

Innovative Strategies for Developing the Arabic Language Debate Community at University

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Abstract

Speaking skill, or *mahārah al-kalām*, is a skill that requires more than just linguistic proficiency; it also requires a certain setting and amount of practice. In addition to directly enhancing students' Arabic speaking abilities, the debate technique can unintentionally foster a language environment that has a significant impact on foreign language learners. The purpose of this study is to evaluate how well the debate approach works for enhancing Arabic speaking abilities. This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach and is conducted in the field. The note-taking method is the data collection methodology, and the intralingual equivalent method is used to evaluate the collected data. Overall proficiency in speaking Arabic has increased significantly by 61.5% as a result of this study. There was an 84% rise in the pronunciation component when speaking skills were taken into consideration. The percentage improvement was 87% in the vocabulary area. The percentage rise in PBA students' debate in the comprehension area was 75%, the percentage improvement in the fluency area was 82%, and the percentage gain in grammar accuracy was 74%. Pronunciation and fluency had the greatest average scores across the five categories in the PBA student debate community's post-test evaluation.

Keywords: *Speaking skills, Debating Method, Arabic, Mentoring*

Introduction

Arabic language students, both in the fields of education and literature, are required to master the four linguistic *mahārah* skills: listening (*al-istimā*), speaking (*al-kalām*), reading (*al-qirāah*), and writing (*al-kitābah*). Mastery of the speaking skill, *mahārah al-kalām*, is one of the essential productive skills that is crucial for language proficiency, as mastering *mahārah al-kalām* represents the ultimate goal of the core language skills (Syamaun, 2016).

Mahārah al-kalām is considered by many to be a skill that is difficult and time-consuming to learn. Speaking ability, also known as *mahārah al-kalām*, often becomes a daunting challenge for students and is quite difficult to master. Arabic language students face difficulties in speaking Arabic. This is because Arabic is a foreign language that is not used in their daily lives. (Nasir et al., 2021).

Students consider *mahārah al-kalām* difficult because it involves many aspects. Those who want to learn to speak Arabic must possess the following abilities: good pronunciation, mastery of Arabic vocabulary and styles, grammar, speaking fluency, and coherence. To develop Arabic language habits, learners must actively practice and use the language as often as possible. Additionally, active language use greatly influences language practice, making a language-rich environment crucial for the formation of language habits.

Students at the university level have already studied Arabic language skills, including vocabulary, style, and grammar. However, a supportive linguistic environment (*bi'ah lughawiyah*) that fosters the practice of speaking in Arabic is still lacking; students only speak Arabic during speaking classes. As a result, there are few opportunities to enhance and improve their abilities. Students also will not succeed if they study alone, as speaking a foreign language requires practice and a speaking partner. A language environment (*bi'ah lughawiyah*) and the use of Arabic in learning greatly impact the success of students. (Nulaila et al., 2022).

Many studies have been conducted regarding the issues surrounding *mahārah al-kalām* and have found solutions. Some examples include the implementation of mixed methods, such as dialogue (*al-hiwar*), pattern practice (*tathbiq al-namudzaj*), and oral composition (*al-tarkib al-syafawi*) (Syamaun, 2016); developing *Bi'ah al-arabiyah* (Nulaila et al., 2022), ; innovative method (Hilmi, 2021), debate method (Maulana & Ibrahim, 2022) and active debate method in lectures (Ninoersy & Akmal, 2020).

Many people choose the debate method because it can significantly improve skills, encourage fast and critical thinking, and create an instant language atmosphere. The debate method can also improve students' language skills, change perspectives from monoperspective to multiperspective, and can even change students' unreasonable conclusions to be more analytical (Nasir et al., 2021). It turns out that the debate method also influences self-efficacy, which influences decision-making and independent learning outside the classroom. (Mufidah & Nuryani, 2019). According to (Widagada et al., 2020), The debate method is not only used to teach language but has also been studied to improve critical thinking in PPkn lessons.

The debate method to improve Arabic speaking ability actually lies in the language practice and language atmosphere. The language atmosphere and practice will be very visible in language groups or language debate communities because it can be a place where students who have the same interest in learning to speak Arabic gather. To improve students' *mahārah kalam* ability, regular practice can help them. Therefore, in language learning, *mahārah al-kalām* must receive sufficient attention (Nuha, 2019).

Considering that students face some problems in *mahārah al-kalām*, the researcher wants to know how effective the Arabic debate community is in solving those problems and for the purpose of improving the speaking ability of PBA study program students in semesters 3 and 5. The formation of the community is based on the idea that it will be a forum that can revive *bi'ah lughawiyah* and gather students who are interested in improving their language skills. The test results showing an increase in *mahārah kalam* distinguish it from similar devotions that use the Arabic debate approach as an approach.

