The Direct Method in Improving Arabic Conversation Skills at MTs

Su'udin Aziz
Universitas Nahdlatul Ulama Sunan Giri, Bojonegoro, Indonesia

Correspodence Email/WA: Email: suudin.aziz@unugiri.ac.id

Abstract: The limited speaking ability of students in learning Arabic at MTs Islahiyah Kalitidu indicates the need for an effective instructional method that supports oral communication skills. This study aims to analyze the implementation of the Direct Method in enhancing students' Arabic speaking proficiency, as well as to identify students' responses and the challenges encountered during the learning process. A qualitative descriptive approach was employed, with data gathered through classroom observations, semi-structured interviews with teachers and students, and documentation analysis. The results show that the Direct Method was applied by maximizing the use of Arabic as the primary medium of communication, minimizing translation, and encouraging vocabulary application in contextual situations. Repetition, role-playing, questioning techniques, and visual media were used to stimulate active student participation. Students demonstrated positive responses, supported by improvements in fluency, pronunciation, and confidence in speaking Arabic. Peer interaction also contributed to a more cooperative learning atmosphere. Despite these positive developments, several challenges were identified, including students' limited vocabulary mastery, differences in proficiency levels, large class sizes, and limited learning facilities. However, adaptive strategies such as contextual learning, scaffolding techniques, and visual reinforcement helped mitigate these constraints. The study concludes that the Direct Method is effective in improving Arabic speaking skills when supported by competent teaching practices and adequate learning resources. Strengthening teacher professional development, integrating technology, and applying differentiated instruction are recommended to optimize the implementation of the Direct Method in Arabic language education..
Keywords: Direct Method, Arabic Speaking Skills, Communicative Approach,

INTRODUCTION

Language learning has always been a central component of education, as it serves as a primary medium for communication and cultural exchange(Kramsch, 2014; Samira & Karfa, 2024). Arabic, in particular, holds significant importance in Islamic education since it is not only a means of communication but also the language of the Qur'an and classical Islamic texts(Ekawati, 2019; Sekarsari et al., 2024). In many Islamic schools (Madrasah Tsanawiyah or MTs), Arabic is taught as both a religious and academic subject to help students understand Islamic sources more effectively(Musliadi et al., 2024; Retnawati et al., 2020). However, learning Arabic is not limited to grammar and reading skills; the ability to speak fluently is equally essential in ensuring that students can actively engage in oral communication. The demand for effective Arabic speaking

skills is increasing due to the need for students to participate in religious discussions, competitions, and international collaboration. Thus, focusing on methods that prioritize communication has become a central concern in Arabic language education.

Traditional approaches to Arabic instruction often emphasize grammar rules, translation, and rote memorization rather than practical speaking skills(Mardani & Syafei, 2025; Wahba, 2022). As a result, students may gain passive knowledge of the language but struggle to express themselves in daily conversations. This issue has led to a gap between students' theoretical knowledge and their practical ability to use Arabic effectively(Ilhami & Robbani, 2021; Ridho & Haq, 2024). The global trend in language education has shifted toward communicative competence, where learners are encouraged to develop fluency and confidence in real-life communication. Within this framework, various teaching methods have been applied, yet not all are equally effective in enhancing students' speaking abilities(Musliadi et al., 2024; Newton & Nation, 2020; Zega, 2025). Among these, the Direct Method has emerged as a promising approach, as it prioritizes the use of the target language in classroom communication. For Arabic education at MTs, this method presents a unique opportunity to align with both linguistic and religious learning objectives.

The Direct Method, introduced in the late 19th century, emphasizes teaching a foreign language directly without using the students' native language for explanation or translation. Instead, meaning is conveyed through demonstration, visual aids, repetition, and active conversation. This method encourages students to think in the target language, thereby reducing dependency on their first language and enhancing fluency(Galante & Thomson, 2017; Toro et al., 2019). In the context of Arabic education at MTs, where students are often exposed to religious texts but lack opportunities for oral practice, the Direct Method provides a valuable pedagogical alternative. By engaging students in continuous dialogue, teachers can foster natural speaking habits and improve listening comprehension simultaneously. The emphasis on real-life communication also aligns with the broader goal of preparing students to interact confidently within both academic and social contexts.

