

Enhancing Arabic Speaking Skills through Short-Phrase Memorization in an Islamic Boarding School

Received :	12 th June 2024	Revised :	20 th July 2025	Accepted :	10 th August 2025
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Abstract

This study examines the effectiveness of the Short-Phrase Memorization Method in enhancing Arabic speaking skills among students at Ma'had al-Akhlaq al-Karimah, Kulon Progo, Indonesia. A quantitative experimental design employing a pre-test-post-test control group was used. Fourteen boarding students were purposively selected and assigned to an experimental group receiving short-phrase-based instruction and a control group taught through conventional vocabulary memorization. Data were collected through speaking tests, classroom observation, and interviews. The findings reveal a statistically significant difference between the post-test scores of the experimental and control groups ($t = 5.691$, $p < .01$), indicating the superior effectiveness of phrase-based instruction. The experimental group showed substantial improvement in fluency, accuracy, and confidence, while the control group demonstrated limited progress. Qualitative observations further confirmed increased learner engagement, participation, and motivation throughout the intervention. These results support cognitive chunking theory and communicative language teaching principles, suggesting that learning language in functional units facilitates automaticity in speech production. The study concludes that short-phrase memorization constitutes a viable and pedagogically sound strategy for improving Arabic oral proficiency in Islamic boarding school contexts. Future research is recommended to extend the intervention to larger samples and explore integration with technology-enhanced instruction.

Keywords: Arabic Oral Proficiency; Memorization Strategies; Short-Phrase Method; Islamic Education; Experimental Design

Introduction

Speaking is a fundamental component of language proficiency and serves as the primary medium for communication in daily interaction (Hanifansyah & Mahmudah, 2024; Mahmudah et al., 2024). In Arabic language learning, speaking skill (mahārah al-kalām) plays a central role because it reflects learners' ability to apply linguistic knowledge in real communicative contexts (Daif-Allah & Al-Sultan,

2023). However, in many Islamic boarding schools (pesantren), Arabic instruction still tends to prioritize grammar, reading, and vocabulary memorization without sufficient emphasis on meaningful oral practice (Arisandi & Habib, 2025; Mahmudah, 2025; Masnun et al., 2025; Solehudin, 2024). As a result, students often experience difficulty in expressing ideas fluently despite having acquired basic lexical and grammatical knowledge (Muhammad Iqbal et al., 2025). This condition is particularly concerning given that Arabic functions not only as a communication tool but also as a gateway to Islamic knowledge and intellectual tradition (Hanifansyah et al., 2025).

In psycholinguistic terms, speaking proficiency is not merely the accumulation of vocabulary and grammatical rules but reflects the learners' ability to retrieve and assemble linguistic units in real time under communicative pressure (Bielak, 2025; Godwin-Jones, 2024; Kormos, 2023; Tagnin & Ní Ríordáin, 2021; Teng, 2023). Fluent speech production requires rapid lexical access, syntactic planning, and articulatory coordination, all of which place heavy demands on working memory (W. Levelt, 2012; W. J. M. Levelt, 1992; W. J. M. Levelt et al., 1999). When learners are trained primarily through isolated word memorization, they are cognitively burdened with constructing sentences word by word, which often results in hesitation, frequent pauses, and reduced communicative confidence (Hanifansyah, 2025; Nur Hanifansyah et al., 2024; Solehudin & Nur Hanifansyah, 2024). This cognitive overload inhibits the automatization of speech and contributes to what many learners experience as the "knowing-doing gap" in foreign language use, whereby students recognize vocabulary items but struggle to activate them in spontaneous interaction (El Majidi et al., 2024; Gupta & Prashar, 2025; Liu, 2024). Consequently, effective speaking instruction must prioritize instructional units that reduce cognitive load and facilitate proceduralization rather than merely expanding declarative linguistic knowledge.

