauhid Kampoeng Tauhid Ogan Ilir Islamic Boarding School, where ta'zīr has been proven to be effective in increasing students' compliance and sense of responsibility for the rules of the boarding school (Alhadi, Noviani, and Ardeni 2022). Consistent daily procedures, such as extra tasks, verbal warnings, or light physical activity, give a firm signal without triggering excessive pressure, thus forming the student's self-reflection on his actions. Daily implementation also allows for continuous supervision and rapid evaluation, preventing repeated patterns of violations and reinforcing an understanding of disciplinary values.

Research by Rahmatullah (2023) at Islamic Boarding Schools in South Sulawesi shows that forms of punishment such as reprimands, social duties, and light physical punishment (when in accordance with sharia) can provide a positive deterrent effect and increase compliance with Islamic boarding school norms. More than just a threat, daily tahkim serves as a form of social didactic that helps students realize mistakes and the importance of obeying the rules. Based on social learning theory, this action contains educational value: students not only learn from personal experience, but also observation of the consequences of their peers' violations. With a note, the implementation of tahkim must pay attention to aspects of legal rationality, proportionality of punishment, and justice in implementation so that it remains in accordance with the principles of Islamic education and the values of children's rights. With a structured, transparent, and humane format, daily tahkim can be an effective instrument in forming disciplined and moral character for Shigar and Kibar students.

The daily activity every night is to memorize the mufradat of each class which is accompanied by the language section by approaching several mufradat to the students.

Routine activities at night which are carried out by memorizing mufradat (vocabulary) per class and accompanied by the language section is a strategy designed to strengthen students' memory of Arabic vocabulary systematically and sustainably. Assistance by the language department in the form of dictation or re-pronunciation helps ensure correct pronunciation and understanding of the right meaning, as well as motivate learning through direct interaction. This process not only helps to increase the absorption of new vocabulary, but also trains hearing (*mahārah al-istimā'*) and pronunciation (*mahārah an-naṭq*) simultaneously. This kind of habituation is important in creating sufficient and contextual linguistic input for students who are still in the language acquisition stage. In the perspective of second language learning, according to the theory of the Input Hypothesis from Krashen (1982), the understanding of meaningful inputs that are slightly above the level of ability of learners ($i+1$) is very important for the development of linguistic competence naturally.

At the Daarul Ukhuwwah Putri 2 Islamic Boarding School Malang, a similar program is carried out: mudabbiroh dictates daily mufradat to students, then they write down the meaning, make sentences, and paste it in the room, even before going to bed they have to submit the memorization of mufradat to the dormitory administrator (Jufrih, Rosyidi, and Rusul 2023). This program is required for both isim and fi'il according to the grade level, and day by day enriches their vocabulary systematically. Studies at the Al-Amanah Al-Gontory Islamic Boarding School also showed that the "Mufradat Pagi" program—carried out every morning per class with a language section—succeeded in improving the speaking skills (*mahārah al-kalām*) of students. With a scheduled mufradat

memorization approach directed by ustadzah, students become more fluent in using vocabulary in everyday Arabic dialogues (Setyaki et al. 2023).

Students are not allowed to use the local language to fellow students.

The implementation of this strategy began from the orientation phase of students. Each class was given an official briefing that in the pesantren area—classes, dormitories, and joint activities—the language used must be Arabic or at least standard Indonesian, and that the use of regional languages to fellow students is not allowed. The dormitory administrator and language team consistently supervise and provide daily reminders. Light sanctions such as verbal reprimands, disciplinary notes, or repetition of mufradat memorization are applied if violations are found. In addition, the importance of self-awareness is also emphasized; Students are encouraged to remind each other when they hear friends using regional languages, so that a new independent language culture is created.

Theoretically and empirically, this strategy is supported by the findings of a study by (Munawwir et al. 2023), which examined the phenomenon of code mixing in students' Arabic conversations, and concluded that the presence of "regional dialects" significantly hinders the mastery of vocabulary and grammar of fuṣḥā in Islamic boarding schools. By not allowing the use of regional languages, pesantren can create a linguistically homogeneous environment, which further supports intensive formal Arabic acquisition. Students are forced out of the comfort zone of their mother tongue and become accustomed to the richness of vocabulary and structure of Arabic fuṣḥā. Consistent implementation also helps foster a collective awareness that every conversation is an opportunity to practice Arabic—building mental capacity and language habits that are natural in the daily life of the pesantren.

Holding a monthly activity, namely muhawarah, which is memorizing Arabic dialogue to all students.

The monthly muḥāwarah activity at the Ibadurrahman Putri Stabat Langkat Islamic Boarding School is a form of direct practice of using Arabic in the form of a dialogue that is structured in a contextual and communicative manner. This activity does not only focus on the aspect of memorizing texts, but is designed to actively build students' speaking skills through conversation simulations that are relevant to daily life in the pesantren environment. The implementation process began with the distribution of dialogue texts by ustadzah as language supervisors, where the material was adjusted to the level of ability and learning needs of each class. Students are given enough time to memorize and understand the content of the dialogue, both in groups and individually, so that they are not only able to convey the text orally, but also understand sentence structure, vocabulary use, and proper intonation. This reinforces aspects of *mahārah al-kalām* (speaking skills) through a directed practice approach that approaches real situations. On D-day, each group performs a dialogue in front of the class, followed by a hands-on evaluation from a language instructor who assesses aspects of pronunciation (ṭajwīd), fluency, and expression. These activities not only encourage verbal memorization, but also simulate natural communication, practice spontaneous responses, and increase confidence in speaking in a formal yet encouraging atmosphere.

