Strategies to Improve Arabic Speaking Skills for Islamic Boarding School Students

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**ABSTRACT**

This study aimed to describe the strategies used to improve Arabic speaking skills for students at Islamic boarding school al-Ishlah Lamongan, East Java, Indonesia. This research used descriptive-qualitative research, with the type of case study, with male students as research subjects. Data collection techniques used were observation, interviews, and documentation. The results of this study were the strategies used to improve Arabic speaking skills for al-Ishlah Islamic boarding school students. The strategies are: applying of direct methods in the teaching process in diniyah school and teaching in formal institutions (Madrasah Aliyah) on Arabic language materials and Islamic materials, giving vocabularies and conversation practices carried out every day after Isha' and shubuh prayers, practicing Arabic speech twice a week, and creating an Arabic language environment to provide opportunities for students to practice speaking and communicate with Arabic.

**Keyword**
- Improving, Speaking Skill, Strategy
INTRODUCTION

In Islamic circles, Arabic is not only considered as a mean of communication, more than that Arabic is believed by Muslims as the language of religion, in the sense of a language for studying and understanding Islam in depth, as well as the language of Muslims unity. This belief is based on the reality which shows that the Qur’an as the main source of Islamic teachings was revealed in Arabic and there has never been other languages. Likewise, al-hadith and various other Islamic treasures, such as interpretation (tafsir), fiqh, and others, are also in Arabic. So, Arabic is the main tool for understanding the Qur’an, as-Sunnah and various books written in Arabic (Hijriyah, 2018).

Arabic language has an important position and it made Muslims wherever they are always pay special attention to Arabic by teaching it to their generations, whether it is done in madrasas, or in Islamic boarding schools (pesantren) and in other course institutions. The teaching of Arabic is intended to encourage, guide, develop and foster abilities and positive attitudes towards the Arabic language (Akla, 2017), so that they are able to master the four language skills, there are listening, speaking, reading and writing.

Speaking skill is one of the most important language skills to be mastered by students. This is because speaking skill is the skill of producing a stream of articulation sound systems that aim to convey desires, needs, feelings, and desires to others (Rimah, 20120). It is active language skills to convey ideas, thoughts and opinions orally (Sa’diyah, 2018). With speaking skills students can convey various kinds of information (facts, events, ideas, responses, and so on). Convey desires, needs, feelings, and desires to others (Rahmani, 2015).

According to Syaiful (Bukhori, 2021) one of the important components in the success of learning a language is that learners are able to communicate, share information with each other, express themselves through thoughts and ideas so that there is reciprocity from the other person using the target language. The existence of teaching speaking skills both applied at the beginner, intermediate, and advanced levels, aims to improve the ability to speak well and be able to communicate with others using Arabic speaking skills and expression correctly (Shidqi & Mudinillah, 2021), as well as being able to express ideas and thoughts through communication, both orally and in writing (Bukhori, 2021). With speaking skills, we first fulfill the need to communicate with the community in which we live (Harianto, 2020).

Seeing the importance of speaking skills, teaching speaking skills should get serious attention in teaching Arabic in various Islamic boarding schools, madrasas, schools, and other institutions. Teaching speaking skills must get a sufficient portion for students to develop their skills in speaking Arabic. But in reality, until now the teaching of Arabic speaking skills has not run optimally, so
that students have spent quite a long time (since elementary school to university), but they do not have good speaking skills.

The lack of success in teaching Arabic speaking skills is caused by many factors, one of them is the teaching strategy used by teachers is still conventional and still tends to be teacher centered. Teaching has not provided many opportunities for students to practice speaking Arabic to express and practice their language skills. In line, Darwati Nalole said that one of the weaknesses and shortcomings of the old system of language teaching methods in Indonesia is the lack of intensive oral exercises, so that very few students are able to express their thoughts and feelings verbally (Nalole, 2018). As a result, students in teaching tend to be passive, not creative, and do not have the will, courage and his motivation in applying Arabic (Dzikrul et al., 2021). In fact, there is a feeling of fear in students and the assumption that Arabic is difficult.