Daif-Allah and Al-Sultan (2023) investigated the effectiveness of role-play strategies in developing Arabic dialogue skills among non-native learners at Qassim University. Using a quasi-experimental design with experimental and control groups, the study demonstrated that students taught through role-play significantly outperformed those taught through traditional methods. The findings revealed improvement not only in linguistic performance but also in self-confidence, interactive competence, and learner engagement. This study confirms that communicative and performance-based methods play a crucial role in enhancing Arabic oral proficiency. Mohd Suib and Baharudin (2025) examined Arabic prosody instruction among teachers in Malaysian Islamic schools and found that teachers' mastery of intonation, stress, and pausing significantly influenced classroom interaction and students' oral development. Although the study focused on teacher competence rather than student intervention, it highlights the linguistic dimensions underlying speaking proficiency beyond vocabulary, reinforcing the

multidimensional nature of oral competence in Arabic learning. Ali (2023) demonstrated that comprehensibility is a stronger predictor of intelligibility in L2 Arabic speech than foreign-accentedness, suggesting that spoken proficiency should prioritize communicative clarity over native-like pronunciation. His findings support the view that speaking instruction should emphasize meaning-focused production rather than accent elimination.

Albarqi (2025) demonstrated that speaking fluency develops with proficiency through measurable changes in articulation rate and pause behavior, indicating that fluency is a multidimensional construct involving breakdown, speed, and repair processes. These findings underscore the importance of targeting cognitive and production mechanisms in speaking instruction. Al-Assaf (2025) showed that integrating sense relations facilitates lexical retrieval and supports both receptive and productive language skills by organizing vocabulary through semantic networks rather than treating words as isolated units. Although the study focused on semantic frameworks rather than memorization techniques, it reinforces the cognitive basis of phrase-based learning.

Despite substantial evidence supporting communicative strategies, prosodic instruction, and semantic organization in enhancing Arabic oral proficiency, existing studies have predominantly examined speaking development from interactional, phonological, and semantic perspectives in isolation. None of the reviewed studies explicitly investigated short-phrase memorization as a cognitive-pedagogical intervention for improving speaking performance in Islamic boarding school contexts. Furthermore, previous research has not sufficiently explored how phrase-based input units may facilitate fluency, intelligibility, and automaticity in speech production as a unified instructional strategy. This gap indicates the need for an empirical investigation into short-phrase memorization as an integrated approach that bridges linguistic structure and communicative function in Arabic speaking instruction.

This study advances the current literature by conceptualizing short-phrase memorization as a functional linguistic scaffold rather than a rote learning technique. Building upon prior findings in communicative language teaching, fluency development, prosody, and semantic networking, this research introduces phrase memorization as a central pedagogical mechanism for accelerating oral production through cognitive chunking. Unlike earlier studies that focused on either classroom interaction, phonological awareness, or lexical relations, this study integrates these dimensions within a single instructional framework centered on phrase-level input. Empirically, it is among the first to test this approach in a pesantren-based setting using experimental design, thereby contributing original insight into Arabic pedagogy in Islamic education contexts and offering a scalable instructional model for enhancing oral proficiency.

One of the major challenges faced by Arabic learners is the gap between theoretical knowledge and communicative performance. Students may understand sentence structures and vocabulary items, yet hesitate to speak due to limited exposure to authentic language use, fear of making mistakes, or lack of confidence. This condition is frequently aggravated by the use of traditional teaching methods that rely heavily on rote vocabulary memorization and teacher-centered instruction. Such approaches, although useful for introducing forms, rarely provide learners with sufficient opportunities to develop oral fluency and spontaneous speaking ability.

To address this issue, alternative instructional strategies that directly support speaking practice are required. One promising approach is the Short-Phrase Memorization Method, which emphasizes the learning of meaningful expressions in communicative chunks rather than isolated words. Through repeated exposure to short phrases commonly used in daily conversation, learners may develop greater familiarity with sentence patterns, improve pronunciation, and enhance automaticity in speech production. In addition, memorizing short phrases enables students to produce language more confidently, as they rely on ready-to-use expressions rather than constructing sentences from scratch.

