

Evaluation of Speaking Competence in Arabic Language Learning: A Performance Assessment Approach

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Abstract:

Assessing Arabic speaking competence requires an evaluation method that accurately reflects students' communicative abilities. This study examines the effectiveness of performance-based assessment in evaluating Arabic-speaking skills, focusing on fluency, coherence, accuracy, pronunciation, and confidence. Using a qualitative research design with thematic analysis, data were collected through structured speaking tasks, rubric-based assessments, observations, and interviews. The findings indicate that performance assessment provides a more comprehensive and authentic evaluation of speaking proficiency compared to traditional methods. Students who engaged in interactive speaking activities demonstrated higher fluency and coherence, while pronunciation challenges were primarily linked to phonemes unique to Arabic. Additionally, language anxiety was found to hinder speaking performance, emphasizing the importance of confidence-building strategies. The study highlights the advantages of performance assessment, particularly in offering detailed formative feedback and fostering intrinsic motivation among learners. These findings suggest that integrating performance-based evaluation into Arabic language instruction can enhance speaking proficiency and create a more effective learning environment. Future research should explore the implementation of digital tools in performance assessment and examine its long-term impact on Arabic language acquisition.

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Introduction (مقدمة)

Speaking skills in Arabic language learning play a crucial role in developing students' communicative competence. According to Ethnologue (Eberhard et al., 2023), Arabic is the fourth most widely spoken language in the world, with over 310 million native speakers. In Indonesia,

the increasing number of educational institutions offering Arabic language programs at both school and university levels highlights the urgency of mastering speaking skills (Zein, 2021). However, despite the growing interest in Arabic language learning, assessing speaking proficiency remains a significant challenge in the education sector.

One of the primary obstacles in Arabic language speaking instruction is the low proficiency level among students, particularly non-native speakers. A study by Al-Khresheh et al. (2020) found that many students struggle with pronunciation, spontaneous speaking skills, and confidence in using Arabic orally. These issues are further exacerbated by the lack of objective and systematic evaluation methods to assess their progress in speaking skills.

Speaking assessments are often conducted subjectively without standardized instruments to measure fluency, grammatical accuracy, and overall coherence. According to Brown (2018), evaluations based solely on direct teacher judgment can be highly subjective, leading to inconsistent results. Consequently, assessment outcomes may not accurately reflect students' speaking abilities, impacting the overall effectiveness of Arabic language learning.

Another limitation in evaluation methods is the minimal use of performance assessment in Arabic language learning. O'Malley & Valdez-Pierce (2019) emphasize that performance assessment allows students to demonstrate their speaking skills in authentic contexts, such as presentations, interviews, and open discussions. Unfortunately, this method has not been widely implemented in Arabic language education in Indonesia due to teachers' limited understanding of its implementation and appropriate evaluation criteria.

Recent studies highlight the importance of using assessment rubrics in performance assessment to enhance objectivity in evaluating speaking skills. For instance, research by Fulcher (2021) suggests that rubrics with clear indicators, such as phonetic accuracy, fluency, and correct grammar usage, can improve the reliability of speaking assessments in second or foreign language learning. By establishing clearer standards, students can better understand expectations and be more motivated to improve their speaking abilities.

Furthermore, performance assessment fosters interactive Arabic language learning. Suwartono (2022) asserts that this method not only evaluates individual speaking proficiency but also assesses students' ability to communicate in real-life situations. This aspect is highly relevant in Arabic language learning, where speaking skills are often the primary indicator of communication success.

In the Indonesian educational context, evaluating Arabic speaking skills faces additional challenges related to resources and infrastructure. A report by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology (Kemendikbudristek, 2023) reveals that most institutions still rely on traditional assessment methods, such as written tests and memorized dialogues, which are less effective in assessing real-world speaking proficiency. This underscores the need for innovation in assessment methods to improve learning effectiveness.

