

# Imitation Strategies in Strengthening Arabic Speaking Skills among Bachelor of Arabic Language Studies Students at UniSZA

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2026.10100542>

Received: 27 January 2026; Accepted: 01 February 2026; Published: 17 February 2026

## ABSTRACT

Speaking skills constitute one of the main components in mastering the Arabic language and represent a challenge for students in higher education institutions in Malaysia. This study aims to evaluate the effectiveness of imitation strategies in strengthening Arabic speaking skills among first-year students of the Bachelor of Arabic Language Studies programme at Universiti Sultan Zainal Abidin (UniSZA). This study employs a quasi experimental design involving two groups of students, namely a control group taught using conventional methods and a treatment group taught using a combination of conventional methods and imitation strategies. The research instrument consists of a five-point Likert scale questionnaire measuring students' perceptions of the effectiveness of this strategy. Descriptive analysis shows that the overall mean score exceeds 4.20, indicating positive student acceptance of imitation strategies in terms of vocabulary improvement, speaking confidence, and listening skills. The discussion of the study relates these findings to cognitive learning theory and social cognitive learning theory, as well as support from recent studies on the use of digital media and gamification in language teaching. This study suggests that imitation strategies should be widely implemented in the Arabic language teaching process and integrated with modern technology to enhance learning effectiveness.

**Keywords:** imitation strategies, speaking skills, Arabic language, student perception, language teaching

## INTRODUCTION

Mastery of Arabic speaking skills is one of the greatest challenges faced by students in Malaysia, particularly those who learn Arabic as a second or foreign language. As non-native speakers, students often face various constraints such as differences in phonological systems between their mother tongue and Arabic, complex grammatical structures, a lack of a conducive communication environment, and limited opportunities to interact directly with native speakers (Nurul Amalia, Norhafizah, & Mohd Rusdan, 2022; Almelhes, 2024). This situation causes speaking skills to become the weakest aspect, even though students have undergone Arabic language learning for a long period, whether through formal education in religious secondary schools, the Malaysian Higher Religious Certificate (STAM), matriculation, diploma, or degree programmes. Local studies such as those conducted by Siti Nur Zaleha (2011) and Ahmad Marwan (2011) indicate that students in higher education institutions are still unable to apply Arabic fluently in spontaneous communication, even though their theoretical mastery of grammar and vocabulary is satisfactory.

This phenomenon is also observed at Universiti Sultan Zainal Abidin (UniSZA), particularly among first-year students of the Bachelor of Arabic Language Studies programme who are enrolled in the Language Skills course (*al-Istima' wa al-Kalam*). This course emphasises listening and speaking skills as the core of Arabic communication. However, identified weaknesses include feelings of shyness and anxiety about making pronunciation mistakes, strong attachment to grammatical rules from the early stages of learning, and a lack of authentic language input that is usually obtained only through interaction with native speakers (Nadzirah Sharighah, 2011; Rosni Samah, 2013; Fadhlán, Asrori, Sutaman, & Setiyadi, 2024). These constraints limit students' courage to speak freely and hinder the development of communicative fluency.

To address this problem, teaching approaches are required that prioritise communicative fluency and confidence before focusing on formal grammatical accuracy. One potential approach is the imitation strategy, which is a language learning method based on imitating or reproducing utterances and actions that are heard or observed from models, whether teachers, peers, or native speakers of Arabic (Regina, Victoria, & Edward, 1978; Poulson, Nunes, & Warren, 1989; *Using Imitation Strategy among Excellent Arabic Language Students in Malaysia*, n.d.). In the context of Arabic language learning, this strategy allows students to imitate the intonation, pronunciation, and sentence structures of native speakers freely at the initial stage before mastering more accurate language use through grammatical learning. This approach aligns with the views of Ibn Khaldun (1987), who emphasised that language mastery requires a process of repeated listening followed by imitation, before learners practise and reinforce their mastery (Mohd Fauzi, 2012; Shaferul Hafes, 2013). It is also consistent with Bandura's (1997) social cognitive learning theory, which highlights observation and imitation of models as essential mechanisms in acquiring new skills.