Although phrase-based learning and chunking strategies have been widely discussed in language pedagogy, empirical studies investigating their effectiveness in Islamic boarding school contexts remain limited. Therefore, this study aims to examine the extent to which the Short-Phrase Memorization Method can enhance students' Arabic speaking skills in a pesantren setting. Specifically, this research seeks to answer the following questions: (1) How is the Short-Phrase Memorization Method implemented in teaching Arabic speaking skills? and (2) To what extent does this method improve students' speaking performance compared to conventional vocabulary memorization techniques?

The findings of this study are expected to contribute both theoretically and practically. Theoretically, the study enriches the body of research on phrase-based instruction in Arabic as a foreign language. Practically, it provides teachers with an alternative strategy to improve speaking competence among Islamic boarding school students and offers insights for curriculum developers in designing more communicative Arabic learning programs.

Method

This study employed a quantitative experimental design using a pre-test-post-test control group approach to examine the effectiveness of the Short-Phrase Memorization Method in improving Arabic speaking skills (Creswell, 2024; Zhang & Chen, 2023). The participants were fourteen students from Ma'had al-Akhlaq al-Karimah, Kulon Progo, selected through purposive sampling and divided evenly into an experimental group and a control group based on their pre-test results. Data were collected using speaking tests, classroom observation, and semi-structured

interviews (Belina, 2023; Brevik, 2019). The experimental group received instruction using short-phrase memorization focusing on daily expressions, while the control group was taught through conventional vocabulary memorization, with both groups receiving equal instructional time over six sessions. A pre-test was administered before treatment and a post-test after the treatment to measure improvement. The collected data were analyzed using inferential statistics, specifically the t-test, to determine whether there were significant differences between the two groups at significance levels of 0.05 and 0.01.

Result and Discussion

The Results section should present findings clearly and concisely, Ma'had al-Akhlaq al-Karimah was established on 7 September 2015 in Alutak Village, Kaliagung, Sentolo, Kulon Progo by Kyai Marah Rusli (may Allah have mercy on him) and is currently led by his successor, Kyai Fawazin. Since its establishment, the institution has emphasized Qur'anic recitation and the study of classical Islamic texts (kutub al-turāth). Over time, it expanded into formal education, offering instruction from kindergarten to senior high school level. The institution is currently equipped with eleven classrooms, one laboratory, and one library, and provides instruction in core Islamic disciplines such as creed (tawhīd), jurisprudence (fiqh), Arabic grammar (nahw and ḥarf), ethics, and Qur'anic studies. The total number of students comprises 14 boarding students and 282 non-boarding students. This study focused exclusively on the 14 boarding students, who were divided equally into an experimental group and a control group.

Arabic instruction at the institution is conducted twice a week, on Tuesdays and Thursdays. Prior to implementing the intervention, the researcher obtained formal approval from the school leadership and explained the research objectives. Group assignment was based on the results of a pre-test, with seven students placed in the experimental group and seven in the control group. The experimental group received six instructional sessions using the Short-Phrase Memorization Method, while the control group was taught through conventional vocabulary memorization. In addition, a pre-test and post-test were administered to both groups. Each instructional session lasted 80 minutes and was delivered by the same instructor to maintain pedagogical consistency.

In the experimental group, instruction focused on memorizing and practicing short expressions related to daily communication, including self-introduction, classroom interaction, household activities, and travel. Students were guided to write, repeat, translate, and use these expressions in dialogue practice. In contrast, the control group learned isolated vocabulary items through translation and repetition without integrated conversational practice. The instructional design in the experimental class emphasized communicative repetition, peer interaction, and

contextual usage, whereas the control class followed a traditional memorization pattern.

Classroom observation data revealed a gradual improvement in students' participation and responsiveness in the experimental group. While initial engagement was limited, noticeable improvement emerged after the second session, with students demonstrating increased enthusiasm, confidence, and willingness to converse in Arabic. In contrast, the control group exhibited limited interaction and relied primarily on memorization without communicative application. These findings suggest that the Short-Phrase Memorization Method promotes a more interactive and motivating learning environment.