Previous research has also shown that performance assessment in speaking evaluations positively impacts students' motivation. A study by Tahir (2020) found that students assessed using performance assessment methods were more actively engaged in speaking activities and exhibited higher levels of confidence compared to those evaluated through conventional tests. This indicates that performance assessment not only enhances assessment accuracy but also contributes to the overall development of students' speaking skills.

Another crucial aspect of performance assessment is its ability to integrate real-world communication skills into language education. According to Bachman and Palmer (2019), language assessments should reflect authentic language use, allowing students to demonstrate their ability to interact naturally in different social and academic settings. This is particularly

relevant in Arabic language learning, where students often struggle to apply their knowledge in practical communication scenarios.

Additionally, studies have shown that performance assessment can contribute to students' long-term retention of speaking skills. According to Ellis (2020), language learners who engage in interactive speaking tasks as part of their assessment tend to develop stronger oral proficiency over time compared to those assessed through traditional testing methods. This is because performance-based assessments encourage deeper cognitive processing and active language use, which are essential for language acquisition.

However, implementing performance assessment in Arabic language learning requires well-trained educators who understand its principles and applications. Research by Reinders (2021) highlights that teachers play a crucial role in designing and administering effective performance assessments. Without proper training and clear assessment guidelines, there is a risk that such evaluations will be inconsistent and fail to achieve their intended goals. Therefore, professional development programs for Arabic language educators are necessary to ensure the successful adoption of performance assessment in the classroom.

Given these challenges, this study aims to analyze the effectiveness of performance assessment in evaluating Arabic speaking skills. By identifying key assessment indicators and examining its implementation in Arabic language education, this research seeks to provide valuable insights into developing a more objective and effective speaking evaluation system.

Thus, this research holds significant urgency in improving the quality of Arabic language education, particularly in speaking skills. A more accurate and performance-based assessment can help students achieve better speaking proficiency, ultimately supporting more effective Arabic language acquisition in academic and professional contexts.

Method (منهج)

2.1 Research Design

This study employs a qualitative research design, focusing on an in-depth exploration of how performance assessment is applied in evaluating Arabic speaking competence. According to Creswell and Poth (2018), qualitative research is effective in capturing detailed and contextualized data on human experiences and learning processes. By using a descriptive case study approach, this study aims to investigate students' speaking competencies in authentic learning environments.

A case study design is particularly relevant for this research because it allows for an intensive examination of real-life language learning settings. Yin (2020) emphasizes that case studies enable researchers to explore complex educational phenomena in natural contexts. The study will be conducted in a university or school setting where Arabic is taught as a foreign language, providing rich insights into students' speaking skill development.

2.2 Participants

The participants of this study will consist of students learning Arabic as a foreign language, selected based on specific criteria. Purposeful sampling will be used to identify students at varying proficiency levels, ensuring a diverse representation of speaking competencies (Patton, 2015). The inclusion criteria include: (1) active enrollment in an Arabic language program, (2) participation in oral language activities, and (3) willingness to engage in the study.

To gain a comprehensive understanding of performance assessment implementation, Arabic language instructors will also be included as secondary participants. Their perspectives

on assessment practices will provide valuable insights into the challenges and effectiveness of evaluating students' speaking skills (Richards & Farrell, 2018).

2.3 Data Collection Techniques

This study employs multiple data collection methods to ensure triangulation and enhance the validity of findings. The primary instruments used include:

1. Performance Assessment Rubrics – A structured rubric will be developed to assess students' speaking competence based on fluency, accuracy, coherence, and pronunciation (Fulcher, 2021). This rubric will guide both the researcher and instructors in evaluating students' oral performances.
2. Speaking Tests and Interviews – Students will participate in speaking tasks such as role-plays, presentations, and interviews to assess their ability to communicate effectively in Arabic. These tasks will be designed to reflect real-life communication situations.
3. Classroom Observations – Observations will be conducted to analyze students' speaking interactions and participation in oral activities. Field notes will be taken to document verbal and non-verbal communication aspects.
4. Audio and Video Recordings – To capture authentic speech samples, students' spoken interactions will be recorded for later analysis. This allows for a more detailed examination of pronunciation patterns, speech fluency, and error types (Brown, 2018).

