Global Education Journal
Vol. 3, 2 (May-August, 2025), pp. 919-926
EISSN: 2808-5094, DOI: 10.59525/gej.v3i2.931

Implementation of the Scientific Debate Method to Improve the Speaking Skills of Students in the Arabic Language Education Program at Hasyim Asy'ari University

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ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:

Speaking skills;
Maharah al-kalam;
Scientific debate;
Arabic language learning

Article history:

Received 2025-06-19
Revised 2025-07-17
Accepted 2025-08-16

ABSTRACT

Speaking skills (maharah al-kalam) are a key competency in Arabic language learning, essential not only for daily communication but also for academic contexts such as scientific debates. However, many students in the Arabic Language Education Program (PBA) at Hasyim Asy'ari University face challenges including limited vocabulary, insufficient practice, grammatical errors, and low self-confidence in presenting arguments. This study aimed to describe the implementation of the scientific debate method in teaching speaking skills, identify obstacles encountered, and explore effective improvement strategies. Using a qualitative approach with a descriptive design, the research was conducted with fourth-semester students and a speaking skills lecturer in PBA UNHASY. Data were collected through direct observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation, using observation and interview guides as well as documentation formats. Analysis followed Miles and Huberman's interactive model of data reduction, display, and conclusion drawing, with validity ensured through source and method triangulation. Findings show that the scientific debate method significantly improved students' fluency, accuracy, vocabulary variety, self-confidence, and ability to present logical arguments. Challenges included vocabulary limitations, nervousness, lack of extracurricular practice, and difficulty in quick argument formulation. Effective strategies comprised providing thematic vocabulary lists, repeated practice with varied topics, constructive feedback, and academic-style debate simulations. The study concludes that integrating scientific debates into the curriculum fosters linguistic, cognitive, and affective development, and recommends consistent application supported by structured materials and extended implementation across institutions

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1. INTRODUCTION

Speaking skills (maharah al-kalam) are one of the core competencies in foreign language learning, including Arabic, and are regarded as a crucial indicator of communicative competence. They play an essential role not only in daily interpersonal communication but also in formal academic contexts such as discussions, presentations, and scientific debates(Norlaila, 2023)(Hidayah, 2022) (Hidayat, R., & Khalika, 2019). In the era of globalization, mastery of speaking skills in Arabic has become a key requirement for students in Arabic Language Education Programs, particularly in preparing them for professional and academic engagement across diverse cultural and intellectual domains(Lachkar, 2021),(Annisa & Safii, 2023),(Anwar & Ahyarudin, 2023),(Kamba, 2018).

At Hasyim Asy'ari University, field observations reveal that many students of the Arabic Language Education Program (PBA) still face substantial barriers in achieving fluent, logical, and grammatically accurate spoken Arabic. These obstacles include limited vocabulary, insufficient intensive practice, structural errors in sentence construction, and low self-confidence when expressing arguments in formal forums (Hamidah, Audina, & Mubarak, 2022),(Rahmawati, 2021),(Ikwan, 2019). This situation reflects a gap between the intended learning outcomes set in the curriculum and the actual communicative competence achieved by students.

Scientific debate, as a teaching method, is recognized in applied linguistics as a form of task-based and active-participatory learning that not only enriches vocabulary and grammatical accuracy but also trains critical thinking, argument structuring, and quick responsiveness to counter-arguments (Lytle, 2018). The constructivist learning theory (Kukkola et al., 2023), provides the theoretical underpinning for this approach, viewing knowledge as something built through social interaction and direct experience. In this context, the debate serves as an authentic communicative task requiring the active use of formal Arabic in a structured academic setting.

Previous research in English language teaching has shown that the debate method significantly improves speaking fluency and argumentation skills (Fernandes Arung, 2016). Similarly, in Arabic language education, muhadatsah-based instruction, which emphasizes practical communication, has been found effective in enhancing maharah al-kalam (Nalole, 2018). However, the application of structured scientific debates in Arabic learning at PBA UNHASY remains limited and has not been implemented systematically. This leaves considerable room for pedagogical innovation to bridge the current performance gap.

Therefore, this study seeks to: (1) describe the implementation of the scientific debate method in teaching speaking skills to PBA UNHASY students; (2) identify the obstacles encountered during the process; and (3) propose strategies for improvement. The principal conclusion, as will be shown, is that systematic application of the scientific debate method substantially enhances students' linguistic, cognitive, and affective speaking performance, and should be integrated into the Arabic language curriculum as a sustainable pedagogical strategy.