Quantitative results confirmed the effectiveness of the treatment. In the experimental group, the post-test mean score reached 91.42, compared to 65.71 in the control group. Statistical analysis using an independent-samples t-test showed a t-value of 5.691, which exceeded the critical values at both the 0.05 and 0.01 significance levels. This indicates a statistically significant difference between the two groups in favor of the experimental group. Similarly, a paired-samples t-test demonstrated a significant improvement from pre-test to post-test in the experimental group, while the control group showed no statistically meaningful progress.

Table 4. Comparison of Pre-Test and Post-Test Mean Scores between Groups

Group	N	Pre-Test Mean	Post-Test Mean	Gain
Experimental	7	75.71	91.42	+15.71
Control	7	71.42	65.71	-5.71

Table 4 presents the comparison of mean scores between the experimental and control groups before and after the treatment. The experimental group, instructed using the Short-Phrase Memorization Method, demonstrated a substantial gain in speaking performance, whereas the control group, taught with conventional vocabulary memorization, showed a decline in post-test scores. The results indicate the effectiveness of phrase-based instruction in improving Arabic speaking skills.

The implementation of the Short-Phrase Memorization Method in the experimental class demonstrated a clear and progressive impact on students' Arabic speaking performance. Although classroom observations indicated limited engagement during the initial sessions, students' responsiveness and participation increased noticeably after the second meeting, followed by steady improvement in speaking confidence and accuracy across subsequent sessions. Quantitative findings further reinforced these observations. The experimental group obtained a post-test mean score of 91.42, substantially higher than the control group's mean score of 65.71, which did not meet the institution's minimum passing criterion. Statistical testing confirmed a highly significant difference between the two groups ($t = 5.691$, $p < .01$), indicating the superior effectiveness of the phrase-based approach.

compared to traditional vocabulary memorization. Within-group analysis also revealed significant gains in the experimental group from pre-test to post-test ($t = 2.44$), whereas improvement in the control group was not statistically meaningful ($t = 2.03$). These results support phrase-based learning theory and cognitive chunking models, which posit that fluency develops more effectively when learners acquire language through meaningful units rather than isolated lexical items. Furthermore, enhanced participation and increased learner confidence observed in the experimental group align with communicative language teaching principles, suggesting that repeated exposure to functional expressions accelerates automaticity in speech production and reduces learners' anxiety. Collectively, the findings confirm that the Short-Phrase Memorization Method is both pedagogically effective and theoretically grounded for improving Arabic speaking skills in Islamic boarding school contexts.

These results support phrase-based learning theory and cognitive chunking models, which argue that fluency develops more effectively when learners acquire and practice language in meaningful units rather than through isolated vocabulary. The improvement in students' speaking performance further aligns with communicative language teaching principles, emphasizing that repeated exposure to functional expressions enhances automaticity in speech production. Therefore, the Short-Phrase Memorization Method not only strengthened linguistic accuracy and fluency but also increased students' motivation and confidence in speaking Arabic.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that the Short-Phrase Memorization Method is a pedagogically effective strategy for improving Arabic speaking skills in an Islamic boarding school context. Compared to conventional vocabulary instruction, it offers a more communicative, contextual, and learner-centered approach. The statistically significant improvement in the experimental group confirms that this method is not only theoretically sound but also practically effective in enhancing oral proficiency.

The findings of this study provide strong empirical support for the effectiveness of the Short-Phrase Memorization Method in enhancing Arabic speaking proficiency among pesantren students. Consistent with Daif-Allah and Al-Sultan's (2023) findings on the effectiveness of role-play in developing dialogue skills, the results of the present study confirm that instructional approaches emphasizing meaningful language use significantly outperform traditional vocabulary-centered methods. While role-play prioritizes situational simulation and interaction, short-phrase memorization achieves comparable gains through a different cognitive route—by equipping learners with ready-made linguistic units that reduce processing load during speech production. This suggests that communicative competence can be fostered not only through interaction but also through structured linguistic automation.