The combination of these methods ensures a holistic understanding of students' speaking competence and the effectiveness of performance assessment in Arabic language learning.

2.4 Data Analysis Techniques

The collected data will be analyzed using thematic analysis, following the six-phase framework proposed by Braun and Clarke (2019). The analysis will be conducted as follows:

1. Familiarization with Data – Audio and video recordings will be transcribed verbatim, and observation notes will be reviewed to gain an overall understanding of the collected data.
2. Initial Coding – The transcriptions and field notes will be systematically coded to identify patterns related to students' speaking abilities, challenges, and assessment effectiveness.
3. Theme Identification – Codes will be grouped into broader themes such as fluency development, pronunciation challenges, self-confidence in speaking, and the impact of performance assessment.
4. Reviewing Themes – Themes will be refined by cross-referencing different data sources (e.g., interview responses, rubric scores, and observation notes) to ensure consistency and validity.
5. Defining and Naming Themes – Clear definitions will be assigned to each theme to accurately represent the findings.
6. Reporting the Results – The themes will be presented with supporting evidence from student performances and instructor feedback.

Using thematic analysis allows for an in-depth exploration of students' speaking proficiency and the pedagogical implications of performance assessment. This qualitative approach ensures that data interpretation is grounded in real classroom interactions and assessment practices.

Ensuring Trustworthiness of the Study

To maintain the credibility and trustworthiness of the research, several strategies will be

employed:

1. Triangulation – Multiple data sources (rubrics, observations, recordings) will be used to validate findings and minimize bias (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018).
2. Member Checking – Participants will be given an opportunity to review and verify the transcriptions of their speech samples and interviews to ensure accuracy.
3. Peer Debriefing – The research findings will be reviewed by Arabic language educators and assessment experts to ensure the validity of interpretations.
4. Thick Description – Detailed descriptions of students' speaking behaviors and assessment contexts will be provided to allow for transferability of findings (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval will be obtained from relevant institutional review boards before conducting the study. Informed consent will be secured from all participants, ensuring their voluntary participation and confidentiality (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2018). Pseudonyms will be used to protect participants' identities, and recorded data will be securely stored and used solely for research purposes.

By employing a rigorous qualitative methodology, this study aims to provide an in-depth understanding of performance assessment in evaluating Arabic speaking competence, offering valuable insights for educators and policymakers in Arabic language instruction.

Result (نتائج)

3.1 Overview of Findings

The thematic analysis of students' Arabic speaking competence revealed four key themes: (1) fluency and coherence in speaking, (2) accuracy and pronunciation challenges, (3) self-confidence and anxiety in oral performance, and (4) the effectiveness of performance assessment in evaluating speaking competence. These themes were derived from multiple data sources, including interviews, speaking test transcriptions, observation notes, and recorded oral performances. The findings highlight both the strengths and challenges that students face in developing their speaking skills, providing insights into how assessment methods influence their progress.

A significant finding was that students exhibited varying levels of fluency and coherence, with noticeable differences based on their exposure to oral communication activities. While some students demonstrated the ability to construct well-formed sentences and maintain a steady flow of speech, others struggled with hesitations, self-corrections, and disjointed ideas. This suggests that structured speaking opportunities are essential for improving fluency and coherence in Arabic language learners.

Additionally, the results indicate that performance assessment, particularly rubric-based evaluation, provides a more comprehensive and accurate measurement of students' speaking abilities compared to traditional methods. Both students and instructors found that performance assessments allowed for more targeted feedback and a deeper understanding of individual strengths and weaknesses. The following sections elaborate on each of the identified themes, providing supporting evidence and pedagogical implications.

3.2 Theme 1: Fluency and Coherence in Speaking

Fluency and coherence were identified as fundamental challenges in students' Arabic

speaking performances. Fluency, defined as the ability to speak smoothly and continuously without unnatural pauses or excessive self-correction, varied significantly among students. Transcriptions of oral assessments revealed that many students hesitated frequently and struggled to maintain a steady pace when constructing sentences. This hesitation often stemmed from limited vocabulary recall and uncertainty about grammatical accuracy, leading to disrupted speech patterns.