METHOD

Since the researcher obtained data in the field, this community service is similar to field-based service. The data was collected from student proficiency tests and questionnaire distribution. This service employs a qualitative approach with descriptive data presentation. Therefore, this service is descriptive qualitative in nature, incorporating a natural background into the issues, using humans as the instrument of service, applying quantitative methods, analyzing data inductively, and utilizing both basic and descriptive theories (J.Moleong, 2014).

According to (Mahsun, 2005), The "Simak Libat Catat" method is a data collection technique where the researcher listens and records what the subjects say. In addition to conducting observations, the researcher also distributes pre-test and post-test questionnaires.

The Padan intralingual method — which connects linguistic elements within one language or across several languages—is then used to analyze the data that has been collected. (Mahsun, 2005). The researcher also distributed pre-test and post-test questionnaires in addition to conducting observations.

Padan intralingual method— which connects linguistic elements within one language or across multiple languages—was then used to analyze the data that had been collected which connects linguistic elements within one language or across multiple languages—was then used to analyze the collected data (Mahsun, 2005). Since there are 12 samples from PBA FIT IAIN Surakarta students in semesters 3 and 5, the researcher employed non-parametric data. This sample size is considered sufficient because the formation and training of an Arabic debate community require a small number of members. Having too many members would reduce the effectiveness and focus of training for each individual.

The researcher conducted this assessment to determine the effectiveness of the debate method based on evaluations conducted before and after the activities. The researcher used specific criteria to assess speaking ability, which consisted of five aspects: pronunciation, vocabulary/expressions, grammar, fluency, and comprehension.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The community service took place over thirty days, starting on August 27, 2021, and ending on September 25, 2021. There were eight activities aimed at improving the Arabic-speaking abilities of students. These activities included:

1. Consulting with the coordinator of the Arabic Language Education study program about the formation of an Arabic debate community for PBA students;
2. Creating guides, manuals, and reference books for Arabic debate;
3. Reaching out to students who wished to improve their Arabic speaking skills;
4. Establishing the Arabic debate community, distributing questionnaires, and conducting pre-test assessments;
5. Conducting training and practice sessions for Arabic debate, including: a) Arabic Debate Technique Training in collaboration with the Arabic Language and Literature study program, b) Engaging in Arabic debate practice sessions, and c) Evaluating the Arabic debate activities and assessing the students' Arabic language abilities (post-test).

Two tools were used to gather information about the students' Arabic language proficiency: Questionnaires, and Pre-test assessments.

Tabel 1. Pre-test

Penilaian Pre test Komunitas Debat Mahasiswa PBA di IAIN Surakarta						
Skills	Pengucapan	Kosakata/Uslub	Gramatika	Kefasihan	Komperhensi	Skor
rata-rata	11,2	11,6	9,1	11,3	9,3	52,4

The questionnaire contained questions about the students' personal information, educational background, and whether they had ever participated in an Arabic debate activity. The pre-test questionnaire consisted of ten questions regarding the Arabic speaking abilities of the debate community members. These ten questions assessed the following:

1. Pronunciation ability,

2. Mastery of Arabic vocabulary and expressions (**uslub**),
3. Grammar,
4. Fluency in speaking, and
5. Comprehension.

Based on the questionnaire distribution, it was concluded that 75% of the 15 PBA students in semesters 3-5 had never participated in an Arabic debate community. Therefore, the students needed and were highly interested in joining and participating in the PBA student debate community organized by the author. The pre-test analysis revealed weaknesses in several aspects supporting Arabic speaking skills, such as *maharah kalam* (speaking ability), *mufrodat* (vocabulary), and *uslub* (phrases or clauses).

In the aspect of *maharah kalam* proficiency, the percentage of students reached only 41.7%. While in the aspect of *mufrodat* (vocabulary), some students had already mastered Arabic vocabulary, their ability to support *maharah kalam* (speaking ability) was still lacking, with a score of 54.3%. In the aspect of *uslub*, 75% of the students were still unable to construct and master Arabic phrases and clauses. Nevertheless, 66.7% of the students who participated in the PBA debate community were able to speak Arabic for 5 minutes without reading from a text.

