



Analysis of Difficulties in Arabic Oral Communication among Arabic Education Students

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Abstract

The teaching of *maharah kalam* (Arabic oral communication) in Islamic higher education continues to face a persistent challenge: mastery of linguistic theory does not automatically translate into confidence and fluency in speaking. This study aims to analyze the contributing factors behind the speaking difficulties experienced by fourth-semester students of the Arabic Language Education Study Program at an Islamic higher education institution, despite their strong academic performance in *nabwu* and *sharf*. Employing a descriptive qualitative case study design, data were collected through a semi-structured written questionnaire consisting of twenty-three items across seven thematic domains, followed by in-depth oral clarification interviews with ten purposively selected informants. The data were analyzed using the Miles and Huberman interactive model, encompassing reduction, display, and conclusion drawing. The findings reveal that speaking anxiety rooted in fear of negative evaluation was the most dominant factor ($f = 10/10$), followed by over-monitoring of grammatical rules ($f = 5/10$) and cognitive overload due to habitual mental translation from Indonesian ($f = 5/10$). Additionally, the absence of *bi'ah lughawiyah* and a tense classroom atmosphere were reported by most informants ($f = 6/10$), while limited active vocabulary was the least cited factor ($f = 4/10$). These results indicate that the primary barriers are non-linguistic and mutually reinforcing. The study implies that effective oral fluency requires psychomotor automaticity developed through continuous practice in a psychologically safe environment, rather than through additional grammatical instruction.

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INTRODUCTION

Language-related study programs at Islamic higher education institutions are challenged to balance accurate mastery of linguistic rules with functional communicative competence. In Arabic language education, this challenge takes

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on a distinctive form because the scholarly traditions of *Nabwu* and *Sharf* occupy a central position as markers of linguistic correctness, while the professional demands placed on graduates increasingly emphasize the ability to speak spontaneously. The tension between structural accuracy and oral fluency has long been recognized in Arabic language teaching research, in which grammatical accuracy is often positioned as a prerequisite for speaking rather than as a by-product of habitual practice [Baroroh & Nisa, \(2022\)](#) At the same time, developments in contemporary language learning increasingly emphasize communicative confidence, self-assurance, and learners' psychological readiness as integral components of language competence [Sari, \(2022\)](#); [Kholid & Majeed, \(2025\)](#) Within this broader context, Arabic Language Education programs face the complex task of bridging mastery of linguistic theory with the demands of oral performance.

In Indonesia, this challenge becomes even more significant. Students entering Islamic higher education institutions come from highly diverse educational backgrounds. Consequently, it is common to find, within the same classroom, graduates of Islamic boarding schools who are accustomed to actively using Arabic alongside graduates of general schools who may have only recently become familiar with the Arabic alphabet (*hijaiyah*). This disparity creates difficulties for lecturers in establishing uniform teaching standards [\(Noviani & Hasan, 2023\)](#). The Arabic Language Education Study Program at Universitas Islam Negeri Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta, as one of the nationally recognized programs that accepts students from various regions, provides a clear representation of this condition. Previous studies conducted in various Arabic language learning contexts have identified persistent speaking anxiety as a significant obstacle [Naili et al., \(2024\)](#); [Hidayanti et al., \(2025\)](#) and have proposed methodological solutions through the implementation of specific teaching methods [\(Misbahul & Muadib, 2023\)](#). Research conducted in the context of Universitas Islam Negeri Sunan Kalijaga has also demonstrated a relationship between *maharah kalam* and students' self-confidence [\(Jannah & Rodiah, 2025\)](#). However, these studies have generally adopted quantitative approaches and have focused primarily on measuring symptoms from an external perspective. Consequently, there remains insufficient evidence concerning how these barriers are experienced internally by students who nevertheless demonstrate strong academic performance in theoretical language courses. This contextual gap in the evidence is particularly important because the anomaly of being "strong in theory but hindered in practice" cannot be adequately explained solely through aggregate anxiety scores.

Against this background, the present study investigates how *maharah kalam*-related difficulties are experienced by academically high-achieving students in the Arabic Language Education Study Program at Universitas Islam Negeri Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta. Specifically, the study focuses on the manifestations of speaking difficulties in the classroom, the psychological and cognitive factors underlying these difficulties, and the environmental and pedagogical conditions that may reinforce them. The study is guided by the following central question: 'To what extent does strong mastery of linguistic theory correspond to students' confidence and fluency in *maharah kalam* practice, and what factors hinder this development?' To address this question, the study identifies the forms of speaking difficulties experienced by students, investigates internal factors involving affective, cognitive, and linguistic dimensions, and maps external factors related to the language environment and classroom climate from the students' own perspectives.