The implementation of the imitation strategy in this study is divided into three main phases. The first phase, the collection phase, emphasises vocabulary acquisition and the construction of simple sentences through input obtained from teachers or audio-visual materials. At this stage, students are exposed to daily vocabulary frequently used in basic communication (Rosni Samah, 2009). The second phase, the reinforcement phase, involves sentence improvement by applying correct Arabic grammatical structures and language styles. Activities in this phase include pronunciation correction, sentence repetition, and dialogue exercises to strengthen understanding (Rohaizaf, 2013). The third phase, the implementation phase, provides opportunities for students to use the language in real communication activities such as paired dialogues, group discussions, or simulations of daily situations, alongside language error analysis that helps students improve the accuracy of their utterances (Nur Hafizah, 2015; Yasin, 2024).

This study focuses on first-year Bachelor of Arabic Language Studies students at UniSZA who are enrolled in the Language Skills course as respondents, as this group is at the early stage of undergraduate study, where their Arabic language foundation is still being formed. Respondents are divided into two groups: a control group taught using conventional methods and a treatment group taught using a combination of conventional methods and imitation strategies implemented systematically according to the three phases described. Based on the identified weaknesses in speaking skills mastery, constraints in the communication environment, and support from previous studies that demonstrate the effectiveness of interactive strategies such as the use of digital media and gamification (Mohzana, 2023; Basith et al., 2025; Tabroni, 2022), this study is conducted to evaluate the extent to which imitation strategies can enhance fluency, confidence, and accuracy in Arabic speaking skills among higher education students in Malaysia.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Previous studies have shown that imitation strategies have a positive impact on language acquisition. Jacob et al. (2024), in a systematic literature review, found that although various strategies for developing speaking skills have been discussed, imitation strategies have received relatively limited specific attention in the context of nonnative learners of Arabic. Mohzana (2023) reported that the use of podcasts as a language learning tool increases students' confidence in speaking and helps them build new vocabulary within authentic contexts. Meanwhile, Basith et al. (2025) found that gamification in language teaching not only reduces speaking anxiety but also increases pronunciation accuracy by up to 25%, confidence by 85%, and student engagement by 78%.

In addition, creative imitation studies by Al-Khateeb and colleagues (2025) emphasise the importance of form-context mapping in reducing language errors. This study supports Crystal's (1987) view that selective imitation, whereby learners choose language items relevant to their communicative needs, is more effective than total imitation. These findings are consistent with Hismanoglu's (2000) assertion that cognitive learning is dynamic in nature and allows learners to control the linguistic input they receive.

In the Malaysian context of Arabic language learning, the implementation of imitation strategies combined with digital media such as audio-visual materials, podcasts, and social media platforms has strong potential to strengthen speaking skills more effectively. This is in line with findings from recent studies that integrate traditional approaches with technology to maximise language interaction (Yahya et al., 2023).

A systematic review by Yaacob, Rahimi, and Baharudin (2024) provides a comprehensive overview of Arabic speaking skill learning strategies among non-native learners. Based on an analysis of four major databases, the authors identified that cognitive strategies and communication strategies are the most frequently used, with an emphasis on activities such as simulations, role-playing, and dialogues (Yaacob et al., 2024). They suggested the structured integration of these strategies into the curriculum to strengthen oral proficiency.

For example, a case study conducted at Pondok Modern Darussalam Gontor by Fadhlán et al. (2024) found that the combination of direct in-class strategies—such as dialogue strategies, discussions, question-and-answer sessions, and vocabulary repetition—with out-of-class activities such as punishment-based language communication successfully created an authentic Arabic language environment and enhanced students' confidence in speaking. Through interviews, observations, and documentation, the researchers found that students demonstrated significant improvement in speaking courage and active oral expression.

Mohzana (2023) further explored the effects of using podcasts as interactive materials in teaching speaking skills. In a quantitative study involving Arabic and English language learners, respondents reported increased speaking confidence and vocabulary mastery when they repeatedly imitated real-life situational dialogues. This technique is considered effective for developing conversational competence in authentic situations (Mohzana, 2023).

