

Developing Speaking Skills among Learners of Arabic as a Foreign Language: A Theoretical Framework and Practical Teaching Strategies

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Abstract

This study examines the development of speaking skills among learners of Arabic as a foreign language by integrating theoretical foundations with practical instructional strategies. The study addresses a persistent gap between learners' linguistic knowledge and their actual oral performance, which continues to limit communicative competence in many Arabic language classrooms. Using a descriptive-analytical design, the study reviews relevant literature on speaking skill, oral performance, communicative competence, and contemporary teaching strategies, with particular attention to interactive, learner-centred approaches. The analysis shows that speaking skill is a multidimensional construct involving pronunciation, vocabulary, grammatical control, fluency, and interactive comprehension, and that its effective development depends on meaningful practice rather than formal knowledge alone. The study further finds that communicative teaching, group discussion, role-play, and audio-visual support offer stronger pedagogical value than traditional lecture-based and mechanical drill methods, especially when integrated into supportive classroom environments. The article concludes that Arabic-speaking instruction for non-native learners should be redesigned around authentic communication, the integration of language skills, and teacher preparedness to manage interaction-rich learning environments.

Keywords: Speaking Skills, Arabic as a Foreign Language, Communicative Competence, Arabic Pedagogy, Interactive Learning

Introduction

The teaching of Arabic as a foreign language has become increasingly important in contemporary education due to the expanding religious, academic, and intercultural

relevance of Arabic across diverse learning contexts. In this evolving landscape, language instruction is no longer confined to the transmission of grammatical rules and lexical knowledge, but is increasingly expected to enable learners to use Arabic effectively in authentic communicative situations (Che Haron, 2014; Faryat, 2025). This shift reflects a broader movement in language pedagogy from teacher-centred knowledge delivery to learner-centred communicative performance.

Within this framework, speaking occupies a central place because it represents the most immediate and visible expression of language mastery. The number of grammatical rules is rarely used to judge learners; rather, their success is more often evaluated by their ability to express ideas, sustain interaction, and respond appropriately in real-life communication (Abd al-Bari, 2011; Al-Haddad, 2024). As a result, speaking may be regarded as the practical manifestation of language acquisition rather than a secondary skill that emerges automatically from grammar instruction.

Despite this importance, many learners of Arabic as a foreign language continue to experience a gap between formal linguistic knowledge and actual oral performance. This problem has also been observed in studies showing that traditional teaching methods such as explanation, memorisation, translation, and decontextualised drills often fail to build speaking ability, even after years of study (Che Haron, 2014). Recent descriptive work on Arabic-speaking development likewise emphasises that weak oral performance is linked to limited interaction, fear of making mistakes, insufficient exposure to communicative situations, and low confidence among learners (Faryat, 2025).

The present study addresses this problem by restructuring the discussion of speaking skills within a more coherent academic framework. It aims to examine the theoretical foundations of speaking skill, identify the major instructional strategies used to develop it, and derive pedagogical implications for Arabic language teaching to non-native speakers. In doing so, the article seeks to contribute a more analytically structured discussion suitable for current scholarly expectations in language education research.

Literature Review

Speaking as Communicative Competence

Speaking skill is commonly understood as the learner's ability to express ideas and feelings orally in an organised and contextually appropriate manner that achieves mutual understanding between speaker and listener (Tuaimah, 1989; Abd al-Bari, 2011). This definition suggests that speaking is not merely the articulation of words, but an integrated activity that includes idea formation, lexical selection, grammatical arrangement, pronunciation, and interactional management. In foreign language education, this broader understanding aligns closely with the concept of communicative competence, which prioritises meaningful and context-sensitive language use over formal correctness alone (Faryat, 2025).

The literature further indicates that speaking is the clearest observable indicator of successful language learning because it converts internal knowledge into actual communicative behaviour. Learners may have a strong vocabulary base or grammatical awareness, yet remain unable to communicate if they are not trained to use language orally in meaningful

settings (Che Haron, 2014; Faryat, 2025). For this reason, many contemporary approaches treat speaking not as an outcome of language learning, but as one of its main drivers.