Despite the importance of speaking skills, many Arabic language classrooms at MTs still rely heavily on conventional grammar-translation methods. These approaches often lead to

students memorizing vocabulary and grammatical rules without developing the ability to use them in conversations. As a result, many students feel anxious or hesitant to speak Arabic, fearing mistakes or lack of fluency. Teachers, too, may find it challenging to shift from text-based teaching to interactive communication-based learning. Limited exposure to Arabic-speaking environments outside the classroom further exacerbates the problem, making it difficult for students to practice the language authentically. Thus, the lack of emphasis on oral skills remains a persistent challenge in Arabic instruction at the secondary education level.

Research conducted by Rivai et al. states that guidance using the direct method significantly improves students' Arabic speaking skills in terms of fluency, pronunciation, and self-confidence. The implementation of the direct method makes the learning process more lively, interactive, and relevant to students' daily communication needs. The involvement of community assets such as support from parents and teachers plays a role in making Arabic language learning more comprehensive and sustainable (Rivai et al., 2024). The research results show that the muhadatsah teaching materials for first-grade students at MTs Darul Qur'an Kubang have not been optimally aligned with the students' life context, and their application is still limited. Teachers still often rely on explanations in Indonesian or local languages, causing students to face difficulties in speaking and requiring enrichment of Arabic vocabulary. To improve learning effectiveness, it is recommended that muhadatsah teaching materials be developed contextually with the use of interactive teaching methods and Arabic as the main medium (Saputra, 2024).

Another critical issue is the gap between curriculum expectations and actual classroom practices. While the curriculum in many MTs highlights the importance of communicative skills, in practice, lessons often focus more on reading comprehension and grammar drills. Students may perform well in written examinations yet fail to engage in simple Arabic conversations. This discrepancy undermines the effectiveness of Arabic education, as students graduate without achieving the intended communicative competence. Teachers may also lack sufficient training or resources to implement more interactive teaching methods. Consequently, there is a pressing need for strategies that bridge this gap and ensure that Arabic language learning outcomes correspond with curricular goals.

Several studies have emphasized the effectiveness of the Direct Method in improving speaking skills in foreign language education. Researchers have found that when students are immersed in the target language, they develop better pronunciation, listening comprehension, and conversational fluency. In the context of Arabic learning, previous research suggests that communicative and immersive approaches help students overcome hesitation and build confidence in using the language. The Direct Method also aligns with natural language acquisition theories, which stress the importance of context-based learning over abstract grammar instruction. Studies conducted in Islamic schools in various countries have indicated positive outcomes when the Direct Method is applied to Arabic speaking classes. These findings highlight the potential of this method as a suitable approach for MTs.

Moreover, the Direct Method has been reported to increase students' motivation and engagement in language learning. By actively participating in conversations, students feel a greater sense of achievement compared to passive memorization of rules. In Arabic education, this method provides meaningful exposure to vocabulary and expressions used in real-life contexts. Teachers using the Direct Method can also create interactive classroom environments that encourage collaborative learning and peer communication. Previous research further shows that the method enhances long-term retention of vocabulary and structures, as students learn them through repeated use rather than isolated drills. These strengths make the Direct Method particularly relevant for addressing the challenges faced in Arabic instruction at MTs.

Although previous research has highlighted the benefits of the Direct Method, there is still limited exploration of its application in the specific context of Arabic learning at MTs in Indonesia. Many studies focus on English or other foreign languages, leaving a gap in understanding how the Direct Method functions in Arabic-speaking classrooms at the secondary Islamic school level. Furthermore, while some schools have experimented with communicative approaches, systematic research on their effectiveness remains scarce. This study seeks to fill this gap by examining the practical implementation of the Direct Method in improving Arabic speaking skills at MTs. The novelty lies in contextualizing the method within Islamic education, where Arabic is not just a foreign language but also a medium of religious knowledge.

