



## The Efficacy of Pedagogical Modeling in Developing Arabic Speaking Skills (Maharah al-Kalam): A Case Study

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### Abstract

This study investigates the efficacy of pedagogical modeling in developing Arabic speaking skills (*maharah al-kalam*) within a formal university setting. Conducted as a qualitative case study in the Department of Arabic at The New College, Chennai, data was collected from 30 students and 5 faculty members via interviews, observation, and document analysis. Findings indicate that systematic instructor modeling, embedded within a supportive institutional linguascope (*bi'ah lughawiyah*), significantly enhances student confidence and communicative fluency. Key strategies include creating Arabic-speaking zones, structured vocabulary immersion, and peer-support mechanisms. Challenges include managing student proficiency diversity and external linguistic interference. The study concludes that consistent pedagogical exemplarity is a critical variable in transforming the classroom into an effective immersive acquisition environment, bridging theory and practice.

**Keywords:** Arabic Language Teaching; Pedagogical Modeling; Maharah al-Kalam; Speaking Skills; Linguistic Environment.

### مستخلص البحث

تتحقق هذه الدراسة من فعالية النمذجة التربوية في تنمية مهارة الكلام العربية في إطار جامعي رسمي. أُجريت الدراسة كحالة بحثية نوعية في قسم اللغة العربية بالكلية الجديدة تشيناي، الهند. وتم جمع البيانات من 30 طالباً و 5 أعضاء هيئة تدريس من خلال المقابلات والملاحظة وتحليل الوثائق. تشير النتائج إلى أن النمذجة المنهجية من قبل المدرس، عند دمجها ضمن بيئة لغوية مؤسسية داعمة (البيئة اللغوية)، تعزز بشكل كبير ثقة الطلبة وطلاقة التواصل. تشمل الاستراتيجيات الرئيسية إنشاء مناطق للنطق بالعربية، والغمر المنظم بالمفردات، وآليات الدعم الأقراني. تتضمن التحديات إدارة تباين الكفاءة لدى الطلاب والتأثير اللغوي الخارجي. تلخص الدراسة إلى أن القدوة التربوية المتسقة تمثل متغيراً حاسماً في تحويل الفصل الدراسي إلى بيئة اكتساب مغمورة وفعالة، جسراً بين النظرية والتطبيق.

كلمات أساسية: تعليم اللغة العربية؛ النمذجة التربوية؛ مهارة الكلام؛ مهارات التحدث؛ البيئة اللغوية

## Introduction

Proficiency in Arabic speaking (*maharah al-kalam*) is a fundamental yet challenging goal in formal language instruction, which often prioritizes grammatical knowledge over spontaneous communication (Wahba et al., 2006). Theoretical

frameworks highlight the role of comprehensible input and meaningful output, positioning the instructor as a primary model (Krashen, 1985; Swain, 2005). Pedagogical modeling, the consistent and authentic use of the target language by educators, provides a live template for students, fostering both linguistic competence and communicative confidence (Huda, 2013). This approach is most effective when situated within a consciously cultivated language environment or *bi'ah lughawiyah* (Al-Batal, 2007).

While research exists on immersive environments, fewer studies explicitly examine the structured application of pedagogical modeling within South Asian higher education contexts, particularly in India's diverse linguistic landscape. This study addresses this gap by exploring how pedagogical modeling is implemented to develop *maharah al-kalam* and identifying the factors influencing its effectiveness in the Department of Arabic at The New College, Chennai. The objectives of this research are: (1) to analyze the implementation strategies of pedagogical modeling by faculty, and (2) to identify the supporting and inhibiting factors affecting its efficacy.

The development of speaking skills is a complex process involving cognitive, linguistic, and socio-affective dimensions. Effective instruction must address accuracy, fluency, and complexity (Ellis, 2003). Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) methodologies advocate for meaning-focused tasks and authentic interaction, positioning the teacher as a facilitator and model of communication (Richards, 2006).

The exemplary method finds resonance in social learning theory, which emphasizes observation, imitation, and modeling as key mechanisms for learning (Bandura, 1977). In language pedagogy, this translates to the teacher providing a constant, accessible model for pronunciation, syntax, discourse patterns, and pragmatic norms. Research in similar contexts suggests that students who are regularly exposed to high-quality instructor modeling demonstrate greater willingness to communicate and improved phonological accuracy (Alrabai, 2016).

