

**ISSUES IN THE TEACHING OF KALAM TO UNIVERSITY STUDENTS:
A DESCRIPTIVE ANALYSIS OF TEACHING PRACTICES, LINGUISTIC
BARRIERS AND SELF-CONFIDENCE.****Sri Zulfida¹, Nuruddin², Muhammad Kamal³**Universitas Negeri Jakarta¹²³Email: sri.zulfida@mhs.unj.ac.id¹, nuruddin.unj@unj.ac.id², m.kamal.ah@unj.ac.id³**ABSTRACT**

This study analyses problems associated with learning maharah kalam, or Arabic speaking skills, from the perspectives of university students who had taken or were taking an Arabic speaking course. It presents a secondary, problem-focused analysis of a broader needs-analysis dataset comprising 108 students from several Indonesian higher education institutions. A convergent mixed-methods survey with a dominant quantitative strand was used. Nine five-point Likert items were analyzed using descriptive statistics, while relevant responses to five open-ended questions were examined using a hybrid deductive-inductive framework in NVivo. Although 75.0% of respondents reported sufficient speaking opportunities and 78.7% reported frequent speaking activities, only 41.7% agreed that students actively used Arabic during instruction. Four interrelated problem domains were identified. Linguistic barriers included limited active vocabulary, difficulty constructing spoken sentences, and pronunciation concerns. Psychological barriers involved low confidence, fear of mistakes, embarrassment, and hesitation. Reported pedagogical issues included the continued prominence of lecturer explanation and memorized dialogue, uneven participation, and limited spontaneous interaction. Environmental limitations involved restricted access to speaking partners, weak Arabic-use routines, and limited sustained exposure beyond assigned classroom activities. The findings suggest that the problems are multidimensional and mutually reinforcing within the surveyed contexts. They support a stronger emphasis on communicative, contextualized, and interaction-rich instruction. Communicative and experiential practices may help students move from rehearsed production towards more sustained and spontaneous Arabic use, although their effectiveness requires further empirical testing.

Keywords: *Arabic speaking; learning problems; linguistic barriers; speaking confidence; higher education; mixed-methods survey*

INTRODUCTION

Arabic-speaking competence requires learners to retrieve vocabulary, organize sentences, monitor pronunciation, and respond to an interlocutor under real-time pressure (Jong, 2023). These processes make speaking more than the oral display of grammatical knowledge. Learners may recognize words and structures in written materials yet remain unable to mobilize them fluently during interaction (Benlaghrissi & Ouahidi, 2024). This issue is especially relevant in university Arabic programs, where students often enter with

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unequal learning histories and have limited opportunities to use Arabic outside formal courses. Research on Arabic as an additional language has therefore treated vocabulary, language form, instructional strategy, and meaningful use as connected concerns (S. Almelhes, 2024; S. A. Almelhes & Alsaiani, 2024; Yusuf et al., 2023).

Linguistic barriers are the most immediate constraints on spontaneous production. A limited active vocabulary slows lexical retrieval and narrows what students can express. Difficulty constructing spoken sentences increases planning time, while uncertainty about pronunciation can interrupt production. Vocabulary development is particularly relevant to speaking when words are encountered in context and repeatedly retrieved for communicative purposes rather than retained only as isolated equivalents (Abd Rahim & Abdul Pisal, 2024; Alkurtehe & Dzakirra, 2018).

Psychological conditions influence whether learners use the opportunities available to them. Students who anticipate negative evaluation may avoid volunteering, shorten responses, or depend on a script. Speaking confidence changes with topic familiarity, preparation time, group size, and the behavior of lecturers and peers. Research on classroom interaction and willingness to communicate shows that anxiety and confidence influence the uptake of existing opportunities rather than simply determining general motivation to learn (Khajavy & Vaziri, 2025; Wang, 2017).