Theoretically, mastery of *nahwu* and *sharf* is often positioned as a prerequisite for speaking, and limited vocabulary is commonly identified as the principal barrier to *maharah kalam*. Field conditions suggest otherwise: students holding the highest grades in theoretical courses, with three to thirteen years of Arabic learning experience, still report tremor, panic, and blankness when asked to speak spontaneously. Prior literature has not adequately explained this discrepancy, since it has largely relied on quantitative approaches that measure anxiety in aggregate from an external perspective, or has proposed methodological remedies without tracing how such barriers are experienced internally by academically high-achieving learners.

The novelty of this study lies in taking that anomalous population as its central focus, in a descriptive qualitative case study design that combines a twenty-three-item semi-structured written questionnaire across seven themes with follow-up oral clarification interviews, and in the use of representation levels (dominant, prominent, limited) as a descriptive mapping device rather than a basis for statistical generalization. This design yields a hierarchy of barriers that invert the conventional assumption, positioning anxiety as the foundational layer shared by all informants and limited active vocabulary as the least represented dimension.

The implications are twofold. Theoretically, the findings refine Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis by showing that what lowers the filter is not a generally relaxed atmosphere but the specific absence of social-evaluative threat when errors occur, while reinforcing the distinction between declarative knowledge and procedural ability. Practically, they provide a basis for lecturers and program administrators to treat oral production as an independent competence, postpone correction, weight willingness and fluency ahead of grammatical accuracy, and build *bi'ah lughawiyah* gradually, so that graduates not only understand linguistic rules but can also use them in genuine communication.

METHODS

This study employed a qualitative approach using a descriptive case study design to investigate the problems associated with *maharah kalam* among fourth-semester students in the Arabic Language Education Study Program at Universitas Islam Negeri Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta (Sugiyono, 2018). This design was considered appropriate because the primary objective of the study was not to measure or quantify the frequency of particular phenomena, but rather to explore and understand in depth the psychological experiences of students when faced with the demands of speaking Arabic. Through this approach, the researchers were able to capture the nuances of students' emotions, anxiety, and internal processes that could not be adequately explored through statistical instruments.

The research site was selected based on the position of Universitas Islam Negeri Sunan Kalijaga as one of Indonesia's leading Islamic higher education institutions and a destination for students from various regions. Therefore, the findings are expected to provide insights that may reflect broader conditions in Arabic language education. To clarify the stages of the research process, the qualitative case study procedure is presented in the following diagram.

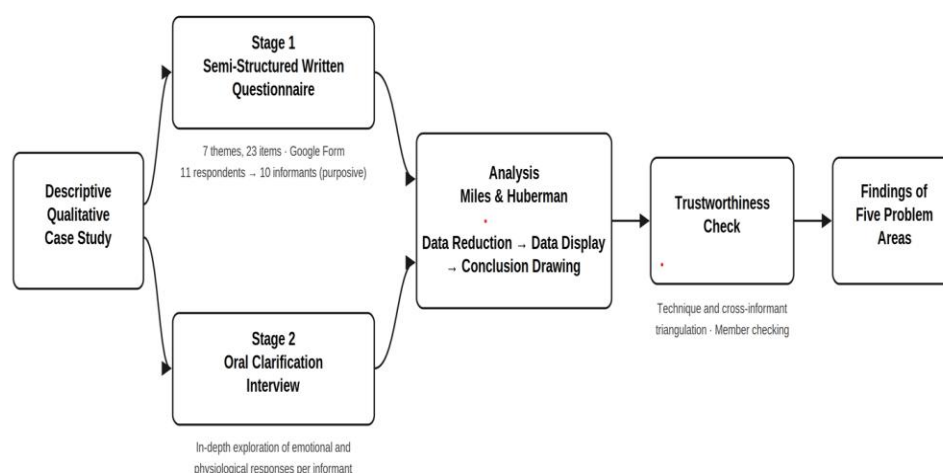


Fig 1. Research Methodology Flowchart: Qualitative Case Study

The research participants were selected using *purposive sampling*, namely the selection of participants based on specific criteria relevant to the research objectives (Anidar et al., 2026; Engkizar et al., 2025, 2026; Ibrahim et al., 2025; Ikhlas et al., 2025; Moleong, 2017; Muhlasin et al., 2026). Three criteria were established: participants had to be active fourth-semester students in Class B of the Arabic Language Education Study Program; demonstrate good academic performance in theoretical Arabic language courses such as *nahwu* and *sharf*; and exhibit signs of low self-confidence during *maharah kalam* (speaking skill) practice in class. A total of eleven students completed the distributed instrument. Following the selection process based on the three criteria, ten students were designated as research informants. This number was considered adequate because data saturation had been reached, as indicated by the recurrence of similar thematic patterns among the final informants.