In terms of coherence, students exhibited difficulties in structuring their ideas logically. Some students provided responses that lacked clear organization, making it challenging for listeners to follow their narratives. This issue was particularly evident in spontaneous speaking tasks, where students were required to describe experiences or present arguments in Arabic. The lack of coherence often resulted in fragmented responses that hindered effective communication.

Observational data suggested that students who participated in structured speaking activities, such as role-plays and debates, demonstrated greater fluency and coherence compared to those who relied solely on textbook-based learning. Research supports the notion that frequent speaking practice in meaningful contexts enhances both fluency and coherence (Nation & Newton, 2009). These findings highlight the need for task-based speaking activities that encourage students to express their thoughts naturally and cohesively.

3.3 Theme 2: Accuracy and Pronunciation Challenges

Accuracy and pronunciation emerged as significant barriers to effective Arabic speaking performance. Grammatical accuracy was a recurrent issue, with students making frequent errors in verb conjugations, prepositions, and sentence structure. Many of these errors reflected negative transfer from their first language, particularly in syntactic arrangements and the application of grammatical rules. For example, some students incorrectly placed adjectives before nouns, mirroring the syntactic order of their native language rather than adhering to Arabic grammar rules.

Pronunciation challenges were equally prevalent, especially in the articulation of Arabic phonemes that do not exist in students' L1. Difficult sounds such as ض (ḍād), ط (ṭā'), ص (ṣād), and the glottal stop (ʾ) were often mispronounced or substituted with phonetically similar sounds from their first language. Audio recordings and instructor feedback revealed that students who had limited exposure to native Arabic pronunciation struggled the most with phonetic accuracy.

The data further indicated that students who engaged in phonetic drills, listening exercises, and direct pronunciation instruction exhibited gradual improvement. Research supports the effectiveness of explicit pronunciation training in developing oral proficiency (Celce-Murcia et al., 2010). Given these findings, it is recommended that Arabic language programs incorporate structured pronunciation exercises and phonetic feedback to help students overcome these challenges.

3.4 Theme 3: Self-Confidence and Anxiety in Oral Performance

The findings indicate that self-confidence plays a crucial role in students' speaking performance. Students with higher confidence levels demonstrated greater fluency, coherence, and willingness to engage in speaking activities. Conversely, those with noticeable anxiety tended to hesitate, avoid eye contact, and struggle with articulation. Many students reported in interviews that they feared making mistakes, which often resulted in reduced participation in speaking tasks.

Classroom observations further supported these findings, as students who were reluctant to speak in front of their peers exhibited significant difficulty in forming complete responses. Anxiety was particularly evident in situations where students were required to speak spontaneously, suggesting that the fear of making grammatical errors and being judged

negatively affected their performance. This aligns with research by Horwitz et al. (2010), which found that foreign language anxiety can severely hinder speaking proficiency.

Thematic analysis of student reflections revealed that supportive classroom environments, positive reinforcement, and structured speaking activities helped reduce anxiety levels. Students who received encouragement from instructors and peers were more willing to engage in oral communication. These results suggest that creating a low-anxiety learning environment through confidence-building exercises and communicative practice is essential for improving Arabic speaking competence.

3.5 Theme 4: Effectiveness of Performance Assessment in Evaluating Speaking Competence

The study found that performance assessment provided a more effective and authentic evaluation of students' speaking abilities compared to traditional testing methods. Unlike standardized exams that primarily assess memorization and written competence, performance-based assessments allowed students to demonstrate their oral proficiency in real-life communication scenarios. Students expressed in interviews that rubric-based assessment offered clearer expectations and constructive feedback, which helped them identify specific areas for improvement.