Pedagogical problems arise when explanation, accuracy, work, and memorization remain disconnected from purposeful interaction (Martin-alguacil et al., 2024). Model dialogues can provide useful formulaic expressions, especially for less experienced learners. Their value becomes limited when students are not required to adapt the language to a new purpose, topic, or interlocutor. A course may contain regular dialogue, presentation, or question-and-answer activities while participation remains concentrated among confident students or restricted to lecturer-nominated turns. Communicative and task-based perspectives, therefore, emphasize meaningful outcomes, interaction, and movement from supported to increasingly independent performance (Bryfonski et al., 2024; East, 2017; Jackson & Burch, 2017).

Environmental limitations concern the social availability of Arabic. Students need interlocutors, recurring routines, and situations in which Arabic has an immediate purpose. When use is confined to assessed turns, students receive little repetition and few opportunities to negotiate meaning. Sociocultural accounts describe language learning as participation mediated by peers, lecturers, and cultural resources (Alharbi, 2023; Y. Li & Jeong, 2020; Panhwar et al., 2016). Research on Arabic learning inside and outside the classroom similarly shows that language strategies and opportunities extend beyond formal lessons (Arifin et al., 2020).

Previous research has examined Arabic teaching challenges, lecturer strategies, technology, and pedagogical reconstruction (Huda et al., 2023; Mazlan et al., 2021; A. W. Ritonga, 2021; M. Ritonga et al., 2024). These studies establish the importance of linguistic resources, classroom methods, and opportunities for use. Less attention has been given to how students experience linguistic, psychological, pedagogical, and environmental constraints as interrelated problems within the same instructional context. Analyzing the four domains together can clarify why providing speaking activities does not always result in sustained, distributed, and independent Arabic use.

The contribution of this study, therefore, lies in an integrated problem analysis rather than in presenting vocabulary limitation, anxiety, or memorization as isolated new findings. It examines how the four domains help explain uneven participation in university Arabic-speaking instruction. The analysis remains grounded in students'

reports and does not claim to describe lecturer behavior independently of those perceptions.

This article presents a secondary, problem-focused analysis of a broader needs-analysis dataset. It does not evaluate a teaching model or measure speaking proficiency. It addresses four questions: (1) What linguistic barriers do students report in Arabic-speaking instruction? (2) What psychological barriers affect their participation? (3) What pedagogical issues characterize their reported learning experience? (4) What environmental limitations constrain sustained Arabic use?

METHOD

Design and analytical scope

The study used a convergent mixed-methods survey with a dominant quantitative strand. The study collected closed-ended and open-ended responses in the same online questionnaire, analyzed them separately, and integrated them through a joint display. This article is a secondary, problem-focused analysis of a broader needs-analysis dataset. The broader instrument also included items on preferred tasks and model development, but we excluded them because they did not address the four research questions here.

Participants and context

The dataset contained 108 responses collected from 24 to 28 May 2026. Participants had taken or were taking a university course related to *maharah kalam*, *muhadatsah*, or another Arabic-speaking subject. The sample included 67 women (62.0%) and 41 men (38.0%). Ten participants were in semester 2, 46 in semester 4, 47 in semester 6, and five in semester 8. Responses came from several Indonesian higher-education institutions. Participation was voluntary through an online form, and no complete sampling frame was available. The sample is therefore treated as a voluntary response sample rather than a representative sample of Indonesian Arabic programs.

Instrument

The complete researcher-developed questionnaire contained 25 five-point Likert items, rated from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), and five open-ended questions. The present analysis used items 1 to 9. Items 1 to 5 addressed speaking opportunities, the presence of classroom activities, perceived reliance on lecturer explanation and memorized dialogue, active Arabic use, and material relevance. Items 6 to 9 addressed sentence construction, confidence, vocabulary, and pronunciation. These items are treated as direct diagnostic indicators rather than a validated latent scale. They are therefore analyzed separately, and internal consistency is not used as evidence that the items measure one underlying construct.

The open-ended questions asked respondents to describe their main difficulty, helpful speaking activities, relevant communication themes, effective speaking tasks, and suggestions for improvement. The main difficulty question formed the primary qualitative corpus for frequency reporting. Relevant barrier statements in the other four fields were used to clarify pedagogical and environmental conditions. The questionnaire information page stated the study purpose, the confidentiality of responses, and that the data would be used for research only. We removed direct identifiers from the analytical file and used respondent codes S001 to S108 in the manuscript.

