



TEACHERS AS FACILITATORS IN OVERCOMING BARRIERS TO ARABIC SPEAKING SKILLS THROUGH AN IMMERSION-BASED APPROACH AT MA ASSALAM BOARDING SCHOOL

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Abstract

This study analyzes the strategic role of teachers as facilitators in overcoming barriers to learning Arabic speaking skills at MA Assalam Tuban, an Islamic boarding school adopting the Gontor model. A qualitative case study design is used with data collected through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and documentation, followed by thematic analysis using data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The findings show that teachers act as designers of a communicative and immersive environment by applying the direct/ummah method and organizing structured speaking activities such as muhadassah, khitobah, drama, and intensive language programs. Linguistic and non-linguistic barriers are addressed through religiously grounded motivation, a comprehensive oral (syafahi) assessment system, and a pesantren culture that normalizes mistakes, enabling first-year students to reach functional fluency within about six months.

Keywords: maharah kalam; facilitator; teacher's role; language immersion; Islamic boarding school

الملخص

تحلل هذه الدراسة الدور الاستراتيجي للمعلمين باعتبارهم ميسرين في التغلب على العوائق التي تحول دون اكتساب مهارات التحدث باللغة العربية في مدرسة «السلام» الثانوية في توبان، وهي مدرسة إسلامية داخلية تعتمد نموذج «غونتور». يتم استخدام تصميم دراسة حالة نوعية مع جمع البيانات من خلال المقابلات المتعمقة والملاحظة المشاركة والتوثيق، يليها تحليل موضوعي باستخدام تقليص البيانات وعرضها واستخلاص النتائج. تظهر النتائج أن المعلمين يعملون كمصممين لبيئة تواصلية وغامرة من خلال تطبيق طريقة «المباشرة/الأمة» وتنظيم أنشطة محادثة منظمة مثل المحادثة والخطابة والدراما وبرامج اللغة المكثفة. يتم التعامل مع الحواجز اللغوية وغير اللغوية من خلال التحفيز القائم على أساس ديني، ونظام تقييم شفوي شامل، وثقافة البيسانترين التي تعتبر الأخطاء أمراً طبيعياً، مما يمكن طلاب السنة الأولى من الوصول إلى الطلاقة الوظيفية في غضون ستة أشهر تقريباً.

الكلمات المفتاحية: مهارة الكلام، الميسر، دور المعلم، الانغماس اللغوي، المدرسة الدينية، طريقة التدريس المباشر.

INTRODUCTION

The challenges in teaching Arabic speaking skills can generally be divided into two categories: linguistic challenges and non-linguistic challenges (Putra Mandaka et al., 2023). Regarding linguistic challenges, as noted in several previous research findings, students face difficulties with pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammar (Mahbubi, 2024). Research findings in Indonesia from 2019 to 2023 indicate that inappropriate and boring teaching methods are also major factors hindering Arabic speaking instruction (Roziqi et al., 2025). Teachers tend to lack proficiency in employing engaging methods, thereby severely limiting students' opportunities for speaking practice (Rahman et al., n.d.). Regarding non-linguistic issues, it was found that the lack of a conducive *biah lughowiah* (language environment) has a negative impact on the learning process. Additionally, low learning motivation, teacher competence, and inadequate teaching methods also serve as major obstacles in developing students' Arabic speaking skills (Fikri et al., 2021).

Given these various challenges, teachers do not merely serve as instructors in the classroom but also as facilitators who help students actively develop their language skills (Jumao-as, 2025). The teacher's roles are divided into nine categories: as an Educator and Instructor, responsible for conveying knowledge, training skills, designing instruction, conducting lessons, and assessing learning activities; as a Facilitator, responsible for providing motivation, assistance, and guidance both inside and outside the classroom; as a Mentor (Alhasanah & Al-Khawaldeh, 2025), responsible for directing learning methods and identifying students' strengths and weaknesses; as a Supportive Figure, responsible for providing a comfortable and safe learning environment tailored to each student; as a Designer, responsible for developing teaching programs based on the current curriculum; as a Manager, obligated to prepare and implement classroom administration consistently; as an Innovator, responsible for enhancing skills in using teaching strategies and methods; and as an Evaluator, responsible for developing assessment tools to objectively evaluate students' learning outcomes (Wahyuningsih et al., 2024).

Madrasah Aliyah Assalam, a private senior high school with an A accreditation under the auspices of the Assalam Islamic boarding school, implements a policy of using Arabic and English as the daily languages of instruction. Students are accustomed to using both languages in daily interactions through an approach that combines theoretical grammar instruction with direct language practice within the boarding school environment. This learning model aims to improve fluency, particularly in Arabic, so that students can master the language comprehensively in a conducive atmosphere grounded in the values of the boarding school (Yarsela et al., 2021).