In the context of gamification, Almelhes (2024) examined innovative strategies that include tiered challenges, rewards, and leaderboard systems for non-native Arabic learners. The results showed an increase in intrinsic motivation and student engagement in oral language classes. This approach is said to support imitation efforts and continuous oral practice without placing excessive pressure on grammatical accuracy.

Abubakar Garba and Hassan (2024) investigated the use of AI-based applications such as ArabicPod101, Lingbe, Duolingo, and Scribe in developing oral skills among non-native learners. Through questionnaire data, students agreed that these interactive applications provide significant benefits in developing speaking and listening skills in an autonomous and flexible manner.

At university institutions such as Mohamed bin Zayed University (2025), studies related to Arabic language acquisition through imitation and emulation have been conducted. The authors found that international students who learned through environments that emulate real communication situations acquired language proficiency more quickly and systematically, consistent with classical imitation theory.

The integration of technological strategies is also supported by El Kheir et al. (2023) and Syaikhudin and Isroul Laili (2024), who demonstrated that AI-based applications for pronunciation training and immediate feedback (such as AI-based Arabic tutors) help improve pronunciation, intonation, and speaking fluency.

A study by Gün genci and Yıldız (2024) on graduates of Arabic language teaching programmes in Turkey revealed that challenges such as oral anxiety, low motivation, lack of practice, and limited cultural awareness significantly affect listening and speaking skills. They found a strong relationship between listening challenges and speaking difficulties, indicating that interventions targeting both skills need to be implemented simultaneously.

Overall, these studies support the conclusion that interactive and imitation-based strategies (including repetition, dialogue, authentic environments, and AI technology) provide concrete benefits in developing Arabic speaking skills among non-native learners. An integrated approach that encompasses structured imitation strategies, active practice, continuous exposure, and interactive feedback through technology is capable of fostering fluency, confidence, and pronunciation accuracy among learners.

## **Problem Statement**

Speaking skills constitute one of the main components in mastering the Arabic language and serve as the foundation for effective communication. However, the mastery of this skill among non-native learners in Malaysia, particularly at higher education institutions, remains at a concerning level. Previous studies have shown that although students have undergone long periods of Arabic language learning through formal education such as religious secondary schools, STAM, diploma, or matriculation programmes, they still face

difficulties in communicating fluently and spontaneously in the language (Siti Nur Zaleha, 2011; Nurul Amalia, Norhafizah, & Mohd Rusdan, 2022; Almelhes, 2024).

This problem stems from several main factors. First, students have limited exposure to authentic communication environments that allow them to practise Arabic outside the classroom (Yaacob, Rahimi, & Baharudin, 2024; Fadhlan et al., 2024). Second, an early emphasis on grammar-oriented instruction causes students to focus more on structural accuracy than on communicative fluency (Rosni Samah, 2013; Almelhes, 2024). Third, psychological factors such as shyness, lack of confidence, and anxiety about making pronunciation errors restrict students' willingness to speak (Woodrow, 2006; Phillips et al., 1999). Fourth, the lack of interactive teaching materials that can encourage repeated oral practice in an enjoyable learning environment limits the effectiveness of the learning process (Mohzana, 2023; Basith et al., 2025).

In the context of Universiti Sultan Zainal Abidin (UniSZA), this problem is also evident among first-year students of the Bachelor of Arabic Language Studies programme who are enrolled in the Language Skills (*alIstima' wa al-Kalam*) course. Although this course emphasises listening and speaking skills, most students are still unable to use Arabic spontaneously and confidently in real communication situations. This situation is attributed to the continued dominance of conventional teaching methods that are teacher-centred and provide limited opportunities for students to practise speaking in authentic contexts and to interact actively.

Several recent studies have suggested the implementation of interactive learning approaches such as imitation strategies to address this issue (Fadhlan et al., 2024; Mohzana, 2023; Yaacob et al., 2024). This strategy is based on the philosophy that learners can acquire language by imitating the utterances and styles of native speakers through repeated exposure in environments that resemble real communication situations. When applied systematically through the collection, reinforcement, and implementation phases, this strategy has the potential to build vocabulary foundations, improve pronunciation, enhance fluency, and instil confidence in students to speak. Nevertheless, empirical studies that apply this strategy within the context of Arabic language teaching in local higher education institutions, particularly at UniSZA, remain limited.