The purpose of this study is to investigate how the Direct Method can be effectively applied to enhance students' Arabic speaking skills at MTs. Specifically, the research aims to analyze the strategies used by teachers, the responses of students, and the overall impact of the method on communication competence. By focusing on real classroom practices, this study seeks to provide practical insights for Arabic educators in Islamic schools. The findings are expected to contribute to the development of more effective Arabic teaching methods that prioritize both fluency and comprehension. Ultimately, the study aims to support the broader goal of equipping students with the linguistic tools necessary for academic, religious, and social interactions in Arabic.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative research design with a descriptive approach to explore the implementation of the Direct Method in improving Arabic speaking skills(Setiawan, 2018). The qualitative approach was chosen because it allows the researcher to gain an in-depth understanding of the teaching and learning process as it naturally occurs in the classroom. Rather than focusing on numerical data, this study emphasizes the meanings, experiences, and interactions between teachers and students. Through this design, the research sought to capture authentic insights regarding the challenges and opportunities faced in applying the Direct Method within Arabic language instruction.

The research was conducted at MTs Islahiyah Kalitidu, an Islamic secondary school that places particular emphasis on the teaching of Arabic as part of its curriculum. The participants consisted of one Arabic language teacher who actively implemented the Direct Method and 25 students from the eighth grade class. These participants were selected purposively, as they were directly involved in Arabic speaking activities and represented the typical classroom environment of the school. The choice of MTs Islahiyah Kalitidu was also based on its reputation for prioritizing religious education while simultaneously developing students' communication skills.

To gather data, three main techniques were used: classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, and documentation analysis. Classroom observations were carried out to record the teacher's strategies in implementing the Direct Method and students' responses during speaking activities. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the Arabic teacher and a selection of students to gain deeper perspectives on the effectiveness of the method and the challenges

encountered. Documentation analysis included reviewing lesson plans, teaching materials, and students' speaking task results to provide supporting evidence for the observations and interviews. These combined methods ensured data triangulation and enhanced the validity of the findings(Gunawan, 2023).

The collected data were analyzed using Miles and Huberman's interactive model of qualitative data analysis, which consists of three stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. In the data reduction stage, the researcher organized and coded the raw data obtained from observations, interviews, and documents. In the data display stage, the findings were presented in the form of descriptive narratives and thematic categorization to highlight recurring patterns and insights. Finally, in the conclusion drawing stage, the researcher interpreted the findings to answer the research questions and draw meaningful implications for Arabic language teaching(Trisna Rukhmana, 2022).

To ensure the credibility and trustworthiness of the research, several validation strategies were employed. Triangulation of data sources and collection techniques was used to cross-check information from observations, interviews, and documentation. Member checking was conducted by confirming key findings with the teacher and students involved to verify accuracy. Prolonged engagement in the field also contributed to building trust with participants and capturing authentic classroom dynamics. Additionally, the researcher maintained detailed field notes and reflexive journals to reduce bias and enhance transparency throughout the research process.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

1. Implementation of the Direct Method in Arabic Speaking Classes

The implementation of the Direct Method in Arabic speaking classes at MTs Islahiyah Kalitidu was observed to be highly structured yet flexible in practice. The teacher consistently used Arabic as the medium of instruction, emphasizing everyday vocabulary, simple sentences, and practical expressions relevant to students' lives. Instead of focusing on grammar explanation, the teacher prioritized oral practice by repeating words and phrases and encouraging students to respond in Arabic. This practice reflected the core principle of the Direct Method, which is to immerse learners in the target language environment, creating a natural learning situation similar to how one acquires their first language.

The classroom dynamics also showed active interaction between the teacher and students. Rather than delivering lectures, the teacher employed questioning techniques, role-playing, and situational dialogues to engage students in real communication. For example, when teaching greetings, the teacher used real-life scenarios where students had to practice introducing themselves and responding politely in Arabic. This practical approach allowed students to connect language learning with their daily experiences, fostering a deeper sense of relevance. The emphasis on speaking as the primary skill encouraged students to use Arabic actively instead of relying solely on memorization.

The use of visual aids and gestures further reinforced the effectiveness of the Direct Method. Pictures, flashcards, and objects were frequently used to clarify meanings without translating into Indonesian. This non-translation approach made students rely on contextual understanding, which enhanced their cognitive engagement with the target language. Students appeared to gradually improve their confidence in expressing themselves, even though their vocabulary and grammar mastery were still limited. The interactive and immersive environment created by the teacher encouraged active participation and reduced students' anxiety in speaking Arabic.