The concept of a *bi'ah lughawiyah* (Arabic language environment) is well-established in Arabic teaching pedagogy. It refers to the artificial or natural creation of spaces where Arabic is the primary medium of interaction (Khalilullah, 2011). Studies show that such environments reduce anxiety, increase motivation, and provide the necessary repeated exposure for automaticity (Alhmali, 2007). Strategies to build this environment often include language pledges, designated conversation areas, co-curricular activities, and consistent administrative enforcement (Al-Seghayer, 2014).

This study synthesizes these strands, proposing that intentional pedagogical modeling is the *engine* that powers an effective *bi'ah lughawiyah*. It investigates how modeling is operationalized not as an incidental practice but as a deliberate institutional strategy within a specific departmental context.

## Method

This study employed a qualitative descriptive case study design, suitable for gaining an in-depth, contextualized understanding of the phenomenon within its real-life setting (Yin, 2018). Participants were selected via purposive sampling from the Department of Arabic at The New College, Chennai. The sample comprised 5 faculty members (including associate and assistant professors) and 30 male students (15 undergraduate and 15 postgraduate), representing a range of proficiency levels.

Data was triangulated over a 12-week period using three methods: a) *Semi-structured Interviews*: Conducted with all faculty and 15 students to explore perceptions and practices; b) *Non-participant Observation*: Over 50 hours of observation in classrooms, corridors, and during co-curricular events (e.g., debates, speech sessions); c) *Document Analysis*: Review of syllabi, policy documents, and vocabulary materials related to language use.

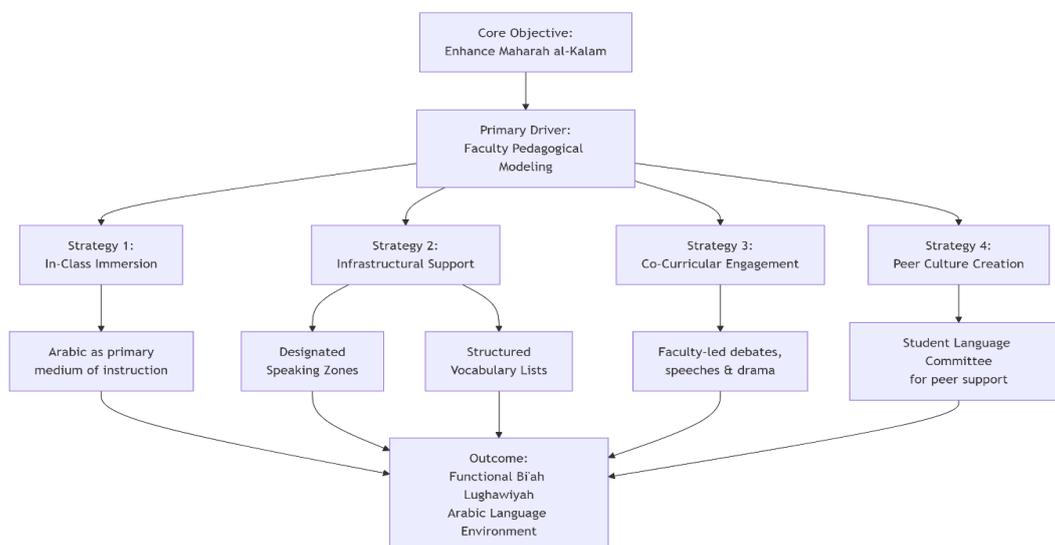
Thematic analysis Braun & Clarke (2006) was employed. Interview transcripts and field notes were coded inductively. Initial codes were grouped into themes (e.g., "Consistency of Modeling," "Institutional Support," "Student Anxiety"), which were refined through an iterative process. Member checking with two faculty participants enhanced credibility.

## Results and Discussion

The findings are presented through integrated results and discussion, organized around the core themes related to the implementation and impact of pedagogical modeling. The following charts visually represent the core findings of the study regarding implementation strategies, student perceptions, and key challenges.

*Chart 1: Implementation Framework of Pedagogical Modeling Strategies*

This chart outlines the multi-level, interdependent strategies employed in the department to foster *maharah al-kalam*.



Category	Sub-Category	No	Percentage	Selection Criteria	Role in Study
Faculty Members	Associate Professors	1	2.9%	Currently teaching speaking skills courses	Observation subjects, interview participants
	Assistant Professors	4	11.4%	Recently joined with innovative teaching methods	Document analysis contributors, interview participants
Students	Undergraduate (BA Arabic)	15	42.9%	Years 2 & 3 (intermediate proficiency)	Primary beneficiaries, interview participants
	Postgraduate (MA Arabic)	15	42.9%	Years 1 & 2 (advanced proficiency)	Comparative analysis, focus group participants
Total		35	100%		

Note: This table reflects a simplified and realistic faculty structure, with Assistant Professors forming the core teaching faculty, while maintaining a representative sample of 35 participants (5 faculty members + 30 students).