In light of these gaps, this study positions the scientific debate method as a promising intervention for elevating students' maharah al-kalam to meet both academic standards and real-world communicative demands. By documenting its implementation, identifying obstacles, and proposing targeted strategies for improvement, this research aims to contribute both practical insights for classroom teachers and theoretical contributions to the growing body of literature on active learning in Arabic language education. The findings are expected to demonstrate that systematic, sustained, and context-sensitive integration of debate can serve as a catalyst for transforming speaking instruction in similar educational settings across Indonesia and beyond.

2. METHODS

This study employed a qualitative research approach with a descriptive design, selected to allow an in-depth understanding of the process of implementing the scientific debate method in teaching speaking skills (maharah al-kalam) to students. Qualitative descriptive studies are suitable for exploring

and documenting real-life teaching practices without manipulating the research setting, thereby enabling the researcher to capture both the linguistic and affective aspects of student performance (Kelly & Cordeiro, 2020),(Lewis, 2015).

The research was conducted in the Arabic Language Education Program (Program Studi Pendidikan Bahasa Arab, PBA) at Hasyim Asy'ari University, Tebuireng, Jombang, East Java. The participants comprised one lecturer responsible for the speaking skills course (maharah al-kalam) and fourth-semester students who were actively involved in scientific debate activities. Participant selection was carried out purposively to ensure that those involved had relevant experience with the learning method under investigation (Ridder, Miles, Michael Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014).

The implementation procedure consisted of five key stages: (1) preparation of relevant and thematically connected debate topics; (2) division of students into pro and contra teams; (3) formulation of arguments supported by textual and empirical evidence; (4) execution of the debates under time and role regulations; and (5) provision of structured feedback from the lecturer. The lecturer acted as both a facilitator and an evaluator, monitoring the debate flow and assessing aspects such as fluency, accuracy, vocabulary variety, and argument quality.

The instruments used included: (1) observation guidelines, which outlined indicators such as speaking fluency, grammatical accuracy, vocabulary range, and logical argumentation; (2) interview guidelines containing open-ended questions designed to explore participants' experiences, perceptions, and challenges in using the debate method; and (3) documentation formats for recording supporting evidence such as lesson plans, debate scripts, photographs, and audio-video recordings. These instruments were adapted from established speaking assessment frameworks(Aprianto & Zaini, 2019)(Syaifullah & Izzah, 2019).

Direct observation of classroom activities to capture natural speaking interactions during debates. In-depth interviews with both the lecturer and students to gain insights into perceived benefits, obstacles, and strategies for improvement. Documentation of relevant artifacts including teaching materials, debate recordings, and institutional guidelines. Data were analyzed using Miles and Huberman's interactive model, which involves three concurrent stages: (1) data reduction—selecting, focusing, and simplifying raw data; (2) data display—organizing information in narrative and tabular forms; and (3) conclusion drawing/verification—interpreting patterns, relationships, and implications (Miles et al., 2014). To ensure validity, triangulation was applied both in sources (lecturer, students, documents) and in methods (observation, interview, documentation), thereby enhancing the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings (Patton, 2015).

Ethical Considerations, Prior to data collection, the researcher obtained formal permission from the head of the Arabic Language Education Program at Hasyim Asy'ari University. Participants were informed about the objectives, procedures, and expected contributions of the research, and gave their verbal consent to participate. Confidentiality was maintained by anonymizing student identities in all reports and publications, ensuring that participation was voluntary and free from any form of coercion (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2018).

Research Timeline, The study was conducted over a period of eight weeks during the even semester of the 2024/2025 academic year. The first week was dedicated to preparatory activities, including instrument validation and topic selection. Weeks two to seven involved the actual implementation of the scientific debate method, with one debate session conducted each week. The final week was reserved for follow-up interviews and documentation review, enabling the researcher to consolidate observational and interview data for analysis.

Role of the Researcher, In qualitative descriptive research, the researcher plays a crucial role as the primary instrument of data collection (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In this study, the researcher assumed the role of a non-participant observer during classroom debates, ensuring minimal interference with the natural flow of interaction. However, during interviews, the researcher engaged actively to probe deeper into participants' reflections, clarify ambiguities, and capture nuanced perspectives.

Data Management, All data collected were systematically stored in both digital and physical formats. Observation notes were digitized immediately after each session to prevent data loss. Audio recordings were transcribed verbatim, while video recordings were reviewed to verify the accuracy of transcription and to capture non-verbal communication cues such as gestures, facial expressions, and turn-taking patterns. A coding system was employed to organize data into thematic categories corresponding to the research objectives.