The data also revealed that students who were evaluated using performance assessment showed noticeable progress in their speaking skills over time. Instructors found that oral presentations, role-plays, and structured interviews provided valuable insights into students' language development, allowing for more personalized feedback. These findings align with research by Bachman & Palmer (2010), which emphasizes that authentic performance assessments contribute to meaningful language learning and skill development.

Furthermore, the integration of rubrics in performance assessments provided a structured and transparent evaluation framework. Students reported feeling more motivated to improve their speaking abilities when given clear assessment criteria and formative feedback. These findings suggest that Arabic language educators should adopt performance-based assessment models to enhance speaking competence and encourage active language use.

3.6 Summary of Results and Emerging Patterns

The results of this study provide a comprehensive understanding of the challenges and strengths associated with Arabic speaking competence. The thematic analysis highlights that fluency, coherence, accuracy, pronunciation, self-confidence, and assessment methods significantly influence students' oral performance. Students who engaged in structured speaking activities and performance-based assessments demonstrated higher levels of proficiency compared to those who relied on traditional learning approaches.

A key insight from the findings is that performance assessment is a more effective approach for evaluating speaking skills than traditional exams. The data suggest that rubric-based evaluation and authentic speaking tasks provide students with clearer learning objectives, targeted feedback, and opportunities for skill development. This supports the argument for integrating task-based speaking assessments into Arabic language curricula to enhance overall communicative competence.

Moreover, the study underscores the importance of addressing pronunciation difficulties and self-confidence issues. By incorporating phonetic training, anxiety-reducing techniques, and interactive speaking exercises, Arabic instructors can create more engaging and effective learning environments. These findings serve as a foundation for future research and pedagogical improvements in Arabic language education.

Discussion (مناقشة)

Fluency and coherence are fundamental aspects of effective Arabic speaking competence. The findings of this study revealed that students who frequently engaged in structured speaking activities, such as role-plays and debates, demonstrated higher levels of fluency and coherence. This supports previous research suggesting that task-based language teaching enhances fluency and coherence by providing learners with meaningful communicative opportunities (Skehan, 2009). Students who lacked exposure to oral interaction often struggled with hesitation and fragmented responses, reinforcing the need for pedagogical interventions that prioritize interactive speaking tasks.

Moreover, the analysis showed that coherence, or the ability to structure ideas logically, posed a significant challenge for many students. This finding is consistent with studies indicating that foreign language learners often struggle to produce logically structured discourse due to limited exposure to the target language's discourse norms (Richards, 2008). Effective speaking instruction should thus incorporate structured discourse strategies, such as outlining key points before speaking, to improve coherence in spoken Arabic.

Accuracy in Arabic speaking was another area of concern, with many students making frequent grammatical errors. Common mistakes included incorrect verb conjugations, misuse of prepositions, and syntactic errors, many of which were attributed to negative language transfer from students' first language. These results align with research by Ellis (2008), who found that interlanguage development is influenced by the learner's first language, requiring targeted grammatical interventions to address persistent errors.

Pronunciation challenges were particularly prominent in phonemes unique to Arabic, such as ض (dād), ط (ṭā'), and ع ('ayn). Students' mispronunciations often resulted in misunderstandings, emphasizing the importance of phonetic training in Arabic language instruction. Research by Celce-Murcia et al. (2010) highlights that explicit phonetic training and exposure to native pronunciation significantly improve learners' phonological accuracy. Implementing pronunciation drills and phonetic transcription exercises can help students overcome these difficulties.

Anxiety emerged as a major factor affecting students' speaking performance, with many learners expressing fear of making mistakes in front of peers. This finding aligns with the Foreign Language Anxiety Theory proposed by Horwitz, Horwitz, and Cope (1986), which posits that language learning anxiety can negatively impact fluency and willingness to communicate. Observational data from this study indicated that students with higher confidence levels performed better in speaking assessments, further reinforcing the link between self-confidence and oral proficiency.

To address this issue, instructors should adopt confidence-building techniques such as peer collaboration, positive reinforcement, and gradual speaking challenges (Dörnyei, 2005). A supportive classroom environment can significantly reduce anxiety and encourage students to participate more actively in oral communication tasks.