The *maharah kalam* learning process was no longer taking place when the research was conducted, data collection was carried out in two complementary stages. The first stage involved semi-structured written interviews distributed through Google Forms on June 14–15, 2026. The instrument was organized into seven main themes comprising twenty-three core questions, excluding three demographic items concerning participants' names, previous school or Islamic boarding school backgrounds, and average *nahwu/sharf* grades. The seven themes consisted of: Arabic language learning background (2 items); experiences in *maharah kalam* practice to identify the actual manifestations of low self-confidence in the classroom (4 items); anxiety and motivation factors developed based on the variables in the *Affective Filter Hypothesis* (5 items); self-confidence and theoretical perfectionism related to the phenomenon of *over-monitoring* (4 items); cognitive load during speaking (3 items); the language environment to explore the absence of a *bi'ah lughawiyah* (Arabic-speaking environment) outside the classroom (3 items); and students' expectations and proposed solutions from their own perspectives (2 items). The second stage consisted of follow-up oral interview sessions with each informant to clarify and elaborate on written responses that were still relatively brief, particularly those concerning emotional and physiological experiences when students were asked to speak. These sessions also served to reconstruct classroom situations narratively through the students' direct accounts.

The collected data were analyzed using the Miles and Huberman model, which consists of three stages (Arifin et al., 2023; Aryasutha et al., 2025; Baroud et al., 2025; Engkizar et al., 2023; Khairunisa et al., 2025; Miles et al., 2014; Wulandari et al., 2024). First, data reduction was conducted by selecting relevant information from the interview results and excluding information

unrelated to the research focus. Second, data were displayed by organizing the reduced data into descriptive narratives and systematic thematic matrices. Third, conclusions were drawn by critically interpreting the data to address the research questions. As a supporting tool for data presentation, the study calculated the distribution of themes across the ten informants and classified them into three levels of representation: dominant when reported by eight or more informants, prominent when reported by five to seven informants, and limited when reported by four or fewer informants. This calculation was descriptive in nature and was not intended as a form of statistical generalization; rather, it was used to illustrate the extent to which a particular theme was shared among the informants.

To ensure data trustworthiness, the study employed two validation strategies. First, technique triangulation was conducted by comparing two different sources of data from the same informants, namely written responses submitted through Google Forms and the results of clarification obtained during the follow-up oral interviews. This comparison was intended to examine the consistency of responses while also identifying differences in nuance between written expressions, which tended to be more structured, and oral expressions, which were more spontaneous. Triangulation was also conducted across informants by comparing response patterns among the ten participants to identify the consistency of recurring themes. Second, *member checking* was conducted through direct conversations.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Academic Profile and Initial Responses of Informants

As shown in Table 1, the informants had strong academic profiles as well as extensive experience in learning Arabic. Eight out of the ten informants obtained an A or an equivalent score of 4.00 in theoretical language courses, nine had educational backgrounds in Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*) or madrasahs, and their duration of formal Arabic language learning ranged from three to thirteen years. Their initial responses to Arabic language courses were also consistently positive, with words such as *exciting*, *enjoyable*, *interesting*, and *curious* appearing across all informants. However, the final column revealed a contrasting pattern. When asked to speak spontaneously, none of the informants reported feeling prepared; instead, they described distress-related experiences using terms such as *panic*, *tremor*, *blankness*, *severe nervousness*, *freezing*, and *incoherent speech*. The contrast between academic achievement and these responses descriptively indicates a discontinuity between cognitive attainment and psychomotor readiness, and this contrast was evident across the entire sample rather than being limited to lower-achieving informants.