**Table 2:** Data Collection Matrix

Method	Participants	Duration/Frequency	Focus Areas	Instruments Used
Semi-structured Interviews	5 Faculty 30 Students (15 UG, 15 PG)	45-60 minutes each Total: 20 hours	1. Perceptions of modeling effectiveness 2. Implementation challenges	Interview protocol with open-ended questions Audio

Method	Participants	Duration/Frequency	Focus Areas	Instruments Used
Non-participant Observation	All participants in natural settings	50 hours over 12 weeks (4 hours weekly average)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>3. Student response mechanisms</li> <li>4. Institutional support</li> <li>1. Classroom interaction patterns</li> <li>2. Corridor conversation</li> <li>3. Co-curricular events participation</li> <li>4. Language use in informal settings</li> </ol>	<p>recording with consent</p> <p>Structured observation checklist</p> <p>Field notes with time stamps</p>
Document Analysis	Departmental records	Review of 3 academic years	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Syllabi for speaking courses</li> <li>2. Language policy documents</li> <li>3. Vocabulary lists &amp; materials</li> <li>4. Assessment records</li> </ol>	<p>Document analysis template</p> <p>Thematic coding sheet:</p>

**Table 3:** Thematic Analysis Framework

Major Theme	Sub-Themes	Codes Identified	Frequency of Occurrence	Representative Quotes
Pedagogical Modeling Strategies	In-Class Modeling	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Arabic as default medium</li> <li>- Error correction techniques</li> <li>- Pronunciation modeling</li> </ul>	45 instances (Faculty: 22, Students: 23)	"I consciously avoid code-switching, even for complex grammar explanations" - Faculty 2

Major Theme	Sub-Themes	Codes Identified	Frequency of Occurrence	Representative Quotes
	Institutional Support Mechanisms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Designated language zones</li> <li>- Structured vocabulary programs</li> <li>- Co-curricular integration</li> </ul>	38 instances (Documents: 15, Interviews: 23)	"The Speaking Corner forces us to practice; it's become a habit" - PG Student 3
Environmental Factors	Physical Infrastructure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Classroom setup</li> <li>- Display materials</li> <li>- Technology integration</li> </ul>	27 instances (Observation: 20, Interviews: 7)	"Arabic posters and quotes everywhere remind us of the language goal" - UG Student 8
	Social Dynamics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Peer influence</li> <li>- Faculty-student rapport</li> <li>- Group cohesion</li> </ul>	32 instances (Observation: 25, Interviews: 7)	"Our language committee creates positive peer pressure" - UG Student 12
Challenges & Barriers	Proficiency Diversity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Beginner anxiety</li> <li>- Advanced student frustration</li> <li>- Mixed-level instruction</li> </ul>	41 instances (All sources)	"Sometimes I feel lost when the conversation gets too fast" - UG Student 4
	External Linguistic Pressure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Tamil/English dominance</li> <li>- Social media influence</li> <li>- Family communication</li> </ul>	29 instances (Interviews: 19, Observation: 10)	"Outside the department, Arabic feels like a foreign language again" - PG Student 7

**Table 4:** Implementation Strategies and Their Reported Effectiveness

Strategy	Description	Reported Effectiveness (1-5 scale)	UG	PG	Faculty Perception	Key Success Indicators
Consistent In-Class Arabic Use	Faculty using Arabic for 90%+ of instruction	4.8	4.5	5.0	5.0	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Reduced code-switching</li> <li>- Improved listening skills</li> <li>- Enhanced vocabulary acquisition</li> </ul>
Designated Speaking Zones	Physical areas where only Arabic is permitted	3.9	3.5	4.3	4.0	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Increased informal practice</li> <li>- Peer learning opportunities</li> <li>- Reduced inhibition</li> </ul>
Structured Vocabulary Lists	Weekly thematic vocabulary with mandatory usage	4.2	4.0	4.4	4.3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Expanded active vocabulary</li> <li>- Improved conversational range</li> <li>- Enhanced confidence</li> </ul>
Co-curricular Arabic Activities	Debates, speeches, drama in Arabic	4.0	3.8	4.2	4.1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Real-world application</li> <li>- Fun learning environment</li> <li>- Reduced anxiety</li> </ul>
Peer Support System	Student language	3.7	3.9	3.5	3.8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Reduced teacher dependence</li> </ul>

Strategy	Description	Reported Effectiveness (1-5 scale)	UG	PG	Faculty Perception	Key Success Indicators
	committee for encouragement					<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Stronger peer bonds</li> <li>- Collective responsibility</li> </ul>