Another key aspect observed was the use of repetition and reinforcement. The teacher frequently asked students to repeat sentences and phrases until pronunciation and intonation became more accurate. Corrections were given directly and gently during conversations, ensuring that students learned from mistakes without feeling discouraged. The teacher also introduced new vocabulary by embedding it into communicative tasks, so students could immediately use it in context. This method allowed gradual accumulation of vocabulary and speaking fluency.

Despite its effectiveness, the implementation of the Direct Method required significant effort and creativity from the teacher. Designing lessons that were communicative, engaging, and contextually relevant demanded preparation and linguistic competence. The teacher had to adjust their strategies to suit the students' proficiency levels while maintaining the immersive nature of the method. Nevertheless, the findings suggest that the Direct Method

provided a strong foundation for enhancing Arabic speaking skills among students at MTs Islahiyah Kalitidu.

In summary, the implementation of the Direct Method created a more engaging and communicative classroom atmosphere. Students were encouraged to actively participate and apply their language knowledge in practical ways. While challenges existed, particularly in maintaining immersion and student motivation, the method proved to be effective in improving students' oral proficiency and fostering confidence in Arabic communication.

2. **Students' Responses and Progress in Speaking Skills**

Students' responses to the Direct Method were generally positive, as they expressed enthusiasm for the interactive learning process. Many students appreciated the opportunity to practice speaking Arabic directly, as it gave them a sense of accomplishment when they could communicate basic ideas. They valued the use of real-life dialogues, role-play, and question-answer sessions, which made learning feel more practical compared to traditional grammar-based approaches. Their motivation was boosted when they realized they could use Arabic to greet friends, introduce themselves, and describe simple objects in the classroom.

The study also revealed significant progress in students' speaking abilities. Initially, many students struggled with limited vocabulary, pronunciation errors, and shyness in using Arabic. However, after consistent exposure to the Direct Method, students demonstrated improved fluency, better pronunciation, and increased confidence. They began to construct simple sentences without hesitation and gradually participated more actively in classroom discussions. This indicated that immersive exposure and consistent oral practice helped accelerate their learning process.

Peer interaction played a vital role in shaping students' progress. Pair work and group dialogues encouraged students to practice Arabic with each other in a supportive environment. This peer-to-peer communication allowed students to experiment with language, correct one another, and share learning strategies. The classroom thus became a collaborative space where students could develop both linguistic and social skills simultaneously. The teacher's encouragement further motivated students to keep trying despite making mistakes.

Nevertheless, not all students responded equally. A few students with weaker backgrounds in Arabic struggled to keep up with the immersion approach, often feeling overwhelmed when forced to use the language exclusively. These students required additional support, such as vocabulary lists or simplified dialogues, to gradually build their confidence. The teacher's role in differentiating instruction was crucial in ensuring that no student was left behind in the learning process.

Interestingly, the use of the Direct Method also had an impact on students' attitudes toward Arabic as a subject. Many students who initially considered Arabic difficult and uninteresting began to view it as an enjoyable challenge. The communicative nature of the lessons made Arabic feel less abstract and more practical, enhancing their appreciation of the language. This attitudinal shift was a key factor in sustaining their motivation for continued learning.

In conclusion, students' responses demonstrated that the Direct Method had a positive impact on both their linguistic development and attitudes toward learning Arabic. While variations in learning outcomes existed, the overall trend showed significant improvement in speaking skills, confidence, and motivation. The findings highlight the importance of interactive, immersive approaches in engaging students and fostering communicative competence.

3. Challenges in Applying the Direct Method

Although the Direct Method proved beneficial, its implementation at MTs Islahiyah Kalitidu was not without challenges. One of the main obstacles was the limited vocabulary of students, which often hindered their ability to fully engage in conversations. Since the Direct Method minimizes translation into the mother tongue, students sometimes felt frustrated when they could not understand or express themselves. This challenge required the teacher to carefully select vocabulary and contexts that were both practical and manageable for students.