Table 1. Demographic, Educational Background, and Academic Profile of Informants (n = 10)

Name Code	Background	Grade	Duration	Initial Response	Response When Asked to Speak Spontaneously
I-1	PP Darul Kholidin	A	Since MI	Exciting	Afraid of making mistakes; needs to formulate sentences beforehand
I-2	SMKN 1 Magelang	4.00 (A)	3 years	Very interesting	Panic, feels inferior, chooses to remain silent or ask questions

I-3	PP Wali Songo Ngabar	3.75–4.00	5 years	Enjoyable	Negative thinking; formulates sentences beforehand
I-4	MA Al-Hikmah Kediri	4.00 (A)	13 years (since MI)	Slightly difficult in kalam, easier in writing	Tremor, blankness, sudden confusion
I-5	MA PP Al-Iman Muntilan	4.00 (A)	Since MTs	Enjoyable, easy to understand	Mildly nervous, often freezes because of fear of making mistakes
I-6	MAS Misykat Al Anwar	4.00 (A)	Since MI	Enjoyable	Confused, nervous, tense, needs a long time to think
I-7	PP Matholi'ul Anwar	4.00 (A)	Since junior high school	Enjoyable	Unable to speak; speech becomes incoherent although the ideas are well organized mentally
I-8	MAS Al-Azhar	75 (B/C)	5 years	Exciting, easy to memorize	Extremely nervous, afraid of being blamed, chooses to remain silent
I-9	PP Al-Bara'ah	80 (B/A)	8 years	Fun, impressive	Embarrassed; knows the answer but struggles to put it into words
I-10	PP Bahrul Ulum Jombang	95 (A)	6 years	Curious	Nervous, lacks confidence, afraid of criticism

These initial findings indicate that the informants' speaking difficulties cannot be explained by knowledge deficits or a lack of interest. On the contrary, they were students with highly favorable cognitive resources and positive initial attitudes toward Arabic learning. Therefore, an explanation for these difficulties must be sought in other domains, particularly affective conditions, the architecture of cognitive processing, and the environmental context in which speaking takes place.

Based on data reduction and coding, this study identified five key problems, which were divided into internal factors encompassing affective, cognitive, and linguistic dimensions, and external factors encompassing the language environment and classroom climate. Table 2 presents the distribution of these five problems before each is discussed in greater detail.

Table 2. Distribution of Five *Maharah* Kalam Problems among Informants (n = 10)

Problem Dimension	Category	Informants	f	Interpretation
Speaking anxiety and fear of negative evaluation	Internal–Affective	I-1 to I-10	10	Dominant
<i>Over-monitoring</i> and	Internal–	I-1, I-3, I-4, I-	5	Prominent

grammatical perfectionism	Cognitive	5, I-6		
Excessive cognitive load caused by mental translation	Internal–Cognitive	I-1, I-3, I-6, I-7, I-9	5	Prominent
Limited vocabulary	active Internal–Linguistic	I-2, I-4, I-5, I-6	4	Limited
Absence of <i>bi'ah lughawiyah</i> and a tense classroom climate	External	I-2, I-4, I-5, I-6, I-8, I-10	6	Prominent

Speaking Anxiety and Fear of Negative Evaluation

As shown in Table 3, speaking anxiety was the problem with the highest level of representation in this study, as its indicators were identified among all informants without exception ($f = 10/10$). The most widely distributed indicator was fear of negative evaluation, including fear of making mistakes, being blamed, being criticized, or being laughed at ($f = 7/10$), followed by somatic symptoms such as *tremor*, heart palpitations, panic, and bodily tension ($f = 6/10$). Indicators of sudden speech blockage or *blankness* were recorded among four informants, while active withdrawal from speaking turns occurred among three informants. This distribution is important to interpret in two respects. First, none of the indicators was concentrated exclusively among lower-achieving informants; *tremor*, for instance, was reported by an informant with a GPA of 4.00 and thirteen years of Arabic language learning experience. Second, anxiety appeared in multiple layers, with individual informants generally reporting more than one indicator simultaneously. This suggests that anxiety in this context was not a single symptom but rather a multidimensional phenomenon involving cognitive, physiological, and behavioral dimensions concurrently.