Research on the teaching of speaking skills in Arabic at Madrasah Aliyah Assalam is of great importance. First, there is a gap between the ideal expectations regarding students' speaking abilities and the reality they face, as many students still struggle to speak Arabic fluently (Taufiqurrahman & Hasaniyah, 2024). Second, it is important to gain a deep understanding of the difficulties students face, both from a linguistic perspective such as pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammar and non-linguistic issues like learning motivation, teacher competence, and teaching methods. Third, it is important to document the roles and effective strategies of teachers in helping students improve their speaking skills (Supriadi et al., 2023). This study will contribute to the development of linguistics and Arabic language education while helping to improve teaching methods so that the quality of Islamic education can be enhanced. Given that Arabic is the primary language of Islamic teachings, speaking proficiency is key to students' success in understanding and practicing religious knowledge in a broader context (Fazira et al., 2025). Teachers play a vital role as instructors, mentors, and classroom managers in creating a pleasant and effective learning environment, thereby motivating students to practice speaking (Fadhlanah et al., 2024).

Various previous studies in Indonesia and internationally have addressed the challenges in teaching speaking skills. A study in Medan identified several factors contributing to students' difficulties in speaking Arabic, including a lack of vocabulary (*mufrodah*), diverse educational backgrounds or previous schools, and an unsupportive language environment (Jabat & Taufiq, n.d.). Based on a study in Pasuruan, two main challenges were identified: linguistic factors stemming from the Arabic language itself and the lack of vocabulary mastery, while non-linguistic factors include students' motivation and interest in learning, language day supervision, and environmental factors (Jannah, 2023). Previous research has also focused on the role of teachers in teaching Arabic *kalam* skills; for instance, a study in Kuningan noted that teachers' formal classroom strategies include teaching vocabulary and practicing speaking skills through textbook materials, while non-formal activities consist of language immersion activities, language courts, debates, and language games using Arabic (Asmara & Mustofa, 2024).

The research gap to be addressed is a more comprehensive exploration of the teacher's role in addressing these two categories of issues, including how teachers' strategies, innovative methods, and management of the learning environment can improve students' speaking skills (Juryatinai, 2021). Existing research generally focuses on identifying problems and initial solutions, but lacks a detailed discussion of the implementation of teachers' strategies within the context of madrasahs with their distinctive boarding curriculum and values (Khaerunnisa et al., 2023). The distinction of this study lies in its focus on Madrasah Aliyah

Assalam, which implements a bilingual policy of Arabic and English within a boarding setting, and in directly assessing the role of teachers in integrating theoretical and practical language learning within that environment. This study positions teachers as key figures who manage linguistic and non-linguistic aspects simultaneously, strengthening the connection between the boarding environment and the effectiveness of maharah kalam learning (Muttaqin et al., n.d.).

Based on this background, this study aims to analyze the strategic role of teachers as facilitators in overcoming barriers to learning Arabic speaking skills at Madrasah Aliyah Assalam Tuban. This study is expected to contribute to the development of more effective Arabic language teaching methods, particularly in improving students' speaking skills within a boarding-based educational environment. Thus, graduates of Madrasah Aliyah Assalam will be better prepared to internalize religious knowledge and make positive contributions to society.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative method with a case study design to examine in depth the teaching of Arabic speaking skills at Madrasah Aliyah Assalam. This approach was chosen to provide a rich, holistic picture of students' and teachers' learning experiences, particularly the linguistic and non-linguistic factors influencing Arabic speaking ability, and the research was conducted at Madrasah Aliyah Assalam in January 2026 (Murhadi, 2025). The study involved one Arabic language teacher and four students selected through purposive sampling based on their relevance to the research focus (Maryam et al., 2025). The teacher met three criteria: at least three years of Arabic teaching experience at Madrasah Aliyah Assalam, direct responsibility for maharah kalam instruction, and familiarity with the school's bilingual boarding policy. The four students were chosen to represent contrasting profiles — two with relatively high speaking proficiency and two experiencing persistent difficulties — so that a broader range of linguistic and non-linguistic challenges could be captured (Susanto & Jailani, 2023).