Quantitative analysis

We analyzed closed-ended responses using frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations. The agreement combines responses of 4 and 5. We report midpoint and disagreement percentages when they clarify interpretation. Because the instrument was designed for diagnostic needs analysis and full psychometric validation was not conducted, the article does not infer latent constructs or causal relationships from the item scores.

Qualitative analysis and integration

Open-ended responses were examined using a hybrid deductive-inductive framework in NVivo. The four broad domains, linguistic, psychological, pedagogical, and environmental, were derived deductively from the research questions and relevant literature. Subthemes within each domain were developed inductively from the Indonesian responses. Analysis proceeded through familiarisation and initial coding, refinement of subtheme definitions, and full recoding of the corpus using the final codebook. Coding was non-exclusive, so one response could contribute to more than one subtheme. We counted explicit mentions in the main-difficulty field as descriptive indicators of salience, not as exclusive categories or prevalence estimates. We translated quotations into English and checked them against the original text for meaning.

The quantitative and qualitative strands were integrated by comparing convergence, divergence, and explanatory contribution in a joint display. Three respondents stated that they had no main difficulty. We retained these negative cases and considered them when interpreting the results. Pedagogical and environmental themes were less frequent in the direct difficulty question and are therefore presented as explanatory conditions rather than quantitatively equivalent barrier scales.

Ethical reporting

The questionnaire information page explained the purpose of the research, the confidentiality of responses, and the research-only use of the data. Verify and insert ethical approval or institutional exemption and the applicable consent procedure before submission.

Table 1. Participant characteristics (N = 108)

Characteristic	n	%
Women	67	62.0
Men	41	38.0
Semester 2	10	9.3
Semester 4	46	42.6
Semester 6	47	43.5
Semester 8	5	4.6

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Table 2 summarises students' reports of speaking opportunities, active Arabic use, and the indicators associated with the four problem domains. The results are presented by domain, followed by an integrated interpretation of how the barriers may reinforce one another.

Table 2. Student-reported speaking conditions and problem indicators

Item	Indicator	M	SD	Agree n	Agree %	Neutral %
1	Sufficient speaking opportunities	3.88	1.02	81	75.0	16.7
2	Frequent speaking activities	4.01	1.04	85	78.7	11.1
3	Perceived prominence of lecturer explanation and memorised dialogue	3.64	0.91	64	59.3	32.4
4	Students actively use Arabic	3.25	1.09	45	41.7	36.1
5	Material is relevant	3.74	1.01	74	68.5	19.4
6	Difficulty constructing spoken sentences	3.48	0.97	57	52.8	33.3
7	Low confidence	3.47	1.03	55	50.9	31.5
8	Vocabulary shortage	3.67	0.97	70	64.8	24.1
9	Pronunciation difficulty	3.28	1.06	52	48.1	28.7

Note. The agreement combines responses 4 and 5. Item 3 reports students' perceptions and is not treated as an observed measure of teaching behavior.

Linguistic barriers: vocabulary, sentence construction, and pronunciation

Vocabulary was the most widely endorsed linguistic problem. Seventy respondents (64.8%) agreed that they often lacked vocabulary while speaking ($M = 3.67$, $SD = 0.97$). Difficulty constructing spoken sentences was endorsed by 57 respondents (52.8%; $M = 3.48$, $SD = 0.97$), while 52 respondents (48.1%) reported pronunciation difficulty ($M = 3.28$, $SD = 1.06$).

The open-ended data converged with these item-level results. In the main difficulty field, 58 responses explicitly mentioned vocabulary, 21 mentioned grammar or sentence construction, and 17 mentioned pronunciation or fluency. The codes overlapped. Students frequently described knowing the meaning they wished to express but being unable to retrieve or organize language quickly enough for continuous speech.