Table 3. Indicators of Speaking Anxiety (n = 10)

Indicator	Informants	f	Interpretation
Fear of negative evaluation by lecturers or peers	I-1, I-3, I-4, I-5, I-8, I-9, I-10	7	Prominent
Somatic symptoms (<i>tremor</i> , heart palpitations, panic, tension)	I-2, I-4, I-5, I-6, I-8, I-10	6	Prominent
Sudden speech blockage or <i>blankness</i> during speaking turns	I-4, I-5, I-7, I-9	4	Limited
Withdrawal and choosing to remain silent	I-2, I-4, I-8	3	Limited
Overall representation of the dimension	I-1 to I-10	10	Dominant

These findings indicate that the most fundamental problem impairing *maharah kalam* was not an intelligence deficit but rather a high level of foreign language anxiety concentrated on oral production. The narrative data further support this interpretation. Informant I-4, who had a GPA of 4.00 and had studied Arabic for thirteen years, stated, “There is no need to ask; obviously, I experience *tremor*... At the beginning of the semester, I was more active, but after giving several presentations, I became somewhat quieter after noticing that some classmates laughed at me.” Informant I-2, the only graduate of a vocational high school among the informants, described her panic by explaining that she chose to remain silent or ask questions because she felt that she was the least capable. She emphasized that what she experienced was not fear but rather a feeling of inferiority. Meanwhile, Informants I-8 and I-10 highlighted their concerns about reactions from both authority figures and

peers, respectively describing a fear of being blamed and a fear of receiving criticism, even though I-10 recognized that such criticism could be beneficial.

Overall, the descriptive and narrative findings indicate that students perceived *maharah kalam* practice not merely as an exercise but as a performance subject to evaluation. The case of Informant I-4 particularly illustrates how a single social incident, which the informant herself acknowledged might have involved nothing more than classmates being surprised, was sufficient to alter her participation pattern from active engagement to avoidance. This condition is consistent with Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis, which proposes that excessive anxiety, low self-confidence, and weak motivation create an affective filter that inhibits the utilization of already-acquired input (Hidayanti et al., 2025; Sari, 2022). The finding is also consistent with studies indicating that foreign language anxiety can interfere with the entire processing chain, from input uptake and storage to production (Alrashidi & Alenezy, 2026; Rajpar et al., 2026). The implication is that the quality of a language classroom cannot be assessed solely on the basis of the completeness of instructional materials; it should also consider the extent to which the classroom provides a psychologically safe environment for students to make mistakes.

Over-Monitoring and Grammatical Perfectionism

As shown in Table 4, the tendency toward over-monitoring was reported by half of the informants ($f = 5/10$) and was therefore classified as a prominent pattern. The most frequently observed indicator was conscious grammatical checking before or while producing a sentence ($f = 5/10$), followed by the tendency to formulate a complete sentence before speaking ($f = 3/10$) and a preference for written rather than spoken expression ($f = 2/10$). Two aspects of this distribution are noteworthy. First, all five informants who exhibited these indicators came from *pesantren* or *madrasah* backgrounds and had *nahwu* and *sharf* scores within the highest range. Thus, this theme was concentrated precisely among the students who demonstrated the strongest mastery of grammatical rules. Second, the frequency of occurrence, positioned exactly at the threshold of the "prominent" category, indicates that *over-monitoring* is not a universal pattern but rather a tendency characteristic of a particular learner profile. This makes the finding more specific than a merely widespread phenomenon.

Table 4. Indicators of Over-Monitoring and Grammatical Perfectionism (n = 10)

Indicator	Informants	f	Interpretation
Consciously checking grammatical rules when preparing to speak	I-1, I-3, I-4, I-5, I-6	5	Prominent
Formulating a complete sentence before speaking	I-1, I-3, I-6	3	Limited
Feeling more comfortable expressing ideas in written form	I-3, I-4	2	Limited
Overall representation of the dimension	I-1, I-3, I-4, I-5, I-6	5	Prominent

These findings indicate that grammatical mastery, which should function as a supporting resource, instead becomes an instrument of self-monitoring. Informant I-5 described the blockage she experienced by stating, "Yes, it is like *freezing*, thinking about where the mistake is... the mistakes in the sentence structure that I have spoken, including the pronouns and vowel markings." Informant I-6 reported a similar experience, explaining that she became more cautious about making mistakes, causing her to focus excessively on the

possibility of being wrong and ultimately hesitate to express what she intended to say. Informant I-3 associated syntactic formulation with internal pessimism and emphasized her preference for written expression because it provides more time to think without the fear of making mistakes in pronunciation.