Components of Speaking Skill

The article's original discussion identifies several major components of speaking skill: pronunciation, vocabulary, grammatical structures, fluency, and comprehension-response. This multidimensional view is pedagogically important because it shows that oral performance depends on the interaction of phonetic, linguistic, cognitive, and social elements rather than a single isolated competence. Weakness in any one of these elements may reduce the overall quality of oral communication, even if other components are relatively strong.

Pronunciation is especially important in Arabic because many learners have difficulty with sounds absent from their first-language phonological systems. Vocabulary provides the raw material for expression, but it must be taught in meaningful contexts rather than as isolated lexical items. Grammar gives structure to utterances, while fluency reflects the learner's capacity to maintain speech despite hesitation and limited resources. Finally, comprehension and response complete the interactive dimension of speaking, reinforcing the idea that speaking and listening are interdependent in actual communication (Abd al-Bari, 2011; Madkour, 1991).

Speaking and the Integration of Language Skills

A strong theme in the article is the relationship between speaking and the other language skills. Listening supports comprehension and provides the auditory input necessary for oral development, reading expands vocabulary and offers linguistic models, and writing helps learners organise ideas more coherently before expressing them orally (Al-Dulaimi, 2013; Madkour, 1991). This supports an integrated-skills approach in which speaking is taught not in isolation but in relation to the broader language system.

Such integration is also consistent with current pedagogical recommendations in Arabic language teaching, where oral performance is seen as benefiting from rich input, repeated exposure, and opportunities for cross-skill transfer (Faryat, 2025). Therefore, speaking development should be embedded within a comprehensive instructional design rather than treated as a stand-alone classroom activity.

Traditional and Contemporary Teaching Strategies

The article contrasts traditional teaching methods with modern interactive strategies. Traditional methods, such as lecturing and repetitive language exercises, are acknowledged as useful for organising content and reinforcing structures, but they provide limited opportunity for real communicative use. This limitation is consistent with findings that learners taught mainly through teacher-dominated practices often struggle to transfer classroom knowledge into actual speaking performance (Che Haron, 2014).

By contrast, modern strategies such as interactive learning, group discussion, role-play, and audio-visual aids create opportunities for meaningful language use, peer interaction, and contextualised expression. These strategies are more aligned with communicative and learner-centred pedagogy because they allow learners to negotiate meaning, experiment

with language, and build confidence through practice. Empirical work has shown that communicative activities can improve learners' perceptions of speaking, reduce difficulty, and increase actual oral engagement when implemented consistently over time (Che Haron, 2014).

Methodology

This study adopts a descriptive-analytical approach, based on document analysis and a critical review of theoretical and pedagogical literature on the teaching of speaking in Arabic as a foreign language. The article does not employ fieldwork or experimental intervention; rather, it synthesises conceptual discussions, prior pedagogical insights, and comparative instructional analysis to generate a structured academic account of speaking-skill development.

The analytical process is organised around three main domains. First, the study reviews the theoretical foundations of speaking skills, including their concepts, importance, components, and relationships to other language skills. Second, it analyses instructional strategies used in teaching speaking, distinguishing between traditional and contemporary approaches. Third, it derives pedagogical implications by comparing the educational value of different strategies and identifying the conditions most conducive to effective oral development.

Although the study is theoretically oriented, it draws on recent supporting literature to strengthen its analytical validity, particularly work on communicative Arabic pedagogy and descriptive studies of speaking development among non-native learners (Che Haron, 2014; Faryat, 2025). This allows the article to move beyond general pedagogical commentary toward a more research-informed synthesis suitable for academic publication.

Findings and Discussion

Speaking is the most Direct Indicator of Arabic Language Use

The analysis confirms that speaking skill is the clearest indicator of whether learners can actually use Arabic in authentic situations. This finding supports the argument that communicative competence cannot be built through grammar and vocabulary acquisition alone, but requires learners to transform linguistic knowledge into oral action. In this respect, the study is consistent with communicative research showing that learners' confidence and speaking ability improve when classroom activities focus on purposeful oral interaction rather than passive reception (Che Haron, 2014).