Seeing the problems of teaching speaking skills, the teacher is required being active, creative and innovative in teaching strategies that can increase students' enthusiasm in learning Arabic simultaneously and continuously (Asy’ari, 2019). Teachers must be able to choose and apply teaching strategies that are relevant to the objectives and teaching materials, strategies that provide opportunities for students to practice a lot in Arabic, because speaking ability can only be achieved through some practice of what is passively heard in listening practice. Without intensive oral practice, it is very difficult for students to achieve perfect mastery of Arabic (Bariyah & Muassomah, 2019).

The accuracy and ability of the teacher (teacher’s skill) in using teaching strategies is the main key for the success of the teaching that is being carried out. According to Suja'i, the teacher's accuracy in choosing teaching strategies (approaches and methods) will greatly affect students' perceptions of the level of ease or difficulty of language, which in the next stage can motivate them to improve learning and foreign language skills, so that it can bring and influence the results of teaching target (Suja'i, 2008).

Al-Ishlah Islamic Boarding School is one of the modern institution views that the development of Arabic language skills for students, especially in speaking skills is one of the most important programs and must be taken seriously. Because with these abilities, students will be able to communicate well, be able to convey messages in the form of ideas, intentions and thoughts to others by using spoken language. For that, from the very beginning, teachers always seek to answer these teaching problems by conducting creatively designed Arabic teaching, both programs and teaching strategies used. Based on the researchers’ observations, it seems that the effort has obtained satisfactory results. The graduates of the boarding school have excellent skills, especially in speaking Arabic. In addition, the students were also able to achieve various achievements in various Arabic
competitions they participated in. Based on the thoughts above, to clarify the focus of this research, the researcher wanted to describe the strategies used by the al-Ishlah Islamic boarding school to improve speaking skills for students.

METHOD

This research was conducted using descriptive-qualitative research, with the type of case study. This method is used to reveal information about the strategies used to improve students' speaking skills. The subjects of this study were the male students of the al-Ishlah Islamic boarding school.

The location of this research is al-Ishlah Islamic boarding school Lamongan. The choice of research location was based on 3 reasons, namely: (a) Al-Ishlah Islamic Boarding School has a strong commitment in the field of Arabic language teaching and development, and always makes innovations in developing its teaching creatively and independently, (b) Al-Ishlah Islamic Boarding School recognized as one of the Islamic boarding schools that has very good quality, including Arabic, as evidenced by the various achievements in the Arabic language achieved by students, both at regional and national levels, (c) al-Ishlah Islamic boarding school applies bi‘ah lughowyiah (language environment) for the students.

Data collection in this study was carried out by researchers as a key instrument. Data collection used were observing teaching process, conducting interviews with caregivers, teachers, students, and documentation. Then the data analyzed using the interactive model developed by Miles and Huberman which is divided into three stages, namely the reduction stage, the data display stage, and the verification and conclusion stages.

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

Teaching Arabic at the al-Ishlah Islamic boarding school aimed to equip students with Arabic language skills, both actively and passively. This is as stated by Agus Salim that the purpose of teaching Arabic is not only to equip children with the ability to read Arabic books, but also to provide children with the ability to express Arabic as means of communication.

To achieve this goal, Arabic teaching strategy in al-Ishlah Islamic boarding schools is carried out and developed creatively and innovatively in a teaching model that can accommodate the achievement of the expected teaching goals. This is as expressed by KH. M. Dawam Salih that the Arabic language teaching system at this boarding school follows strategy developed at KMI Gontor. The
use of the Gontor system, as stated by Agus Salim, is based on the experience of the caregiver (KH Dawan Sholeh) while studying at Gontor and that experience became the inspiration for developing Arabic language teaching in this Islamic boarding school.

Operationally, teaching strategy is implemented in various forms of activities oriented to provide students with the ability and mastery of Arabic language skills, especially in speaking skills. Based on the results of research, the teaching strategies used to improve speaking skills at the al-Ishlah Islamic boarding school include; the use of direct methods in teaching, giving vocabulary and conversation practice, the practice of Arabic speech, and the creation of an Arabic environment.