Overall, these findings reveal the paradox that the strongest grammatical resources can become a significant source of difficulty for a particular group of informants. This condition is consistent with Krashen's *Monitor Hypothesis*, which distinguishes naturally acquired language that supports fluency from consciously learned rules that function primarily as an internal editor (Rajpar et al., 2026). The informants in this study appeared to rely excessively on the monitor, causing their oral production to slow down, become hesitant, and, in some cases, come to a halt. This finding reinforces studies suggesting that cognitive mastery of grammar does not automatically translate into speaking fluency (Baroroh & Nisa, 2022; Khairani et al., 2025). Thus, the issue faced by these learners is not a lack of grammatical knowledge, but rather the absence of sufficient opportunities for that knowledge to become internalized through repeated use and develop into an automatic linguistic habit.

Excessive Cognitive Load Due to Mental Translation

As shown in Table 5, excessive cognitive load was also classified as a prominent category, represented by five out of ten informants. The most prominent indicator was the condition in which ideas were already well organized in the mind but failed to be verbally expressed ($f = 4/10$), followed by the simultaneous processing of multiple components and the loss of ideas during the speaking process, which were reported by three and two informants, respectively. This distribution is meaningful in two respects. First, the most frequently reported indicator was not a lack of understanding, but rather a failure to convey existing understanding, confirming that the difficulty lies at the production stage rather than at the mastery stage. Second, all four informants represented in the highest indicator were academically high-achieving students, indicating that cognitive load in this context was not associated with weak mastery of the material.

Table 5. Indicators of Excessive Cognitive Load (n = 10)

Indicator	Informants	f	Interpretation
Ideas are organized in the mind but fail to be verbally expressed	I-1, I-6, I-7, I-9	4	Limited
Processing vocabulary, sentence structure, and grammatical rules simultaneously	I-3, I-6, I-7	3	Limited
Ideas disappear during the speaking process	I-4, I-6	2	Limited
Overall representation of the dimension	I-1, I-3, I-6, I-7, I-9	5	Prominent

These findings indicate that most informants did not think directly in Arabic. Instead, they first formulated their ideas in Indonesian and then translated them word by word. Informant I-7 described this condition by stating, "When I want to answer, I often get confused about how to reorganize what I want to say, so I become tangled up, even though the answer is already well organized in my head." Informant I-9 expressed a similar experience, namely knowing the answer but finding it very difficult to verbalize it when asked a question by the lecturer. Informant I-6 emphasized that he simultaneously thought about multiple aspects, ranging from vocabulary and sentence structure to grammatical accuracy, so that excessive thinking made him hesitant and sometimes caused him to forget what he intended to convey.

Overall, this pattern can be explained through Cognitive Load Theory and models of bilingual speech processing. Fluent speakers process three stages almost automatically: conceptualizing the intended message, carrying out lexico-syntactic formulation, and articulating the utterance (Nawal, 2018). The habit of manually translating adds unnecessary *extraneous cognitive load*, thereby reducing the remaining mental capacity available for conveying meaning and making speakers more vulnerable to hesitation and breakdowns in speech production (Zulfa et al., 2023). This finding confirms that informants' reports of having well-organized thoughts but disorganized speech should not be interpreted as evidence of weak mastery, but rather as an indication of limitations in working memory during online processing. The implication is that the intervention required is to reduce manual translation through habituation to speaking directly using already-mastered linguistic patterns, rather than adding further grammatical explanations.

Limited Active Vocabulary

As shown in Table 6, limited active vocabulary was reported by four out of ten informants and therefore fell into the limited category, making it the dimension with the lowest representation in this study. The most frequently occurring indicator was speech interruption caused by searching for an appropriate word equivalent ($f = 3/10$), followed by concerns about forgetting *mufradat* and an acknowledgment of insufficient oral production practice, each of which was reported by two informants. These figures need to be interpreted carefully. The low representation of this dimension does not mean that vocabulary is not a problem; rather, it indicates that when informants were asked to identify the roots of their difficulties, they more frequently pointed to affective and cognitive conditions than to deficiencies in their linguistic resources. Thus, the linguistic dimension in this study functions as a contributing factor rather than a determining factor.