The results suggest that performance assessment is a more effective evaluation method for Arabic speaking competence compared to traditional written or multiple-choice assessments. Rubric-based assessment provided students with clear evaluation criteria and formative feedback, which helped them understand their strengths and weaknesses. This aligns with research by Bachman and Palmer (2010), who argue that authentic assessments better capture communicative competence than traditional tests.

Additionally, students reported feeling more motivated when assessed through performance-based methods. Unlike standardized tests, which often induce test anxiety, performance assessments allowed learners to focus on real-life communicative tasks, enhancing their intrinsic motivation to improve (Brown, 2004).

The findings of this study have several implications for Arabic language instruction. First, curriculum designers should prioritize interactive speaking activities that promote fluency and coherence (Nation & Newton, 2009). Speaking tasks should simulate authentic communication scenarios, such as discussions, debates, and storytelling exercises, to enhance students' ability to express themselves naturally.

Second, pronunciation training should be integrated into speaking courses, utilizing phonetic drills and speech recognition technology to help students refine their pronunciation. As research suggests, exposure to native speech patterns and targeted pronunciation exercises significantly improve learners' phonological accuracy (Gilakjani & Sabouri, 2016).

One of the key advantages of performance assessment identified in this study is the ability to provide structured and individualized feedback. Unlike traditional exams, where students receive little insight into their performance, performance assessments allow instructors to highlight specific areas for improvement. According to Black and Wiliam (1998), formative feedback plays a crucial role in language learning, as it guides learners toward self-correction and progress.

The use of detailed rubrics in speaking assessments ensures transparency and objectivity, helping students better understand their performance. Future research should explore how digital tools, such as automated speech analysis software, can further enhance feedback mechanisms in Arabic language learning.

Despite the valuable insights provided by this study, some limitations must be acknowledged. First, the sample size was relatively small, limiting the generalizability of the findings. Future studies should include larger and more diverse participant groups to strengthen the reliability of the results.

Additionally, while this study focused on qualitative analysis, incorporating a mixed-methods approach that combines qualitative and quantitative data could provide a more comprehensive understanding of Arabic speaking competence (Creswell, 2014). Future research could examine the effectiveness of different performance assessment models across various Arabic language proficiency levels.

In conclusion, this study underscores the importance of fluency, accuracy, pronunciation, and self-confidence in Arabic speaking competence. The findings highlight that performance assessment is a more effective evaluation tool than traditional exams, providing students with meaningful feedback and authentic language use opportunities. By incorporating interactive speaking tasks, pronunciation training, and structured feedback mechanisms, Arabic language programs can enhance learners' oral proficiency and confidence.

Future research should continue exploring innovative assessment models that align with communicative language teaching principles. As Arabic language education evolves, integrating performance-based assessments will be crucial in fostering real-world speaking skills among learners.

Conclusion (خاتمة)

The findings of this study emphasize the critical role of performance assessment in evaluating Arabic speaking competence. By focusing on fluency, coherence, accuracy,

pronunciation, and confidence, performance-based evaluation provides a more comprehensive and authentic measure of students' communicative abilities compared to traditional assessments. The study highlights that structured speaking tasks, formative feedback, and rubric-based evaluation significantly enhance learners' oral proficiency. Furthermore, the results suggest that reducing anxiety and fostering a supportive learning environment can positively impact students' willingness to communicate in Arabic. These findings align with existing research on communicative language teaching, reinforcing the importance of interactive and learner-centered instructional approaches.

Future research should explore broader implementation strategies for performance assessment in Arabic language programs across various educational contexts. Expanding the study to include larger participant samples and integrating quantitative measures could provide more robust insights into the effectiveness of different assessment models. Additionally, leveraging digital tools, such as speech recognition software and AI-driven feedback systems, may further enhance students' speaking development. By adopting performance-based evaluation and refining pedagogical techniques, Arabic language educators can better equip learners with the necessary skills for real-world communication, ultimately improving language acquisition outcomes.

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