Based on the pre-test data, the highest score among the PBA debate community students at IAIN Surakarta was 68, and the lowest score was 43. Among the five pre-test evaluation aspects, vocabulary had the highest average compared to the other aspects. This is because many of the students who joined the debate community at IAIN were graduates of Islamic boarding schools, where they had acquired a significant amount of Arabic vocabulary. However, their repertoire of *uslub* (phrases and clauses) remained limited, especially concerning general themes beyond what they had studied in their coursework. The second and third highest averages were found in the aspects of **fluency** and **pronunciation**. **Comprehension** and **grammar** had lower averages in the pre-test evaluation, as most of the students in the debate community still struggled with constructing words into proper Arabic sentences.

Post-Training Questionnaire Analysis

Based on the analysis of the post-test questionnaire distribution for the PBA student debate community at IAIN Surakarta, there was an improvement across all aspects, including **maharah kalam**, **mufrodat**, and **uslub**. In this case, 61.5% of the students in the debate community were able to improve their **maharah kalam** skills. This percentage showed a 19.8% increase compared to the previous pre-test questionnaire distribution.

Additionally, 46.2% of the students in the debate community were able to recall Arabic **mufrodat** (vocabulary). In the **uslub** aspect, 53.8% of the students were able to construct and master phrases and clauses in Arabic. According to the results of the post-training questionnaire, students also felt that the debate method was effective in enhancing their **maharah kalam** skills.

Tabel 2. Post-test

Penilaian Post-test Komunitas Debat Mahasiswa PBA di IAIN Surakarta							
NO	NAMA	Pengucapan	Kosakata Uslub	gramatika	Kefasihan	Komprehensi	Skor
1.	Ahmad Zakariyya	12	12	11	13	10	61
2.	Erlien Purti Larasati	12	14	10	14	11	65
3.	Fahmi Syahrul Romadhon	14	17	14	16	14	76
4.	Hasma Rafina Khoirunnisa	11	12	11	9	10	56
5.	Hanna Khoirul Mustasyaroh	13	13	12	13	11	64
6.	Muhammad Abdul Akhsan	15	14	13	17	14	75
7.	Muhamad Misbakhul Munir	17	16	15	18	16	81
8.	Nirmala Luthfia Hamaz	11	9	10	12	12	54
9.	Rafiy aulia abdillah	12	10	11	12	13	61
10.	Samrotul Mawaddah	16	14	13	10	13	68
11.	Syafira Rachma Salsabila	13	12	12	11	10	58
12.	Yusuf Nurul Ikhsan	15	16	15	16	15	76
Skor rata-rata		13,4	13,3	12,3	13,4	12,4	66,3

Based on the post-test data, the PBA student debate community at IAIN Surakarta experienced a significant improvement. This was evident from the highest score reaching 82, and the lowest score being 54. In the pre-test, the highest score was only 68 and the lowest was 43. Additionally, the average scores in each aspect of debate assessment also increased. For example, in the pronunciation aspect, the percentage increase before and after the PBA student debate community activities was 0.84%. In the vocabulary aspect, the increase reached 0.87%. For grammar, the percentage increase was 0.74%, while in fluency, the percentage improvement reached 0.84%. In comprehension, the percentage increase in the PBA students' debate skills was 0.75%.

In the post-test assessment of the PBA student debate community, the highest average across the five aspects was pronunciation and fluency, each scoring 13.4. This improvement was attributed to regular practice sessions conducted twice a week, with each session lasting 120 minutes.

To further verify the effectiveness of the debate method, the researcher compared the Arabic proficiency of students who had participated in the Arabic debate community with those who had not by administering a brief proficiency test.

Penilaian Maharah kalam mahasiswa non Komunitas							
NO	NAMA	Pengucapan	Kosakata Uslub	gramatika	Kefasihan	Komprehensi	Skor
1.	Ainun Zariah	9	7	8	9	8	41
2.	Lilis Wijayanti	11	9	7	10	7	44
3.	Syihab Al Zuhri	12	10	9	11	9	51
Rata - rata		10.7	8.7	8	10	8	45.3

CONCLUSION

The results of this study indicate that the debate method practiced in the Arabic Debate Community of PBA students at IAIN Surakarta is quite effective in improving Arabic speaking skills. This is supported by the positive responses from students who participated in the debate training within the Arabic Debate Community, particularly in terms of its usefulness and student satisfaction. The results of the Arabic language proficiency tests before and after the training also demonstrated significant improvements in the students' abilities. Additionally, a comparative test between students who did not participate in the training and those who did revealed a noticeable difference. It can be concluded that the debate method is effective in enhancing students' Arabic speaking skills and successfully fosters a **bi'ah lughawiyah** (linguistic environment) within their surroundings.

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