**Using Direct Method in Teaching**

In order to achieve the objectives of teaching Arabic, Islamic boarding school has established a direct method as one of the methods that must be used by teachers in the teaching process. KH. Dawam and Agus Salim said all teaching activities were carried out using the direct method, that method used to present language subject matter, especially Arabic, which the teachers directly use Arabic as the language of instruction, without using student’s language in teaching progress. If there words are difficult for students to understand, the teachers can interpret them by using props, demonstrating, describing and so on (Izzin, 2007). The reasons for using this method, continued KH Dawam, are (1) learning a language is not just to be memorized and understood, but to be practiced. Now, with this method, it is hoped students who have acquired Arabic vocabulary can immediately practice it in their daily activities, (2) In teaching Arabic, the most important thing for teachers is to provide opportunities directly for students to practice speaking Arabic.

In practice, the use of this direct method, continued KH Dawan, likes a mother teaches Javanese to her child without translation. So, the way seems in Gontor, the teacher doesn't translate, but immediately says Arabic, for example ما هذا ؟ هذا كرسي هذا كتاب etc. So, the children immediately imitated it and were asked with Arabic. So, they speak Arabic directly every day. So this method used with the assumption that the process of learning Arabic is the same as learning the mother tongue, namely by using it directly and intensively in communication (Nababan, in Hermawan, 2011).

Similarly, Agus Salim said that using this direct method, when the teachers explain one word, they explain it in Arabic without translating into the local language (mother language) is as generally done in salaf boarding school. After delivering the material, the teachers interacted with the students and asked them in Arabic, and the students answer it in Arabic. Thus, the students are forced to
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show their abilities in Arabic, because this program is students’ oriented, not only knowing the basics of knowledge, but they are also able to use Arabic directly.

The direct method used in teaching in madrasah diniyah as curricular in Islamic boarding schools, done every day at 07.00 - 09.00 with the material being taught is Durus al-Lughoh. Then after studying for six months at the boarding school, students are given additional material with different materials, such as khulashoh nurul yaqin, fiqh al-wadhih, nahwu al-wadhih, and so on. In addition, this direct method is also used in teaching in formal institutions (Madrasah Aliyah) on Arabic and Islamic subjects, such as the Qur’an and Hadith, Fiqh, Akidah Akhlak, Islamic history and culture (SKI). The use of this direct method is also supported by the use of Arabic books developed in accordance with the topics of discussion in the curriculum.

The use of the direct method and the Arabic language materials book is positive step to improve students' speaking skills and needs to be developed in other madrasas. With this method, students have more opportunities to learn Arabic, especially in speaking skills. According to Hamadah (Fahrurrozi, 2014) that the use of direct language in foreign language teaching will be effective for achieving language proficiency. This is very important, considering the learning hours (duration) for Arabic subject in madrasas are very minimal and do not fully support students to master Arabic, especially to practice speaking Arabic.

In addition, the use of direct method in teaching Arabic also creates a learning atmosphere that provides opportunities for students to use Arabic directly and intensively in daily communication. Students are not only positioned as objects in teaching, but also as subjects. Students are required to always be active in practicing and using Arabic as a language of communication in the teaching process and in all students’ activities at the boarding school. So, the creation of such a learning atmosphere is a must, and even becomes one of the success factors for teaching Arabic. According to Krashen, teachers must create an atmosphere and learning environment that brings students to acquire the language being taught (Krashen, 2009).

The aim of implementing direct method in teaching Arabic is that students are able to communicate using Arabic, they are learning like native language (Siregar & Nurhakim, 2018). According to (Izzin, 2007), the direct method as used in al-Ishlah Islamic boarding school seen from its effectiveness has the following advantages are (1)Students are motivated to be able taught by their teachers, especially using visual display and various kinds of fun media; (2)Students easily understand daily languages taught by the teachers. Usually, the first teachers teach simple words and sentences that students can understand and know it, for example (pen, pencil, bench, table, etc.); (3)This method uses many media/props, so it can attract students’ interest and make easy to learn;
(4) Students gain direct and practical experience, even though at first the spoken sentence has been understood and not understood before; (5) The students’ speech apparatus (tongue) becomes trained to pronounce the phrases they often hear.