Another challenge was related to students' varying proficiency levels. While some students quickly adapted to the immersive environment, others struggled to follow along, leading to uneven participation in class. This disparity required the teacher to apply differentiated instruction, offering additional support for struggling students while keeping

advanced learners engaged. Balancing these needs was demanding and required ongoing adjustment.

The lack of supporting facilities also posed difficulties. For example, the availability of teaching aids such as multimedia resources, projectors, or language labs was limited. As a result, the teacher relied heavily on basic materials like flashcards, pictures, and role-play. While effective, these resources sometimes restricted the variety of teaching methods that could be applied, making it harder to sustain students' interest over time.

Classroom size and time allocation further complicated the application of the Direct Method. With relatively large class sizes and limited lesson hours per week, it was challenging to provide sufficient individual speaking practice for all students. Some students received less opportunity to practice orally, which slowed their progress compared to their peers. This limitation highlights the structural constraints of implementing communicative approaches in formal school settings.

Teachers also faced personal challenges, including the need for advanced Arabic proficiency and strong classroom management skills. Implementing the Direct Method required them to maintain communication in Arabic consistently, which demanded both fluency and creativity. Not all teachers might have the confidence or training to use this method effectively, indicating the importance of professional development.

In conclusion, the challenges faced in applying the Direct Method illustrate the complexities of implementing immersive approaches in real classrooms. While the method offers significant benefits, overcoming obstacles such as limited vocabulary, resource constraints, and time allocation is essential to maximize its effectiveness. Addressing these challenges requires both institutional support and teacher innovation.

4. **Pedagogical Implications and Future Directions**

The application of the Direct Method at MTs Islahiyah Kalitidu provides valuable pedagogical implications for Arabic language education in similar contexts. First, it demonstrates that immersion in the target language can significantly enhance students' communicative competence, even in environments where Arabic is not spoken outside the classroom. Teachers can draw from this example to incorporate more interactive, speaking-

focused activities in their lessons, shifting the emphasis from grammar-heavy instruction to practical communication.

Second, the findings suggest that contextual learning is key to sustaining student engagement. By connecting vocabulary and expressions to real-life situations, students find learning more meaningful and applicable. This principle can guide future curriculum design, ensuring that Arabic instruction moves beyond rote memorization toward active use of the language. Incorporating cultural elements and authentic materials can further enrich the learning experience.

Third, the role of teacher training emerges as a crucial factor in the success of the Direct Method. Teachers must possess not only linguistic competence but also the pedagogical skills to manage immersive classrooms effectively. Continuous professional development programs focusing on communicative teaching methods, classroom management, and material development are essential to empower teachers in this regard. Such initiatives can help standardize the effective use of the Direct Method across institutions.

Fourth, the study highlights the importance of balancing immersion with support for weaker students. While the Direct Method minimizes translation, scaffolding techniques such as visual aids, simplified dialogues, and peer mentoring are necessary to prevent frustration and exclusion. Future research can explore strategies for tailoring the method to diverse learner needs while maintaining its immersive principles.

Fifth, institutional support plays a vital role in sustaining innovative teaching methods. Schools must provide adequate resources, smaller class sizes, and sufficient instructional time to ensure that students can benefit fully from communicative approaches. Investment in teaching aids, language labs, and technology can significantly enhance the implementation of the Direct Method, making lessons more dynamic and effective.

In conclusion, the pedagogical implications of this study extend beyond MTs Islahiyah Kalitidu, offering insights for Arabic language education in general. The Direct Method holds great potential for improving speaking skills, but its success depends on teacher competence, contextual relevance, student support, and institutional commitment. Future directions may involve integrating technology, expanding teacher training, and adapting the method to suit

diverse learning contexts, thereby ensuring the sustainability of communicative Arabic instruction.

CONCLUSION

the application of the Direct Method at MTs Islahiyah Kalitidu has significantly contributed to improving students' Arabic speaking skills through immersive learning, interactive communication, and contextual practice. The findings reveal that students showed progress in fluency, pronunciation, and confidence, supported by the teacher's role as a facilitator and role model. Although challenges such as limited vocabulary, unequal proficiency levels, and lack of facilities were encountered, adaptive strategies such as repetition, role-play, and the use of visual aids helped sustain the learning process. The pedagogical implications highlight the importance of teacher competence, institutional support, and contextual learning in maximizing the effectiveness of the Direct Method. Therefore, the research emphasizes that the success of communicative Arabic instruction depends not only on teaching methodology but also on collaboration between teachers, schools, and students in creating an engaging and supportive learning environment.