Trustworthiness Strategies, To strengthen the credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability of the study, several measures were taken: Preliminary interpretations were shared with participants to confirm the accuracy of the researcher's understanding. Colleagues within the PBA program reviewed the coding process and emerging themes to reduce potential researcher bias. Contextual details of the research site, participants, and debate activities were provided to allow readers to determine the transferability of findings to other settings.

Summary of Methodological Rationale, The combination of direct observation, in-depth interviews, and document analysis was deliberately chosen to capture the multifaceted nature of speaking skill development within a debate framework. The use of triangulation not only reinforced the credibility of findings but also provided a holistic perspective on how the scientific debate method operates in an authentic Arabic language learning environment. This methodological approach ensures that the results reported in the following section are grounded in rich, contextually embedded data that accurately reflect the lived experiences of both students and lecturers in the PBA UNHASY context.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study address the research objectives stated in the Introduction, namely to (1) describe the implementation of the scientific debate method in teaching speaking skills (maharah al-kalam), (2) identify the challenges encountered, and (3) propose effective improvement strategies. All results are supported by qualitative data obtained from observations, interviews, and documentation, and are discussed with reference to relevant literature.

3.1. Implementation of the Scientific Debate Method

Classroom observations indicated that the scientific debate process followed a structured sequence: Debate topics were aligned with course learning objectives and drawn from authentic academic themes relevant to students' fields. Students were divided into pro and contra groups to ensure balanced perspectives. Each team prepared evidence-based arguments, often consulting Arabic language sources, textbooks, and online references. Debates were conducted under formal rules, including time limits, turn-taking, and rebuttals. The lecturer, acting as facilitator, provided targeted feedback on fluency, vocabulary, grammar accuracy, and argument structure.

Task-Based Language Teaching in Arabic Language Learning is an approach to language instruction that focuses on the use of the language through authentic tasks to achieve real communicative goals, rather than merely learning the forms of the language. Task-Based Language Teaching helps improve communicative competence, classroom engagement, and learning motivation. However, researchers also highlight challenges such as task design, classroom management, and the development of Task-Based Language Teaching materials specifically for the Arabic language.

3.2. Improvement in Speaking Skills

The qualitative analysis revealed notable progress in key performance indicators of speaking skills, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Improvement in Speaking Skills Before and After Debate Implementation

Indicator	Initial Condition	After Implementation
Fluency	Low–Moderate	Moderate–High
Accuracy	Low	Moderate–High
Self-confidence	Low	High
Vocabulary Use	Limited	More varied
Logical Argumentation	Weak	Strong

The data indicate that debate participation enhanced both linguistic competence (fluency, accuracy, vocabulary range) and cognitive-affective skills (argumentation, confidence). These findings are consistent with Fernandes Arung's (2016) study on English learners and Darwati Nalole's (2014) findings on Arabic muhadatsah practice.

3.3. Challenges Encountered

Despite overall improvement, several challenges persisted: Students lacked sufficient lexical resources to express complex ideas. Nervousness hindered performance, particularly during rebuttals. Few opportunities existed for Arabic speaking outside class. Some students struggled to respond quickly to opposing viewpoints. These challenges mirror findings in similar debate-based studies(Al-Amri, 2020).

3.4. Strategies for Improvement

Effective strategies implemented during the study included: Providing thematic vocabulary lists prior to debates. Conducting repeated practice sessions with varied topics. Delivering constructive feedback after each debate. Simulating debates in formats resembling formal academic forums. Such measures correspond with scaffolding techniques in communicative language teaching, which gradually build learner independence (Chun, Smith, & Kern, 2016).

3.5. Discussion

The results support the original hypothesis that structured scientific debate can significantly enhance maharah al-kalam. The improvement in linguistic performance aligns with task-based learning theory, which emphasizes real-world communicative tasks to foster language development (Ellis, 2003). Furthermore, the gains in self-confidence reflect the affective filter hypothesis (Krashen, 1982), which posits that reduced anxiety facilitates language acquisition. Comparatively, these findings are consistent with Fernandes Arung (2016) in English debate contexts and extend them to Arabic academic speaking. However, unlike in English debate settings, the Arabic case presents the additional challenge of formal linguistic register (fusha), requiring mastery of grammar and vocabulary not used in colloquial contexts (Ikhwan, 2019). The implications are both theoretical—reinforcing the value of debate as an integrative skill-building tool in Arabic pedagogy—and practical—suggesting that regular, curriculum-integrated debate activities can bridge the gap between classroom learning and real academic communication. Future research should explore longitudinal impacts of sustained debate practice, involving multi-institutional samples to enhance generalizability.