**Giving Vocabulary and Conversation Practice**

The provision of vocabulary is carried out every day after the fajr and isya’ prayers in each room under the guidance of seniors and teachers. The vocabulary themes provided are adapted to daily needs, for example about: school (given vocabulary related to school), field (given vocabulary related to activities in the field), and so on. The provision of this *mufradat* is intended for students to have sufficient vocabulary mastery, because mastery vocabularies become one of the keys to mastering the Arabic language, without it, nothing to express (Zubaidillah & Hasan, 2019). Adequate mastering skills can support and determine a person’s ability to master four language skills as listening skills, speaking skills, reading skills, and writing skills. In addition, the large number of vocabularies also supports students’ confidence in speaking Arabic.

Vocabulary is the main element of language that must be mastered by foreign language learners in order to acquire communication skills in that language (Hasyim, 2016). This vocabulary is used in spoken and written language, and is one of the tools to develop one's Arabic language skills (Mawardi et al., 2022). Language, said Suja’i, depends on how much vocabulary you have mastered and memorized. The more vocabulary memorized, the better and easier it will be for someone to speak and communicate with others (Suja’i, 2008). Thus, it is clear that mastery language skills must be supported by mastering adequate, productive and actual vocabularies.

After giving vocabulary, students practice it directly in the form of a conversation with their friends for 30 minutes. This conversation activity aims to encourage students to speak Arabic, as well as train them to communicate in Arabic. According to Iswanto (2017) Arabic as a communication tool, so learning Arabic focused on how students practice a lot and are skilled in Arabic speaking. This conversation activity is usually carried out in a loud voice so that they do not feel ashamed to speak Arabic. So, by practicing this conversation, then giving vocabulary which is not only to be memorized but also applied in conversation activities. In addition, with this activity students are able to improve their vocabularies, they can also practice speaking Arabic. Moreover, this activity becomes positive habit for them to practice Arabic as daily communication.

According to Horasan-Doğan & Cephe (2020), this conversation practice between teachers and students must hold in every condition. Because there are many benefits such as building character, finding identity, forming a teacher / student self. Both of them must increase their ability to communicate each other, to take listeners’ attention of their conversation, to have a good acting to use their body language, and also be independent to create language

**Arabic speech practice**
Arabic speech practice is carried out twice a week in each class. The students take turns delivering Arabic speech according to a predetermined schedule. Before practicing Arabic speech, every student who get turn performing speech is required to compile an Arabic speech text and will be corrected by his teacher or supervisor after delivering it in front of his friends.

Providing opportunities for students to practice Arabic speech twice a week can be a chance for students to practice the language continuously, foster motivation, courage, and confidence, as well as provide opportunities and encourage them to always practice using Arabic. Besides, practicing Arabic speech it is also an opportunity for students to practice communicating their ideas in front of their audiences or listeners. This is very important, because students are able to perform in front of the audience requires special skills that are not acquired quickly, but through practice and habituation, students will acquire special skills in Arabic speech.

**Creation of the Arabic Language Environment**

The Islamic boarding school environment as Arabic-speaking environment is valuable and productive to develop language skills, especially Arabic speaking skills (Junaidi & Hidayah, 2018). For that, Al-Ishlah Islamic Boarding School as an institution that makes Arabic language as communication tool gives very serious attention to creation of language environment. This is as stated by Agus Salim, because the purpose of teaching Arabic in this boarding school is to use Arabic language as daily communication, the teaching is not only done in class, but must be practiced in daily activities. This Islamic boarding school designed to be an environment where Arabic or English used as daily communication in it. All students, he continued, must speak Arabic as much as possible, even with mistakes, the most important thing is practicing to speak Arabic.

In addition, to support the language environment in al-Ishlah Islamic boarding school, there are at least three steps taken, namely: First, presenting people as models, such as caregivers, principals, teachers, and coaches in the boarding school environment. All of them must be able to give examples and encourage students to communicate in Arabic. Second, establishing language division within organizational structure of the boarding school, that is running the program, arranging conversation schedules, giving new vocabulary including on the bulletin board, holding language competitions among rooms, giving punishment to students who do not speak Arabic, such as collecting mufradat, memorizing mufradat, memorizing Qur’an, doing certain tasks such as cleaning and so on. Third, applying strict rules so that students used to speak Arabic.