Table 6. Indicators of Limited Active Vocabulary (n = 10)

Indicator	Informants	f	Interpretation
Speech interruption caused by searching for an appropriate word equivalent	I-2, I-5, I-6	3	Limited
Concern about forgetting <i>mufradat</i> while speaking	I-5, I-6	2	Limited
Insufficient oral production practice compared with written language activities	I-2, I-4	2	Limited
Overall representation of the dimension	I-2, I-4, I-5, I-6	4	Limited

These findings indicate that mastery of structural patterns is insufficient when learners do not have readily accessible vocabulary to fill those patterns. Informant I-2 stated that the sentence had already been formulated in their mind but could not be expressed because they did not know the corresponding Arabic equivalent, identifying insufficient *mufradat* as the reason why the words could not be produced. Informant I-5 associated their difficulty with unfamiliar vocabulary, which created the impression that they were unable to speak when asked to present their work. Informant I-4, in a reflective account, acknowledged that they had been much more accustomed to writing and translation because of limited *kalam* practice.

Overall, the complaint that a sentence has already been formulated but cannot be expressed reflects a broader pedagogical issue, namely a curriculum that places greater emphasis on grammatical analysis than on habitual

production. This condition is consistent with findings indicating that speaking difficulties often stem from limited opportunities for practice rather than from a lack of knowledge (Misbahul & Muadib, 2023; Noviani & Hasan, 2023). The lower representation of this dimension compared with the other four dimensions further reinforces the main argument of this study: that the barriers to *maharah kalam* among academically high-achieving students are predominantly non-linguistic. Therefore, increasing vocabulary memorization without providing opportunities for active use is likely to expand declarative vocabulary knowledge without necessarily transforming it into the procedural ability required for fluent speech.

Absence of *Bi'ah Lughawiyah* and a Tense Classroom Climate

As shown in Table 7, external factors were reported by six out of ten informants and therefore fell into the prominent category. The most frequently occurring indicator was the need for a non-judgmental classroom climate ($f = 5/10$), followed by the absence of an Arabic-speaking environment outside class hours ($f = 4/10$) and the perception that speaking practice sessions felt like examination situations ($f = 2/10$). Two points should be noted. First, the highest-ranking indicator in this dimension concerns a need rather than a complaint, as most informants raised it when discussing their expectations and proposed solutions. This indicates a relatively high level of diagnostic awareness among students regarding what they actually need. Second, the six informants represented in this dimension were also recorded in the anxiety dimension, suggesting that external factors function to reinforce internal factors rather than operate independently.

Table 7. Indicators of External Environmental Factors and Classroom Climate (n = 10)

Indicator	Informants	f	Interpretation
Need for a non-judgmental classroom climate	I-2, I-4, I-5, I-6, I-8	5	Prominent
Absence of a <i>bi'ah lughawiyah</i> outside class hours	I-4, I-6, I-8, I-10	4	Limited
Perception of speaking practice sessions as examination situations	I-6, I-8	2	Limited
Overall representation of the dimension	I-2, I-4, I-5, I-6, I-8, I-10	6	Prominent

These findings demonstrate that barriers originating within students are exacerbated by conditions outside themselves. Informant I-8 stated that few people in their surrounding environment spoke Arabic, described the classroom atmosphere as resembling an examination situation, and expressed a need for a more relaxed classroom environment that was accepting of mistakes. Informant I-6 explained that classes often felt like examinations because of assessment and the attention received from lecturers and peers, which made them more tense, while also noting that opportunities to use Arabic in everyday life remained limited. Informant I-4 proposed the gradual establishment of routines or designated areas in which Arabic would be required on campus and stated that they felt more challenged when a greater proportion of class time was devoted to speaking practice than to grammatical rules. Informant I-5 emphasized the importance of instructors who were not intimidating and of a supportive environment in which students did not blame one another but were still informed when errors occurred. Meanwhile, Informant I-2 expressed the need for dialogue partners who were willing to teach without passing judgment.

Taken together, these statements point to one consistent finding: what students need is not the absence of correction, but a form of correction that does not involve judgment. This finding further refines Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis by demonstrating that what lowers the affective filter is not merely a generally relaxed atmosphere, but specifically the absence of social-evaluative threat when errors occur (Kholid & Majeed, 2025; Sari, 2022). This finding is also consistent with studies identifying the absence of *bi'ah lughawiyah* as a structural barrier to the development of speaking skills (Noviani & Hasan, 2023; Hidayanti et al., 2025). Accordingly, the external dimension represents the most institutionally controllable point of intervention, as it concerns the organization of classroom climate and opportunities for language use rather than changes in students' individual dispositions.