3.6. Integration of Quantitative and Qualitative Evidence

While the study primarily used a qualitative approach, some quantitative tendencies emerged from the coded observation sheets and self-assessment checklists completed by students at the

beginning and end of the intervention period. These data reinforced the qualitative impressions, showing that: The average rating for fluency increased from 2.1 to 3.8 on a 5-point scale. Accuracy in grammatical structures improved from 1.9 to 3.5. Self-confidence ratings rose from 2.0 to 4.2, reflecting notable affective gains. Lexical variety scores moved from "limited" to "moderate-to-high" in most cases. These quantitative patterns corroborate the narrative data from interviews, in which students reported feeling "lebih lancar" (more fluent), "lebih percaya diri" (more confident), and "lebih siap secara materi" (better prepared with content) during debates compared to other speaking tasks.

3.7. Pedagogical Reflections from the Lecturer

The participating lecturer highlighted several key observations: Students displayed higher levels of engagement during debates than in traditional lecture-based speaking classes. The format encouraged students to learn from one another's arguments and linguistic choices, creating a collaborative learning environment. Debates forced students to think critically about content, anticipate counter-arguments, and refine their points, integrating language learning with intellectual development. These reflections align with the view that debate is not merely a linguistic activity but also a cognitive apprenticeship (Lave & Wenger, 1991), in which learners participate in socially situated learning tasks.

3.8. Observed Classroom Dynamics

During debates, classroom interaction patterns shifted from teacher-centered to student-centered. Turn-taking was largely self-regulated within teams, and rebuttals became progressively more dynamic as sessions advanced. Non-verbal communication—such as gestures for emphasis and confident posture—also improved, suggesting a broader communicative competence development beyond purely linguistic measures.

3.9. Link to Broader Theoretical Frameworks

The observed improvements can be explained within several theoretical paradigms: Constructivism (Vygotsky, 1978): Knowledge construction occurred through social negotiation and scaffolded interaction. Task-Based Language Teaching (Ellis, 2003): Debates served as authentic, goal-oriented tasks requiring integrated language skills. Affective Filter Hypothesis (Krashen, 1982): Gradual exposure to structured speaking tasks lowered anxiety, allowing for greater language output. Communicative Competence Framework (Canale & Swain, 1980): Gains were noted not only in grammatical competence but also in discourse, sociolinguistic, and strategic competence.

3.10. Implications for Curriculum Design

The findings indicate that the scientific debate method can serve as a powerful capstone activity in speaking skill courses. Incorporating debates into the curriculum could: Enhance real-time argumentation skills in fusha. Provide an authentic context for academic vocabulary usage. Foster intellectual agility alongside linguistic proficiency. However, for debates to be most effective, they should be systematically scaffolded with vocabulary lists, model arguments, and gradual increases in difficulty level. Furthermore, providing opportunities for extracurricular Arabic speaking clubs could address the persistent issue of limited practice outside the classroom.

4. CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the implementation of the scientific debate method in the Arabic Language Education Program (Program Studi Pendidikan Bahasa Arab, PBA) at Hasyim Asy'ari University has proven effective in enhancing students' speaking skills (maharah al-kalam). The research objectives were fully addressed:

1. Implementation: The method was carried out through systematic stages, including topic preparation, division of pro and contra teams, structured argument development, debate execution, and feedback provision. The lecturer functioned as both facilitator and evaluator, ensuring that the debates promoted active participation and linguistic accuracy.
2. Challenges: The primary difficulties encountered included limited vocabulary, nervousness during public speaking, and difficulty in formulating arguments quickly.
3. Improvement Strategies: Solutions such as supplying thematic vocabulary lists, conducting repeated debates on varied topics, and providing constructive feedback proved effective in overcoming these challenges.

The study's findings contribute to Arabic language pedagogy by demonstrating that structured debate fosters both linguistic competence (fluency, accuracy, lexical range) and higher-order cognitive skills (critical thinking, logical argumentation). These results align with communicative and task-based learning frameworks, reinforcing the value of debate as an integrative pedagogical tool.

However, the scope of the study was limited to one institution and a relatively short implementation period. For broader applicability, future research should:

1. Involve a larger, multi-institutional sample of Arabic language learners.
2. Extend the duration of debate-based instruction to assess long-term language development.
3. Explore the integration of digital platforms (e.g., online debates) to expand practice opportunities beyond the classroom.

By embedding scientific debates consistently in the curriculum, supported by structured materials such as argumentation frameworks and thematic vocabulary banks, institutions can better equip students for academic communication in Arabic at both national and international levels.

Acknowledgments

The author expresses sincere gratitude to the lecturer and students of the Arabic Language Education Program at Hasyim Asy'ari University for their cooperation and active participation during data collection. Appreciation is also extended to the university administration for granting permission to conduct the research and providing logistical support.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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