REFERENCE

Ekawati, D. (2019). Urgency of Arabic in Islamic education. *International Journal of Arabic Language Teaching*, *1*(02), 209–222.

Galante, A., & Thomson, R. I. (2017). The effectiveness of drama as an instructional approach for the development of second language oral fluency, comprehensibility, and accentedness. *Tesol Quarterly*, *51*(1), 115–142.

Gunawan, I. (2023). *Metode Penelitian Kualitatif , Teori dan praktik*. Bumi Aksara.

Ilhami, Z., & Robbani, A. S. (2021). Arabic language learning in a comprehensive approach (theoretical study). *EKSPOSE: Jurnal Penelitian Hukum Dan Pendidikan*, *20*(2), 1240–1249.

Kramsch, C. (2014). Language and culture in second language learning. In *The Routledge handbook of language and culture* (pp. 403–416). Routledge.

Mardani, D., & Syafei, I. (2025). Traditional Methods in Arabic Language Instruction: A Critical Review of Classical Pedagogies. *International Journal of Islamic Educational Research*, *2*(3), 1–6.

Musliadi, M., Triyono, S., & Jamilah, J. (2024). Enhancing speaking agility: unveiling Indonesian lecturers' hybrid teaching experiences in oral communication skills. *Language Learning in Higher Education*, *14*(2), 401–433.

Newton, J. M., & Nation, I. S. P. (2020). *Teaching ESL/EFL listening and speaking*. Routledge.

Retnawati, H., Rahmatullah, S., Djidu, H., Apino, E., & others. (2020). Has Arabic Language Learning Been Successfully Implemented?. *International Journal of Instruction*, *13*(4), 715–730.

Ridho, A., & Haq, H. (2024). Constructivist Approaches in Arabic Language Teaching: An Analysis of the Relationship with Modern Linguistic Theories. *IJAS: International Journal of Arabic Studies*, *1*(1 September), 63–76.

Rivai, A., Hamdi, N. F., Hidayat, R., Ritonga, U. S., Zega, R. F., Habib, M., & Arrasyid, M. (2024). Arabic Language Learning Assistance Using Direct Methods at MTs Al--Barokah Jaharun B Galang. *Al-Arkhabiil: Jurnal Pengabdian Masyarakat*, *4*(3), 38–44.

Samira, E.-A., & Karfa, A. E. L. (2024). The The Impact of Cultural Contact on Exchange Students' Foreign Language Development. *International Journal of Language and Literary Studies*, *6*(2), 523–532.

Saputra, M. R. (2024). This study aims to find out how to prepare muhadtsah teaching materials in first grade Arabic learning at MTS at Darul Qur'an Kubang, Kampar Riau Regency, and how to apply good muhadtsah teaching materials in first grade Arabic learning at MTS at Darul Qu. *International Journal of Islamic Educational Research*, *1*(3), 72–85.

Sekarsari, A., Abdillah, A., Aulia, A. E. P., & Mawada, A. (2024). The Role of Arabic in Islamic Education. *Quality: Journal of Education, Arabic And Islamic Studies*, *2*(3), 176–182.

Setiawan, A. A. dan J. (2018). *Metodologi Penelitian Kualitatif*. jejak.

Toro, V., Camacho-Minuche, G., Pinza-Tapia, E., & Paredes, F. (2019). The Use of the Communicative Language Teaching Approach to Improve Students' Oral Skills. *English Language Teaching*, *12*(1), 110–118.

Trisna Rukhmana, danial D. dan A. R. A. (2022). *Metode Penelitian Kualitatif*. CV. Rey Media Grafika.

Wahba, K. M. (2022). A historical overview of Arabic grammar instruction. In *Teaching and Learning Arabic Grammar* (pp. 3–36). Routledge.

Zega, Y. S. (2025). Effective strategies for enhancing English speaking competence among learners in English education study programs. *Journal of Education, Social & Communication Studies*, *2*(2), 88–100.