Real research support demonstrates the effectiveness of this method. Research conducted by (Suci Aprianti 2011) in his research at MTs Nurul Iman Bandung found that dialogue learning through *muhāwarah* resulted in an increase in speaking scores from an average of 8.1 to 8.7 in three PTK cycles, showing the effectiveness of memorized dialogue for speaking skills. This monthly practice of *muhāwarah* systematically utilizes the principles of collaborative learning and language habituation, where the intensity of dialogue exercises and the rhythm of periodic evaluation encourage the internalization of vocabulary and grammatical structure, while building habits of thinking and responding in Arabic. Therefore, this strategy is very worthy of being used as a model to develop the *mahārah al-kālām* of the santriwati significantly.

Hold a *musyāhadah* (nobar) by giving a film in Arabic on Wednesday or once a week.

The *musyāhadah* activity which is routinely held every Wednesday night at the Ibadurrahman Putri Stabat Langkat Islamic Boarding School is one of the audiovisual-based Arabic language learning innovations. In this activity, students together watch Arabic films or videos that have been curated by the language team, usually covering educational, religious, or daily conversation themes that are relevant to the context of pesantren life. The screening is carried out in the dormitory hall to create a conducive, collective atmosphere and support non-formal learning. After the screening, all students were required to record new vocabulary that appeared during the film, as well as compile a summary of the story based on their personal understanding. This step aims to train listening skills (*mahārah al-istimā'*), enrich vocabulary (*mufradāt*), and improve writing and critical thinking skills.

The results of the summaries made by the students are then collected and examined by the language coach, then discussed again in the language facilitation session which is carried out periodically. This process not only stimulates memory of the content of the film, but also provides an opportunity for students to clarify their understanding of the context of using Arabic in a more natural and communicative form (Mushoffa 2023), finding in a pre-experimental study at the Al Berr Pandaan Islamic Boarding School that watching Arabic films significantly increased students' speaking skills scores from an average of 59.0 to 81.67 ($p < 0.05$), proving that *Maharah al-kalam* can be developed through Arabic-language film media. The Arabic film *deliberation* once a week is not just entertainment, but a planned educational strategy that combines audio-visual input, listening exercises, vocabulary expansion, summary writing, and joint evaluation.

Hold *class mufradat* every day and memorize.

The daily *mufradat program* implemented at the Ibadurrahman Putri Stabat Langkat Islamic Boarding School is one of the systematic strategies in strengthening the Arabic language competence of students, especially in the aspects of *mahārah al-kalām* (ability to speak) and *mahārah al-qirā'ah* (reading ability). This activity takes place regularly every day, both before and after formal teaching and learning activities, where each class receives a number of new *mufradat* that has been prepared by the language team according to the class level and the ability of the students—usually between 5 to 10 words per day. The vocabulary given is not only random, but is designed thematically according to the topic of learning, the season of worship, or the daily communication needs in the pesantren environment. The process begins with dictation by the *ustadzah* or language department

administrator, then followed by simultaneous repetition by all students to strengthen correct pronunciation and intonation.

After that, the students were asked to write the mufradat in a special notebook and form simple sentences as a form of practical application. At the next meeting, evaluations were carried out in the form of oral quizzes, quick questions and answers, and conversation challenges using the mufradat that had been taught. This strategy not only enriches vocabulary (lexical items), but also strengthens students' retention power to the vocabulary taught because it is accompanied by contextual practice and consistency of repetition. According to research by Al-Farisi & Suryaningsih (2021) in *Arabiyat: Journal of Arabic Language and Arabic Language Education*, the strategy of strengthening mufradat through an intensive vocabulary input and retrieval practice approach has been proven to significantly improve Arabic language skills, especially if accompanied by continuous and applicable evaluation. By making this activity part of a structured daily routine, the Ibadurrahman Islamic Boarding School has succeeded in instilling a strong Arabic literacy culture, not only in terms of memorization but also in terms of the use and habituation of active communication. Research by (Wardani and Hilmi 2021), Pesantren Persis 67 Tasikmalaya proves that daily vocabulary debriefing significantly improves students' speaking skills. The experimental group with a daily mufradat routine recorded a higher increase in speaking scores than the control group, confirming the positive effect of daily mufradat habituation.

CONCLUSION

Based on all the strategic descriptions that have been implemented at the Ibadurrahman Putri Stabat Langkat Islamic Boarding School, it can be concluded that a systematic and sustainable approach plays a very important role in improving the Arabic speaking skills (*mahārah al-kalām*) of students. Strategies such as the use of Arabic by all ustadzah, intensive training for the first three months for new students, the implementation of daily tahkim for violators, daily memorization of mufradat with assistance, prohibition of using regional languages, monthly *muhāwarah* activities, weekly *musyāhadah*, and daily mufradat class programs are part of the habituation system designed to create *bi'ah lughawiyah* or a conducive and directed language environment. All of these strategies not only encourage students to actively use Arabic in their daily contexts, but also form a communication culture that strengthens confidence, the ability to think in the target language, and the absorption of vocabulary contextually. With the support of relevant empirical research, it is proven that the pesantren environment that integrates habituation, example, routine evaluation, and communicative approaches in language practice is able to significantly improve Arabic language skills, making students not only understand the language theoretically, but also able to apply it actively and productively in daily life.

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