Therefore, this study is conducted to fill this gap by evaluating the effectiveness of imitation strategies in enhancing Arabic speaking skills among non-native learners. This study not only addresses existing pedagogical constraints but also examines the potential of this strategy as a more interactive, enjoyable, and effective alternative for Arabic language teaching at the higher education level.

## Research Objectives

This study is designed to achieve several specific objectives that focus on evaluating the effectiveness of the imitation strategy in enhancing Arabic speaking skills among non-native learners at Universiti Sultan Zainal Abidin (UniSZA). These objectives are formulated based on the key issues identified in the problem statement, including pedagogical constraints, students' psychological factors, and the need for more interactive and authentic learning approaches.

### 1. To evaluate the level of students' perceptions of the effectiveness of the imitation strategy in learning Arabic speaking skills.

This objective aims to obtain information on the extent to which students perceive the imitation strategy as a method that helps them build confidence, expand vocabulary, and improve pronunciation. Students' perceptions are an important indicator as they influence motivation levels and their willingness to continue using this method in the learning process (Mohzana, 2023; Almelhes, 2024).

### 2. To measure the improvement in students' speaking skills after participating in imitation strategy based learning.

This objective focuses on the empirical assessment of changes in fluency, pronunciation accuracy, intonation, and students' ability to construct correct sentences before and after the implementation of the strategy. This evaluation is in line with the recommendations of Fadhlan et al. (2024), which emphasise that interactive strategies should be supported by students' oral performance data to demonstrate their effectiveness.

### 3. To identify the challenges faced by students in applying the imitation strategy in learning Arabic speaking skills.

Although the imitation strategy offers many advantages, students may face challenges such as difficulty maintaining motivation, feelings of shyness when practising in pairs, or constraints in understanding complex language input. This objective is important for identifying actual obstacles so that improvements can be made in future implementations (Yaacob, Rahimi, & Baharudin, 2024).

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employs a quasi-experimental design to evaluate the effectiveness of the imitation strategy in enhancing Arabic speaking skills among non-native learners at Universiti Sultan Zainal Abidin (UniSZA). This approach was selected because it allows for comparison between a group of students who receive the imitation strategy intervention and a control group taught using conventional methods, without requiring full randomisation in participant selection.

### Research Design

The study is divided into two groups: a treatment group and a control group. The treatment group underwent Arabic speaking skills instruction using the imitation strategy implemented in a structured manner through three phases—namely the collection phase, the reinforcement phase, and the implementation phase—while the control group received speaking skills instruction using traditional teacher-centred approaches.

### Population and Sample

The population of this study consists of first-year students of the Bachelor of Arabic Language Studies programme at UniSZA who are enrolled in the Language Skills (*al-Istima' wa al-Kalam*) course. The study sample was selected using purposive sampling, as this group is undergoing intensive training in listening and speaking skills. A total of 84 students participated in the study and were evenly divided between the treatment group and the control group.

### Research Instruments

The main research instrument was a five-point Likert-scale questionnaire developed to measure students' perceptions of the effectiveness of the imitation strategy. The questionnaire included items related to vocabulary improvement, speaking confidence, indirect grammar acquisition, motivation, and challenges encountered when using the strategy. In addition, pre-test and post-test oral assessments were administered to evaluate changes in students' speaking skills, including fluency, pronunciation accuracy, intonation, and sentence construction.

### Implementation Procedures

The study was conducted over a period of 12 weeks. In the first week, a pre-test and an initial questionnaire were administered to all participants to measure their baseline speaking proficiency and initial perceptions. Subsequently, the treatment group underwent Arabic speaking skills instruction using the imitation strategy according to the three phases outlined below:

- **Collection Phase** – Students collected vocabulary and phrases from audio-visual materials and teacher speech models.
- **Reinforcement Phase** – Activities such as repetition, pronunciation correction, dialogue practice, and role-playing were conducted to reinforce vocabulary usage and sentence structures.
- **Implementation Phase** – Students engaged in authentic communication simulations such as paired conversations, group discussions, and virtual interactions with native speakers.