"My main difficulty is fear of grammatical mistakes and not having enough active vocabulary when speaking spontaneously. I often stop in the middle of a sentence because I think for too long. I also have too few practice partners." (S005)

Psychological barriers: fear of error, anxiety, and low confidence

Fifty-five respondents (50.9%) agreed that they lacked confidence when speaking Arabic in front of peers or lecturers ($M = 3.47$, $SD = 1.03$). The sizeable midpoint response (31.5%) suggests that confidence varied across situations. Twenty-six responses to the main difficulty question explicitly mentioned low confidence, anxiety, embarrassment, hesitation, or fear of error.

Students connected fear with grammatical accuracy, pronunciation, memory failure, and public evaluation. Confidence was often described as stronger with familiar topics or supportive partners and weaker during unprepared public performances. The psychological problem was therefore situational rather than a uniform unwillingness to speak.

"I feel embarrassed speaking in front of many people, more precisely because I am afraid of making mistakes." (S031)

Reported pedagogical issues: memorization, uneven participation, and limited spontaneous interaction

Students generally recognized the presence of oral instruction. Eighty-one respondents (75.0%) agreed that their courses provided sufficient opportunities to speak Arabic ($M = 3.88$, $SD = 1.02$), and 85 respondents (78.7%) agreed that lecturers frequently used dialogue, presentation, discussion, or simulation activities ($M = 4.01$, $SD = 1.04$). The availability of activities did not translate into equally active participation. Only 45 respondents (41.7%) agreed that students actively used Arabic during instruction ($M = 3.25$, $SD = 1.09$), while 36.1% selected the midpoint and 22.2% disagreed.

Sixty-four respondents (59.3%) also agreed that lecturer explanation and memorized dialogue remained prominent ($M = 3.64$, $SD = 0.91$). This single diagnostic item does not establish that all observed teaching was teacher-centered. It shows that a substantial proportion of students perceived explanation and memorization as noticeable features of their courses.

Open responses described Arabic use as occurring mainly when lecturers assigned a dialogue, nominated a student, or required a performance. Respondents also indicated that students with greater confidence or vocabulary were more likely to participate first. The central pedagogical issue was therefore not the complete absence of speaking activity, but the uneven distribution of participation and the limited movement from prepared reproduction to spontaneous and adaptive communication.

"The first problem is the environment. If people around us used Arabic, we would become accustomed to it. The second is too much focus on grammar, so the main purpose of speaking is rarely practiced." (S082)

Environmental limitations: restricted partners, weak routines, and limited sustained exposure

The questionnaire did not include a dedicated environmental scale. Environmental limitations, therefore, emerged from the open responses and were less frequent than linguistic and psychological barriers. Eight respondents explicitly identified limited speaking partners or an unsupportive Arabic-use environment as a principal difficulty. Additional comments in the other open fields requested more routine Arabic use on campus and more opportunities to interact beyond assigned performances.

These responses suggest that access to interlocutors and recurring language-use routines can help explain why classroom activities do not always lead to sustained participation. The data do not demonstrate a complete absence of Arabic exposure. Rather, they point to limited continuity, restricted access to partners, and weak routines for using Arabic beyond formal tasks.

"I lack confidence, do not have a supportive speaking partner, and do not have a supportive language environment." (S108)

Interrelationship among the four domains

The four domains were not experienced equally by all students. Three respondents reported no major difficulties, while others identified only one problem. Some students reported adequate sentence patterns but insufficient vocabulary, and others reported confidence when speaking with familiar partners but hesitation during public performance. This variation cautions against treating the sample as a uniform deficit group.

Nevertheless, the integrated findings suggest that the barriers can reinforce one another. Limited vocabulary and sentence-construction difficulty may increase pauses and uncertainty. Fear of error may reduce students' willingness to take up available speaking opportunities. Reported reliance on prepared dialogue may restrict independent language production, while limited partners and weak Arabic-use routines may reduce repetition and habit formation beyond assigned activities. These are explanatory interpretations of convergent self-report data, not a tested causal sequence.