Data were collected through three complementary techniques. First, in-depth semi-structured interviews with the teacher and students explored their experiences, strategies, and obstacles in developing Arabic speaking skills, with each interview conducted individually, recorded with consent, and transcribed for analysis (Ishtiaq, 2019). Second, direct non-participant observations were carried out in five classroom sessions and selected areas of the madrasah environment, with systematic field notes focusing on language use, speaking instruction, and the teacher's facilitative role. Third, relevant documents such as lesson plans, teaching materials, and samples of speaking assessments were gathered to corroborate and contextualise interview and observation data (Sari et al., 2025). The data were analysed using six-step thematic analysis, starting from familiarisation with transcripts, field notes, and documents, followed by systematic coding of meaningful data segments related to the research questions (Qomaruddin, 2024). Codes were then organised into themes that reflected patterns in linguistic aspects (pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar) and non-linguistic aspects (motivation, teacher competence, instructional methods), reviewed and refined for coherence, and finally defined and reported in a narrative linked to the teacher's facilitative role. To ensure trustworthiness, the study applied source and technique triangulation and maintained researcher reflexivity, while ethical principles were upheld through participant confidentiality and written informed consent from the madrasah and all informants (Sari et al., 2025).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In the context of Arabic language learning at Gontor-based Islamic boarding schools such as Madrasah Aliyah (MA) Assalam Tuban, speaking skills plays a crucial role as the culmination of the four basic skills (*istima'*, *qira'ah*, *kitabah*, and *kalam*), which support the development of students' competencies as active and fluent graduates. However, significant challenges arise from the diversity of students' backgrounds, which include graduates of Madrasah Tsanawiyah (MTS), Junior High School (SMP), Madrasah Ibtidaiyah (MI), and Elementary School (SD), often resulting in an imbalance in foundational Arabic language skills. The research objective is to analyze teacher strategies in addressing these challenges based on primary data from in-depth interviews, participatory observation, and madrasah document collection at MA Assalam Tuban.

Findings

The MA Assalam Tuban Islamic boarding school implements a series of routine activities designed to strengthen verbal skills through daily immersive practice. A group *Muhadasah* session is held for 30 minutes every Friday morning, often followed by a short drama session lasting about three minutes or longer, depending on the group's needs, which encourages spontaneous verbal expression among the students. The Friday night sermon serves as a progressive exercise: students in grades 1–3 gather material from books, while grades 4–6 are asked to draft sermons independently, which are then submitted to the language section for correction and structural feedback to improve speaking fluency. The *insya'* activity requires students to write detailed

elaborations on titles provided by the Qismul Lughoh (language section) in a special notebook, integrating speaking skills with oral composition practice during presentations. Additionally, supporting programs such as Islahul Lughoh (pronunciation correction), Mufrodad Jidar (vocabulary memorization), and Les khitobah (public speaking lessons) collectively form an ecosystem of daily kalam practice, as confirmed by student respondents who emphasized the role of these extracurricular activities in fostering natural Arabic language habits.

Arabic teachers at MA Assalam Tuban play a strategic role as facilitators, with the mandatory requirement of mastering the four skills (listening, reading, writing, and speaking); as a result, the school rarely recruits from outside the Assalam alumni to ensure authentic oral proficiency. Core strategies include the direct method and the ummah approach (mother tongue), where teachers encourage students to speak repeatedly without initial grammar pressure — much like a mother who continuously speaks to an infant until a habit is formed. The emphasis is on allowing grammatical errors to foster courage ("speaking up comes first; mistakes don't matter"). Active facilitation begins with basic questions such as the date, day of the week, or news, followed by intensive guidance for struggling students through the AAC program (special Arabic language support), as well as peer-to-peer conversation among classmates to ensure equal participation. Supporting innovations include language competitions such as Arabic-language drama contests, Friday sermons (requiring Arabic with written translations), sarhul mufrodad (object descriptions for speech practice), and comprehensive subject lessons including mutola'ah (reading), tarjmah (translation), language exercises, spelling, and memorization. For mixed-ability classes, strategies are implemented gradually: general instruction first, followed by adapted exercises with reduced difficulty for those struggling, and peer conversations to ensure equal opportunities for practice.

Discussion

Teachers at MA Assalam Tuban play a strategic role as facilitators of immersion learning by creating a comprehensive "Arabic, Arabic, Arabic" ecosystem from the moment students wake up, through interactions with peers, to classroom instruction, by applying the mother tongue method (ummah), in which repetitive practice is prioritized over grammar mastery ("practice makes perfect"), while grammar rules such as nahwu and shorof are taught gradually, thereby fostering natural habits similar to a child learning from their mother. As motivators, teachers connect Arabic language learning with the dimensions of worship, such as prayer, the Quran, and the reward for seeking knowledge, enriched with personal anecdotes and step-by-step explanations that instill the belief that every Muslim has been "capable of speaking Arabic" since the womb. Overcoming obstacles is handled with patience and on an individual basis through repeated guidance, fostering participation through group discussions and competitions, and accommodating diverse backgrounds through intensive programs like AAC and Tahsin Al-Quran, ensuring all students achieve functional language proficiency.

The environment at the MA Assalam Tuban boarding school makes a significant contribution to supporting the role of teachers as facilitators through strict language discipline with Arabic prioritized as the primary language and a series of intensive extracurricular activities such as the weekly Friday conversation sessions (30 minutes followed by a drama performance), insya' (writing and presenting on topics for the language department), and khitobah (speech), which tangibly improve students' fluency. Respondents noted that "the habit of frequently speaking Arabic every day, anywhere and anytime" creates a perception of it being "pleasant, easy, and fluent." The impact is evident in progressive transformation: first-year students who initially struggled with pronunciation and vocabulary developed high self-confidence after six months, reinforced by the absence of insecurity due to the norm of "not being afraid to make mistakes" in this immersive environment.