The control group followed the existing teaching syllabus, which emphasised grammar instruction and general speaking activities without the specific application of the imitation strategy.

## Data Collection

Data were collected using two methods:

- **Quantitative data** obtained from questionnaires and pre- and post-tests were analysed statistically.
- **Qualitative data** derived from open-ended feedback in the questionnaires and teacher observations during the intervention were used to gain deeper insight into students' experiences and challenges.

## Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analysed using SPSS software through descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation) to identify trends and levels of student perception. Paired-sample t-tests and independent-sample ttests were employed to examine significant differences between pre- and post-test scores as well as between the treatment and control groups. Qualitative data were analysed using thematic analysis to identify patterns of challenges, students' adaptive strategies, and elements of the imitation strategy that had the greatest impact.

## Perception of the Imitation Strategy

Table 1 shows the mean score and standard deviation of the respondents' perception of the imitation strategy.

Table 1 : Perception Of The Imitation Strategy.

No	Item	Mean	SD	Interpretation
1	The Imitation Strategy improves my Arabic vocabulary	4.48	0.75	High
2	The Imitation Strategy helps me to speak in Arabic	4.49	0.63	High
3	The Imitation Strategy strengthens my speaking skills	4.36	0.69	High
4	The Imitation Strategy strengthens my listening skills	4.33	0.7	High
5	The Imitation Strategy builds my confidence to speak in public	4.06	0.81	High
6	The Imitation Strategy allows exploration of intonation and language style	4.46	0.65	High
7	I learn new vocabulary through the Imitation Strategy	4.61	0.56	High
8	I learn vocabulary based on contextual texts and stories	4.54	0.61	High
9	I prefer imitation activities compared to traditional methods	4.05	0.83	High
10	I enjoy participating in imitation based activities	4.46	0.65	High

This section aims to evaluate the level of students' agreement regarding the effectiveness of the imitation strategy in learning Arabic speaking skills. There are ten five-point Likert-scale items (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree) that were analysed descriptively to obtain mean values, standard deviations, minimum

scores, and maximum scores. Overall, the findings indicate that all items recorded mean scores exceeding 4.0, reflecting a high level of agreement among respondents regarding the effectiveness of this strategy.

The first item, “The Imitation Strategy can improve my Arabic vocabulary,” recorded a mean score of 4.48 with a standard deviation of 0.75. This result indicates that students are confident that this strategy is able to enhance vocabulary acquisition through the process of imitation and repetition of native speakers’ utterances. The second item, “The Imitation Strategy helps me to speak in Arabic,” obtained a mean score of 4.49 (SD = 0.63), indicating the effectiveness of this strategy in assisting students to produce more fluent speech. The third item, “The Imitation Strategy can strengthen my mastery of speaking skills,” recorded a mean score of 4.36 (SD = 0.69), demonstrating that repeated practice within this strategy is able to retain vocabulary and sentence structures in students’ long-term memory.

For listening skills, the fourth item, “The Imitation Strategy can strengthen my mastery of listening skills,” recorded a mean score of 4.33 (SD = 0.70). This indicates that the strategy also has a positive effect on students’ listening skills, thereby reinforcing the relationship between listening and speaking as complementary skills. However, the fifth item, “The Imitation Strategy can build my confidence to speak in public,” recorded the lowest mean score of 4.06 (SD = 0.81). Although still at a high level, this finding suggests that psychological factors such as shyness and anxiety remain barriers to oral communication in public settings.

In terms of intonation and language style, the sixth item, “The Imitation Strategy gives me the opportunity to explore intonation and language style in Arabic,” obtained a mean score of 4.46 (SD = 0.65). This finding demonstrates that the imitation strategy plays an important role in helping students adapt their communication style according to native speaker models. The seventh item, “I am able to learn new words through the Imitation Strategy,” recorded the highest mean score of 4.61 (SD = 0.56), indicating that this strategy is highly effective in expanding students’ vocabulary.