Oral Performance Depends on Multiple Interrelated Components

A second finding is that speaking skill is not a single ability, but an integrated construct that includes pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar, fluency, and comprehension-response. This means that effective instruction must address oral performance holistically rather than focusing on a single component, such as grammar accuracy or memorised vocabulary. The article's emphasis on oral linguistic performance as observable, measurable behaviour is particularly useful for structuring classroom assessment and task design (Abd al-Bari, 2011).

Speaking Develops best through Integration with other Language Skills

The analysis also shows that speaking is strengthened when linked to listening, reading, and writing. Listening supports phonological and interactional awareness, reading enriches

vocabulary and discourse models, and writing improves idea organisation before oral production. This confirms that an integrated language-skills model is more educationally productive than separating speaking from the rest of the language system.

Interactive Strategies are more Effective than Teacher-Dominated Approaches

A major pedagogical finding of the study is that modern interactive strategies outperform traditional methods in promoting speaking development. Interactive learning, group discussion, and role-play create communicative situations in which learners must negotiate meaning and use language spontaneously. These strategies also improve fluency, reduce anxiety, and foster learner confidence because they place oral use at the centre of the lesson rather than at its margin. This conclusion aligns with evidence from communicative Arabic teaching that sustained interaction-based activities can improve learners' perceptions of speaking and reduce their difficulties with oral expression (Che Haron, 2014).

At the same time, the study does not reject traditional methods altogether. Instead, it suggests that traditional approaches remain useful for establishing foundational knowledge, but are insufficient on their own for developing communicative speaking ability. A balanced pedagogical model is therefore preferable: one that combines structured linguistic input with interactive practice and authentic language use.

Teacher Preparedness and Classroom Environment are Decisive Factors

Another important finding is that successful speaking instruction depends not only on the choice of strategies but also on teacher preparedness and classroom climate. Teachers must be able to manage interactions, provide supportive feedback, reduce fear of making mistakes, and create realistic communicative situations that encourage participation. In large or highly formal classrooms, these conditions may be difficult to achieve, which helps explain why the effectiveness of interactive strategies often depends on teacher training and implementation quality rather than on method labels alone.

Pedagogical Implications

The article suggests several practical implications for Arabic language teaching to non-native speakers. First, speaking should be positioned as a central curricular objective rather than a by-product of grammar instruction. Second, classroom practice should move beyond explanation and memorisation toward tasks that require students to interact, negotiate meaning, and speak for real communicative purposes.

Third, curriculum design should integrate the four language skills while still giving dedicated attention to oral practice. Fourth, speaking lessons should incorporate audio-visual support, role-play scenarios, group work, and short oral presentations to diversify participation and reduce monotony. Fifth, teacher development programmes should prepare instructors to function as facilitators of interaction rather than transmitters of information only.

These implications are especially relevant for Arabic programmes in non-Arabic-speaking environments, where classroom interaction may be the primary or sole opportunity for learners to use Arabic orally (Che Haron, 2014). In such contexts, the design of communicative classroom ecology becomes a decisive factor in learners' oral development.

Conclusion

This article has restructured the discussion of speaking-skill development among learners of Arabic as a foreign language into a more coherent academic format by integrating theory, pedagogy, and instructional implications. The study concludes that speaking is the most direct manifestation of communicative competence, that it depends on a set of interrelated linguistic and cognitive components, and that its effective development requires integration with other language skills.

The analysis further shows that modern interactive strategies are pedagogically stronger than traditional teacher-centred methods for fostering oral communication, especially when implemented in supportive and well-managed classroom environments. Accordingly, improving Arabic speaking instruction requires curriculum revision, methodological diversification, and stronger teacher preparation in communicative pedagogy. In this sense, the article contributes a structured framework that can serve as a basis for future empirical research and pedagogical innovation in Arabic as a foreign language.

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