The main implication of this study underscores the strength of the Gontor model at MA Assalam Tuban, which effectively overcomes barriers to maharah kalam (speaking skills) through comprehensive teacher-led immersion, direct/ummah strategies, and innovative competitions, resulting in students who are functionally fluent despite differences in initial input. However, remaining challenges such as the heterogeneity of students' backgrounds and the lack of exposure to authentic media (Arabic films are still rare) require further attention. Practical recommendations include: (1) standardizing input through a mandatory intensive orientation program for non-MTS students upon enrollment; (2) intensifying audiovisual media by scheduling Arabic-language films and podcasts at least twice a week; (3) increasing the frequency of daily conversation practice; and (4) conducting routine oral exams every quarter, triangulated with competitions and observations, to identify individual challenges early and adjust facilitation strategies.

The results indicate that the role of teachers as facilitators in Arabic language learning is fully consistent with the findings of previous research on the Gontor model and immersion-based learning in modern Islamic boarding schools (Syamsu, n.d.). Teachers function not merely as conveyors of material but as architects of a communicative environment that emphasizes daily repetitive practice through the direct/ummah method, in which grammar is taught incrementally once speaking skills begin to take shape (Ulum, 2020). This approach is consistent with prior studies affirming that Arabic language learning in a boarding setting is more effective when the language is used as a functional communication tool, rather than merely as an object of grammatical study.

Furthermore, the emphasis on religious motivation by linking Arabic language learning to prayer, the Quran, and hadiths serves as an additional dimension that strengthens the students' commitment to learning (Alamin et al., 2025).

Regarding the boarding school environment, the consistent language immersion at MA Assalam Tuban, along with a series of muhadatsah, insya', khitobah, drama, and competitions empirically reinforces the finding that a communicative environment that minimizes the "fear of making mistakes" effectively enhances students' fluency and self-confidence (Irawan, 2021). The transformation of first-year students who initially struggled with pronunciation and vocabulary into confident speakers after approximately six months aligns closely with patterns of language skill development in other modern Islamic boarding schools. In terms of learning strategies, the combination of intensive practice, competitions, intensive programs such as AAC and Tahsin Quran, as well as individual mentoring also reflects convergence with findings that direct methods, communicative activities, and foundational reinforcement are vital for students with diverse backgrounds (Fatmawati, 2021).

The findings of this study reinforce the theories of language immersion and social constructivism in the context of Arabic language learning at Islamic boarding schools, while offering recommendations that are more systematic and actionable than those of previous studies. The emphasis on standardizing input through orientation programs, intensifying audiovisual media, integrating daily muhadatsah into the classroom, and conducting routine oral exam evaluations indicates that the Gontor model remains relevant but needs to be developed to be more responsive to the diversity of backgrounds and the demands of digital media (Syafei, 2025). Thus, this study not only confirms previous findings regarding the advantages of language immersion in Islamic boarding schools but also enriches its application in the context of boarding school-based senior high schools outside the main Gontor campus.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that teachers at MA Assalam Tuban play a strategic facilitative role in overcoming barriers to Arabic speaking skills by integrating a Gontor-style boarding immersion environment with the direct/ummah method that prioritizes speaking courage before grammatical accuracy, reinforced by structured immersive activities such as muhadatsah, khitobah, insya', drama, language competitions, Islahul Lughoh, Mufrodat Jidar, AAC, and Qur'an recitation, enabling first-year students to progress from difficulties in pronunciation and basic vocabulary to functional fluency within about six months. Linguistic barriers (pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar) and non-linguistic barriers (low motivation, heterogeneous backgrounds, and residential status) are addressed through doctrinal religious motivation, comprehensive authentic oral assessment, and a boarding school culture that normalizes mistakes, which is in line with language immersion theory and social constructivism.

Practically, it is recommended that the institution implement a mandatory two-week intensive orientation for new students to standardize basic pronunciation and vocabulary, integrate Arabic audiovisual media at least twice a week, institutionalize daily conversation as a routine class opener under the norm "be brave to speak, mistakes don't matter," and conduct quarterly evaluations using triangulated data from oral tests, competition observations, and teacher assessments to continuously refine instructional strategies. Theoretically, the study proposes the development of a "Religious-Direct Immersion" model that integrates doctrinal motivation (Qur'an and hadith) into language immersion and social constructivism, and suggests further research through longitudinal comparative studies between Gontor and non-Gontor pesantren, mixed-method analyses of religious interventions on motivation, and testing the model's generalizability in state madrasahs and non-religious schools.

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