Furthermore, the eighth item, “I am able to learn several new words based on the context of stories and texts through the Imitation Strategy,” obtained a mean score of 4.54 (SD = 0.61), emphasising the importance of context-based learning in facilitating vocabulary retention and usage. The ninth item, “I prefer the activities in the Imitation Strategy compared to traditional methods in learning Arabic language skills,” recorded a mean score of 4.05 (SD = 0.83), indicating that the majority of students favour interactive learning methods over traditional approaches, although a small proportion still prefer conventional methods. Finally, the tenth item, “I am happy to participate in the activities of this Imitation Strategy,” obtained a mean score of 4.46 (SD = 0.65), demonstrating that this strategy is capable of creating an enjoyable and positive learning environment, thereby enhancing student motivation.

Overall, the findings of this section confirm that the imitation strategy is well received by students in terms of its effectiveness in improving vocabulary, listening skills, intonation, and enjoyment in learning. Although building confidence to speak in public remains a challenge, the overall high mean scores indicate the strong potential of this strategy to be widely implemented in teaching Arabic speaking skills at the higher education level.

### Issues in Learning Arabic Speaking Skills

Table 2 shows the mean score and standard deviation of the respondents' issues in learning arabic speaking skills.

Table 2 : Issues In Learning Arabic Speaking Skills.

No	Item	Mean	SD	Interpretation
1	Traditional teaching is insufficient for speaking practice	3.55	1.12	Moderate–High
2	Feeling shy to speak	3.45	1.08	Moderate–High

3	Fear of mispronunciation when speaking	3.76	1.12	Moderate–High
4	Feeling constrained by <i>Nahu</i> and <i>Sorof</i> rules	3.88	0.94	High
5	Lack of Arabic-speaking environment	3.52	1.18	Moderate–High
6	Lack of peers for Arabic speaking activities	3.31	1.14	Moderate
7	No native speaker acquaintances	3.71	1.08	Moderate–High
8	Lack of interest in speaking Arabic	2.17	1.2	Low–Moderate

This section contains eight five-point Likert-scale items (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree) aimed at identifying the main challenges faced by students in learning Arabic speaking skills. Descriptive analysis shows that the mean scores range from 2.17 to 3.88, indicating that these issues exist at moderate to high levels among respondents.

The first item, “Traditional teaching (full explanation by the teacher) is not sufficient for practising speaking and listening skills,” recorded a mean score of 3.55 (SD = 1.12), indicating that the majority of students feel that conventional teaching methods provide limited opportunities to practise language use in authentic contexts.

The second item, “Feeling shy to speak,” obtained a mean score of 3.45 (SD = 1.08). Although not the highest, this finding confirms that affective factors such as shyness still influence students’ willingness to communicate.

The third item, “Feeling afraid of mispronouncing words when speaking,” recorded a mean score of 3.76 (SD = 1.12), indicating that anxiety about making pronunciation errors is one of the main barriers to speaking fluency, consistent with the concept of foreign language anxiety.

The fourth item, “Feeling constrained by the rules of *Nahu* and *Sorof*,” recorded the highest mean score of 3.88 (SD = 0.94). This confirms that excessive focus on grammatical rules during speaking hinders fluency and natural communication.

The fifth item, “There is no environment for speaking and listening to Arabic,” obtained a mean score of 3.52 (SD = 1.18), while the sixth item, “There are no peers for speaking and listening activities in Arabic,” recorded a mean score of 3.31 (SD = 1.14). Both findings highlight environmental constraints that reduce opportunities for consistent practice.

The seventh item, “There are no native Arabic speaker acquaintances for speaking and listening,” obtained a mean score of 3.71 (SD = 1.08), indicating that the lack of interaction with native speakers negatively affects accurate pronunciation and intonation.

Finally, the eighth item, “Lack of interest in speaking and listening in Arabic,” recorded the lowest mean score of 2.17 (SD = 1.20). Although relatively low, this finding indicates the presence of a small group of students with weak intrinsic motivation towards learning speaking skills.

Overall, the main issues identified include pedagogical constraints associated with traditional teaching methods, psychological factors such as shyness and fear of making mistakes, environmental limitations that restrict communication opportunities, and excessive attachment to grammatical rules during speaking. Although students’ general interest in Arabic speaking is high, the presence of these factors necessitates the implementation of more interactive, student-centred teaching strategies that reduce grammatical pressure at the early stages of learning, such as the imitation strategy that has been proven effective in previous studies.



## DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The findings of this study indicate that the imitation strategy has significant potential in enhancing Arabic speaking skills among non-native learners at the higher education level. The results of the questionnaire analysis show a high level of agreement regarding the effectiveness of this strategy, particularly in helping students expand vocabulary, improve pronunciation, enhance listening skills, and build confidence in communicating in Arabic. Respondents acknowledged that learning through the imitation of native speakers' utterances, whether from teachers or audio-visual materials, provided a more practical and interactive learning experience compared to traditional grammar-centred teaching methods.

This study also found that the imitation strategy has a positive impact not only on linguistic aspects but also on students' affective aspects. Through repeated imitation practice, students were able to reduce anxiety and fear of making pronunciation errors. This finding is consistent with Bandura's (1997) view that observation and imitation of models can build confidence and influence learning achievement. In the context of speaking skills, students who participated in structured imitation activities demonstrated improvements in fluency and willingness to speak in class, although psychological challenges such as shyness still persisted in certain situations.

In addition, the findings confirm that learning based on imitation strategies provides broader exposure to intonation, language style, and contextual vocabulary usage. Students reported that they not only acquired new words but also understood their use in various communication situations. This approach aligns with Ibn Khaldun's (1987) view that language acquisition occurs gradually through exposure, imitation, and reinforcement within meaningful contexts.

However, several constraints need to be addressed. These include students' strong attachment to *Nahu* and *Sorof* grammatical rules, which sometimes hinder speaking fluency, limited opportunities to interact with native speakers, and restricted Arabic-speaking environments outside the classroom. These constraints are consistent with the findings of Almelhes (2024) and Yaacob et al. (2024), who reported that environmental and pedagogical factors often pose major challenges in Arabic language acquisition among non-native learners.

Overall, the findings of this study support previous research demonstrating the effectiveness of imitation strategies in language learning (Fadhlan et al., 2024; Mohzana, 2023). This approach provides more active, enjoyable, and effective learning opportunities, particularly when integrated with supporting technologies such as podcasts, interactive videos, gamification, and automatic feedback applications (El Kheir et al., 2023; Basith et al., 2025). Therefore, the systematic implementation of imitation strategies in Arabic speaking skills instruction has great potential to enhance teaching effectiveness, overcome the limitations of traditional learning approaches, and meet the demands of 21st-century language education that emphasises interactivity and authentic learning experiences.

## CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that the imitation strategy is an effective pedagogical approach for enhancing Arabic speaking skills among non-native learners at the higher education level. The implementation of this strategy through repeated exposure to authentic language input, imitation of native speakers' pronunciation and sentence structures, and communication practice in real contexts has produced a significant positive impact on vocabulary mastery, pronunciation accuracy, speaking fluency, and students' confidence in communication.

The findings show that students responded very positively to the use of this strategy, particularly because it provides a more interactive, enjoyable, and relevant learning experience. This is consistent with the views of Ibn Khaldun (1987) and Bandura (1997), who emphasised that language acquisition occurs through continuous processes of observation, imitation, and reinforcement.

Although constraints such as excessive reliance on *Nahu* and *Sorof* grammar, limited opportunities for interaction with native speakers, and restricted Arabic-speaking environments outside the classroom remain, the imitation strategy has strong potential to overcome many of these challenges when implemented systematically and integrated with supporting technologies. This approach also aligns with the needs of 21st-

century language pedagogy, which emphasises student-centred methods, technological integration, and authentic learning experiences.

Therefore, it is recommended that imitation strategies be more widely incorporated into Arabic language teaching curricula at higher education institutions. Their implementation should be supported through teacher training, the development of high-quality audio-visual teaching materials, and the integration of technologies such as podcasts, gamification, and pronunciation feedback applications. With careful planning, this strategy can become one of the main approaches contributing to the comprehensive and effective enhancement of Arabic speaking skills among non-native learners.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENT

This research was supported by Universiti Sultan Zainal Abidin (UniSZA) under Dana Penyelidikan Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) UniSZA/2023/SoTL/015.

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