"I do not have a main difficulty." (S056)

Table 3. Explicit themes in the main-difficulty responses

Theme	Explicit mentions	% of respondents
Vocabulary limitations	58	53.7
Grammar or sentence construction	21	19.4
Pronunciation or fluency	17	15.7
Low confidence, anxiety or fear of error	26	24.1
Limited practice or perceived pedagogical imbalance	4	3.7
Limited speaking partners or Arabic-use environment	8	7.4
No main difficulty reported	3	2.8

Note. Coding was non-exclusive, so a response could contain more than one theme. Pedagogical and environmental counts are conservative and are presented as explanatory themes rather than quantitative scales.

Table 4. Integrated mixed-methods interpretation of the four problem domains

Problem domain	Quantitative pattern	Qualitative contribution	Integrated interpretation
Linguistic	64.8% vocabulary, 52.8% sentence construction, and 48.1% pronunciation.	Students described lexical searching, pauses, and uncertainty about form.	Limited accessible language resources constrain spontaneous production.
Psychological	50.9% reported low confidence.	Fear varied by audience, preparation, and perceived risk of error.	Affective barriers influence students' uptake of available speaking opportunities.
Pedagogical	75.0% reported opportunities and 78.7% activities, but only 41.7% reported active use; 59.3% perceived explanation and memorised dialogue as prominent.	Students described instructed or scripted use more often than spontaneous interaction.	Speaking activity may be present without being evenly distributed, adaptive, or independent.
Environmental	No dedicated scale.	A less frequent theme concerned limited partners and weak Arabic-use routines beyond assigned tasks.	Restricted continuity and exposure may limit repetition and habit formation.

Discussion

The study identified four interrelated problem domains in university Arabic speaking instruction: linguistic barriers, psychological barriers, reported pedagogical issues, and environmental limitations. The contribution lies in considering the domains together and in showing that the presence of speaking activities did not necessarily produce sustained, distributed, and independent Arabic use. Three-quarters of respondents recognized speaking opportunities, and almost four-fifths reported practical activities, yet fewer than half agreed that students actively used Arabic during instruction.

Linguistic barriers formed the most visible layer. Vocabulary shortage was more prominent than sentence construction and pronunciation, although the three frequently overlapped within individual responses. During real-time communication, a missing word can interrupt sentence planning, increase attention to grammatical form, and lead to longer pauses. Research on vocabulary development and Arabic learning similarly suggests that lexical knowledge must become available for contextualized retrieval rather than remain receptive or list-based (Abd Rahim & Abdul Pisal, 2024; Alkurtehe & Dzakirya, 2018; S. Almelhes, 2024). The finding, therefore, concerns accessible vocabulary in use, not merely the quantity of words students have encountered.

The psychological findings explain why linguistic knowledge did not automatically become speech. Half of the respondents reported low confidence, and open responses connected hesitation with fear of grammatical and pronunciation errors. The sizeable neutral category and negative cases show that confidence was not uniformly low. It changed with topic familiarity, preparation, partner, and audience. This pattern supports the view that willingness to communicate is dynamic and shaped by classroom conditions (Khajavy et al., 2018; Wang, 2017). Speaking anxiety should therefore be addressed through the organisation of interaction, not treated only as an individual weakness.

The reported pedagogical pattern requires a similarly balanced interpretation. The study did not observe classes and cannot determine the objective frequency or quality of lecturer behaviour. Student reports nevertheless indicate that explanation and memorised dialogue remained prominent in their experience. Model dialogues can support less experienced learners by providing vocabulary and sentence patterns. The problem arises when reproduction becomes the final performance, and learners are not required to adapt language to a different purpose or interlocutor. Communicative and task-based perspectives emphasise meaningful outcomes and movement from supported to increasingly independent performance (Bryfonski & McKay, 2019; East, 2017; Ellis, 2017).

The contrast between frequent activities and comparatively low active use suggests that pedagogical quality cannot be judged solely by counting dialogues or presentations. Participation also concerns who speaks, how often, to whom, with what degree of preparation, and how much dependence on a script. A strong accuracy orientation may reduce participation when students believe that they must produce a complete and correct sentence before speaking. This does not justify removing grammar or corrective feedback. It suggests organising attention to form around communicative attempts. Scaffolding can provide lexical preparation, sentence starters and rehearsal before a task, followed by selective feedback and another opportunity to speak (Panhwar et al., 2016; Sarmiento-Campos et al., 2022).