From a phonological and performance perspective, the observed improvements in fluency and accuracy in the experimental group align with Mohd Suib and Baharudin's (2025) emphasis on prosodic competence as a vital component of oral communication. Although their study focused on teacher mastery of intonation and pausing, the present findings demonstrate that students' exposure to formulaic phrases inherently supports prosodic development by embedding natural rhythm and stress patterns within memorized expressions. This indicates that phrase-level input can implicitly reinforce suprasegmental proficiency, thereby improving communicative delivery beyond lexical accuracy.

Furthermore, the results resonate strongly with Ali's (2023) conclusion that comprehensibility is a more important predictor of intelligibility than foreign-accentedness in Arabic second-language speech. Students in the experimental group showed notable improvement in clarity and coherence, despite not receiving explicit pronunciation drills. This supports the notion that speaking instruction should prioritize functional comprehensibility over accent reduction. Short-phrase memorization appears to facilitate intelligible output by enabling learners to access stable phrases rapidly, allowing greater attention to meaning construction rather than articulatory monitoring.

Similarly, the fluency gains observed in the experimental group reflect Albarqi's (2025) assertion that speaking proficiency develops through changes in articulation rate and pausing behavior. By internalizing commonly used phrases, learners demonstrated smoother transitions and fewer disruptive pauses, suggesting that memorized chunks serve as cognitive anchors during speech. This reinforces the view that fluency is not merely a function of linguistic knowledge but also of proceduralized access to linguistic material.

In addition, the cognitive benefits identified in this study substantiate Al-Assaf's (2025) argument that semantic structuring enhances lexical retrieval. Although Al-Assaf emphasized sense relations such as synonymy and antonymy, the Short-Phrase Memorization Method organizes language around functional usage rather than semantic categories. Yet both approaches share a fundamental principle: meaning is stored and retrieved more effectively when language is systematized. Phrase memorization extends this principle by embedding vocabulary within syntactic and pragmatic frames, streamlining access during real-time speech.

Collectively, these findings position Short-Phrase Memorization not as a mechanical learning technique, but as a linguistically and cognitively grounded instructional strategy. The method operationalizes insights from communicative pedagogy, prosodic theory, fluency research, and semantic cognition into a unified model of instruction. Its strength lies in bridging linguistic form and communicative function, offering learners a practical pathway toward autonomy in oral performance. Consequently, the present study not only confirms existing theories

but also expands them by identifying phrase-level memorization as a powerful catalyst for communicative development in Arabic learning environments.

Conclusion

This study provides strong empirical evidence that the Short-Phrase Memorization Method is an effective instructional strategy for improving Arabic speaking skills in Islamic boarding school contexts. By organizing linguistic input into functional phrasal units rather than isolated vocabulary items, the method significantly enhanced students' fluency, accuracy, and confidence in oral production. The results demonstrate that phrase-based learning facilitates faster retrieval, strengthens automaticity, and reduces anxiety during speech, thereby bridging the long-standing gap between grammatical knowledge and communicative performance commonly observed in pesantren-based Arabic instruction. From a theoretical perspective, the findings support cognitive chunking theory and communicative language teaching paradigms, reinforcing the view that meaningful language units serve as the primary building blocks of fluent speech. Pedagogically, the study offers a practical alternative to traditional memorization-centered approaches by encouraging contextual repetition, peer interaction, and real-use expressions. Nevertheless, the study is limited by its small sample size and single-institution scope, which restrict the generalizability of the findings. Future research should involve larger samples, longer intervention periods, and multi-site designs to validate and extend these results. Further studies may also explore the integration of short-phrase memorization with digital platforms and task-based learning models to maximize speaking development in Arabic as a foreign language. Overall, this research contributes to both theory and practice by demonstrating that phrase-based memorization is not merely a supportive technique but a central pedagogical strategy for developing oral proficiency in Arabic instruction.

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