Efforts to create language environment are necessity, because the language environment is the first facility (Awwaludin et al., 2022) for students to improve their abilities and skills in actively speaking Arabic (Wahyuningsih & Fauzi, 2020) and practice it as daily communication. The aim of creation of Arabic language environment are: 1). Familiarize students in using Arabic communicatively through the practice of conversations, discussions, seminars, lectures, and expression through writing, 2). strengthen Arabic language learned in the classroom, 3) foster creativity and Arabic language activities that are
integrated between theory and practice in pleasant informal atmosphere (Hidayat, 2012).

Functionally, language environment has a very big role in improving students' language skills. A language environment is optimally organized and programmed in line with teaching objectives can help students succeed in achieving their goals (Astiti & Sarbaini, 2020). According to Wow (Jihadiy, Muhammad Ajyad & Yusuf, 2022). The implications of directed, guided, and conducive language environment lead to communication activities that function as a support for students' language skills (Hasan et al., 2019).

Sinni (1993) said that language teaching will progress if it is trained continuously and practiced in communicating between teachers and students, as well as between students and their friends in the language environment. Moreover, Abdul Hamid (Hidayat, 2012) emphasizes that the language environment as the source of the stimulus becomes dominant and very important in helping the second language teaching process, because the process of language acquisition is habituation.

According to Iskandarwassid & Suhendar (2008) that a person's success in learning a language can be optimal if the language environment gets serious attention. Although teaching is well designed and the provision of grammatical knowledge is carried out intensively, it is not necessary that students skilled in speaking well if there is no input data available in the form of good in use of the language they are learning. Then in the psycholinguistics perspective, it stated that the ability of a child to speak is obtained from the environment through imitation and developed naturally. If the language environment does not exist at all, then there is no automatic effort for language acquisition, so to acquire language and be skilled in using it, a language environment is needed.

The language environment used to support the improvement of students' language skills consists of two types of environment, namely the artificial environment (al-bi'ah al-ishnaiyah) and the natural environment (al-bi'ah al-thobi'iyah). An artificial environment (al-bi'ah al-ishnaiyah) is an environment that is intentionally created to help students learn language. What is meant by the artificial environment here is the classroom environment because it is intentionally created and has special characteristics that are programmed (Iskandarwassid & Suhendar, 2008).

Meanwhile, the natural environment (al-bi'ah alt-thabi'iyah) is the environment outside the classroom, or what is often referred to as the actual language environment. The term environment outside the classroom in this context is the presence of a language environment of language they learn, both in the form of a native speaker community and community deliberately created in language teaching programs (Iskandarwassid & Suhendar, 2008).

Both environments have the same important role to support improving students' language proficiency (Hasan et al., 2019). Therefore, students are expected to gain addition, reinforcement and habituation in Arabic, so that students' ability and mastery of Arabic has increased significantly. Suja'i (2008) stated that language learning will be easier if it occurs reinforcement, continuous
repetition, so that it can form a habit. Because the principle of learning a language is a habit (*al-lughoh hiya al-'adah*).

According to Tulviste & Tamm (2021), early language skills predict cognitive development of second language learners as well as their academic and life achievements. The language is in which the language learner lives. The quantity and quality of speech exposed to them is important in facilitating students’ language development. In recent studies, conversations and language environments that involve two-way conversations with fellow language users plays key role here, particularly in the development of language skills. The language environment turns out to have more developed brain-building powers than the words they get outside the environment. The number of conversations in the language environment has been proven to improve language skills of learners, especially speaking skills.

**CONCLUSIONS**

Based on the description and results of the analysis above, it was found that the strategies used to improve Arabic speaking skills for al-Ishlah Islamic boarding school students include: using of direct methods in the teaching process in madrasah diniyah which is carried out curricular in Islamic boarding schools and teaching in formal institutions (Madrasah Aliyah) on Arabic language materials and Islamic materials, giving mufradat and practicing conversations carried out every day after Isha' and Fajr prayers, practicing Arabic speech twice a week, and creating an Arabic-speaking environment to provide opportunities for students to practice Arabic and get used to communicating with Arabic. Furthermore, the researchers hopes that this research will continue to be carried out by the next researchers.

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