Integrative Analysis: Interconnections among the Five Problems and Directions for Intervention

A comprehensive reading of Tables 2 through 7 reveals that the five problem areas are not randomly distributed but instead form an interconnected chain in which the factors mutually reinforce one another. The affective dimension is the most consistently represented, with full representation, while the two cognitive dimensions occupy a middle level with equal representation. The external dimension is slightly more prevalent than the two cognitive dimensions, whereas the linguistic dimension has the lowest representation. This hierarchical pattern descriptively indicates that the farther a factor is removed from the domain of knowledge and the closer it is to psychological experience, the more consistently it is experienced. In addition, the overlap among dimensions is substantial, as all informants recorded in the over-monitoring, cognitive-load, and external-factor dimensions were also represented in the anxiety dimension. Thus, anxiety functions as a foundational layer underlying the other four dimensions.

These interconnections can be understood as a recurring cycle. Anxiety about negative evaluation encourages students to intensify their monitoring of grammatical rules; excessive monitoring increases processing demands during speech; increased cognitive load raises the likelihood of speech breakdown; and such breakdowns occurring in front of the class subsequently reinforce the initial fear. The absence of an Arabic-speaking environment outside the classroom interrupts the only potential pathway out of this cycle, namely habituation through practice in low-risk situations, while limited active vocabulary reduces students' ability to sustain their speech once hesitation begins. Within this framework, the research question can be answered directly: strong mastery of linguistic theory does not necessarily correspond to confidence and fluency in speaking, because these constitute different forms of knowledge that develop through different mechanisms.

Based on this pattern, the proposed direction for intervention rests on two pillars that must operate simultaneously. The first pillar is the development of a *bi'ah lughawiyah* through three strategies: the gradual implementation of designated areas or periods in which Arabic is required, the formation of cross-background conversation groups involving students from *pesantren* and non-*pesantren* backgrounds, and the provision of exposure to authentic Arabic through media as a routine practice without academic assessment. The second pillar is the creation of a psychologically safe classroom environment through three measures: postponing correction until the speaking activity has been completed so that students are not interrupted in the middle of their utterances, initially assigning greater assessment weight to willingness and fluency before grammatical accuracy, and conducting speaking activities in

small groups to reduce the pressure of performing in front of the entire class. These two pillars are interdependent, because abundant opportunities for practice will not be fully utilized by students who continue to feel threatened, while a safe classroom climate without sufficient opportunities for practice will not produce the automaticity required for fluent speech.

CONCLUSION

This study set out to examine how *maharah kalam* difficulties are experienced by academically high-achieving students in the Arabic Language Education Study Program at an Islamic higher education institution. The findings reveal a consistent pattern: despite extensive histories of Arabic learning and high achievement in theoretical courses such as *nahwu* and *sharf*, all informants reported difficulties when asked to speak spontaneously. These difficulties were found to be multilayered and interconnected. Anxiety rooted in fear of negative evaluation emerged as the underlying dimension, while over-monitoring of grammatical rules and cognitive overload from mental translation further compounded the problem. The absence of an Arabic-speaking environment and tense classroom climate reinforced these barriers, whereas limited active vocabulary was the least represented factor. This hierarchical distribution confirms that *maharah kalam* difficulties among this group are predominantly non-linguistic in nature.

The novelty of this study lies in demonstrating that *maharah kalam* difficulties do not represent a contradiction between grammatical mastery and speaking ability, but rather a gap between mastered knowledge and opportunities for habitual practice. By focusing on high-achieving students, the study highlights an anomaly: substantial grammatical knowledge can become a burden when not accompanied by tolerance for errors and psychological safety. The implications are significant for curriculum renewal. Instruction in *maharah kalam* should shift toward models emphasizing habituation, fluency, and willingness to speak within supportive environments, postponing correction and positioning oral production as an independent competence rather than a derivative of grammar. Future research should explore the implementation of these interventions across diverse institutions to evaluate their effectiveness in enhancing students' confidence and fluency in Arabic oral communication.

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DECLARATIONS

Author contribution

Muhamad Hadli Alfurqon: data curation, writing-original draft preparation and editing, conceptualization, **Dwi Ratnasari & Dewi Hasanah:** methodology, **Ismail Fakhri:** validation, visualization, **Alif Aizuddin bin Ahmad Farikh Riaz'uddin:** supervision, software.

AI Statement

The data and the grammatical structure in this article have been validated and verified by English language experts and no AI-generated sentences are included in this article.

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Conflict of interest

The authors declare that this research was conducted without any conflict of interest in the research.

Ethical clearance

The research company has agreed to carry out the research and is willing if the results of this research are published.

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