Environmental limitations were reported less frequently than linguistic and psychological barriers, but they provide an important explanation for continuity. Students who lack partners or recurring Arabic-use routines have fewer opportunities to repeat vocabulary,



initiate exchanges, and build automaticity. This interpretation is consistent with social-interaction perspectives on additional-language learning (Alharbi, 2023; P. Li & Jeong, 2020) and with research showing that Arabic learning strategies operate inside and outside formal lessons (Arifin et al., 2020). The evidence does not justify claiming that all surveyed institutions lacked an immersive environment. It indicates restricted access to sustained interaction in some students' reported experiences.

The four domains should not be read as a simple causal chain. Their relationship is better understood as mutually reinforcing. Linguistic limitations can increase hesitation; psychological concerns can reduce the uptake of available opportunities; reported classroom practices can restrict adaptive language production; and limited exposure can reduce opportunities for repetition. The negative cases also show that the pattern does not apply identically to every student. Instructional responses, therefore, need to accommodate different combinations of barriers rather than assume one uniform learner profile.

The practical implication is a more integrated emphasis on communicative, contextualized, and interaction-rich instruction. Pair and small-group interaction can distribute speaking opportunities more evenly. Task-linked vocabulary and sentence frames can lower the initial processing burden without fixing every utterance in advance. Repeated performance can allow students to use feedback rather than experience correction only as an evaluation. Activities linked to campus life, daily routines, and familiar social situations can provide a plausible purpose for speaking. These implications arise from the diagnosed problems; the present study did not test their effectiveness.

Experiential practices may also help students move from rehearsed production to experience as meaningful language use, followed by reflection and another attempt. Role-play, interviews, short presentations, campus information tasks, or digital speaking projects can create a purpose and an audience, but they should not be treated as inherently effective. Their contribution depends on scaffolding, participation structure, feedback, and opportunities for re-performance. Future intervention research should test whether these conditions improve spontaneous production and reduce the gap between available activities and active use.

The study has several limitations. The voluntary sample cannot represent all Indonesian Arabic programs. The data measure perceptions rather than speaking proficiency or observed interaction. The questionnaire was researcher-developed, and full content, construct, and external validation were not available. The qualitative strand consisted of short open-ended responses rather than interviews, and no independent second coding was conducted. Fewer direct indicators supported the pedagogical and environmental findings than the linguistic findings. Future research should combine validated multi-item measures, verified interviews, classroom observation, lecturer perspectives, and speaking-performance data.

CONCLUSION

The primary problems identified in university Arabic-speaking instruction were grouped into four interrelated domains: linguistic barriers, psychological barriers, reported pedagogical issues, and environmental limitations. Linguistic barriers included limited active vocabulary, difficulty constructing spoken sentences, and pronunciation concerns.

Psychological barriers involved low speaking confidence, fear of making mistakes, embarrassment, and hesitation during unprepared interactions. Reported pedagogical issues included the continued prominence of lecturer explanation and memorized dialogue, uneven student participation, and limited opportunities for spontaneous and adaptive communication. Environmental limitations included restricted access to speaking partners, weak routines for using Arabic beyond assigned activities, and limited sustained exposure to Arabic as a medium of interaction.

Not all students experienced these problems equally, and the study did not establish a causal sequence among them. Nevertheless, the findings suggest that the barriers are multidimensional and mutually reinforcing within the surveyed contexts. Linguistic limitations can increase hesitation; affective concerns can reduce students' uptake of available speaking opportunities; reported classroom practices can restrict independent language production; and limited exposure can reduce repetition and habit formation. The findings therefore support a more integrated emphasis on communicative, contextualised and interaction-rich instruction. Communicative and experiential practices may help students move from rehearsed language production towards more sustained and spontaneous Arabic use, although their effectiveness requires further empirical testing.

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