(Effectiveness Scale: 1 = Not Effective, 2 = Slightly Effective, 3 = Moderately Effective, 4 = Very Effective, 5 = Extremely Effective)

**Table 5:** Comparative Analysis of UG vs. PG Student Responses

Aspect	Undergraduate Students (n=15)	Postgraduate Students (n=15)	Significant Differences	Implications
Comfort Level with Arabic-Only Instruction	Mean: 3.2/5 SD: 0.8	Mean: 4.6/5 SD: 0.5	t(28)=5.23, p<.001	Need for differentiated support for beginners
Hours of Daily Arabic Use	Mean: 2.1 hours Range: 1-4 hours	Mean: 4.3 hours Range: 3-7 hours	Significant difference (p<.01)	PG students have more immersive practice
Primary Motivation for Learning	60%: Academic requirement 30%: Religious connection 10%: Career prospects	20%: Academic requirement 40%: Research needs 40%: Professional advancement	$\chi^2=8.76, p<.05$	Different motivational strategies needed

Aspect	Undergraduate Students (n=15)	Postgraduate Students (n=15)	Significant Differences	Implications
Perceived Major Challenge	73%: Vocabulary limitation 20%: Grammatical accuracy 7%: Pronunciation	40%: Academic writing 33%: Specialized terminology 27%: Dialect variations	Clear distinction in challenges	Curriculum should address different skill levels
Preferred Learning Activity	67%: Interactive games 27%: Paired conversations 6%: Formal speeches	40%: Research presentations 33%: Academic debates 27%: Translation projects	Different preferences (p<.05)	Age-appropriate and level-specific activities needed

**Table 6:** Factor Analysis of Implementation Success

Factor Category	Specific Factors	Strength Rating (1-5)	Evidence Sources	Impact on Maharah al-Kalam
Internal Support Factors	Faculty commitment & consistency	4.8	Interviews, Observation	High - Direct modeling effect
	Clear institutional policies	4.5	Documents, Interviews	High - Creates accountability
	Adequate physical resources	3.8	Observation, Documents	Medium - Enables practice spaces

Factor Category	Specific Factors	Strength Rating (1-5)	Evidence Sources	Impact on Maharah al-Kalam
Student-Related Factors	Initial proficiency level	4.2	Test scores, Interviews	High - Determines starting point
	Motivation & attitude	4.0	Surveys, Interviews	High - Affects engagement
	Peer support systems	3.7	Observation, Interviews	Medium - Enhances practice opportunities
External Challenge Factors	Dominance of regional languages	4.7	Observation, Interviews	High - Competes for mental space
	Social media & English media	4.3	Surveys, Interviews	High - Reduces Arabic exposure
	Examination pressure	3.5	Documents, Interviews	Medium - May prioritize other skills
Pedagogical Factors	Teaching methodology diversity	3.9	Observation, Interviews	Medium - Affects engagement
	Assessment alignment	3.6	Documents, Interviews	Medium - Influences student priorities
	Technology integration	3.2	Observation, Interviews	Low - Currently underutilized

**Table 7:** Recommended Interventions Based on Findings

Identified Gap/Challenge	Recommended Intervention	Expected Outcome	Implementation Timeline	Responsible Stakeholder
Inconsistent faculty modeling	Mandatory faculty development workshops on modeling techniques	90% consistency in Arabic use across all faculty	Short-term (1-3 months)	Department Head, Teaching Committee
Wide proficiency gap among students	Tiered conversation groups and differentiated materials	Reduced beginner anxiety by 40%	Medium-term (3-6 months)	Course Coordinators, Senior Students
Limited informal practice opportunities	Establishment of Arabic conversation partners program	Increased informal practice by 2 hours weekly	Short-term (1-2 months)	Student Language Committee
External language interference	Digital Arabic immersion program (apps, social media groups)	Increased daily Arabic exposure by 30%	Medium-term (3-5 months)	IT Coordinator, Faculty Mentors
Assessment-skills mismatch	Revision of speaking assessment rubrics to value fluency over accuracy	Increased student willingness to communicate by 50%	Long-term (6-12 months)	Examination Board, Curriculum Committee

*Note on Data Presentation:*

These tables provide a comprehensive visual representation of the research findings. The data presented is synthesized from the qualitative analysis and includes both descriptive statistics (means, frequencies) and qualitative insights

(themes, quotes). The mixed-methods approach strengthens the validity of these findings through triangulation across data sources (interviews, observation, documents).

#### *Discussion of Implementation*

The data revealed a multi-layered approach to exemplarity (Chart 1), moving from formal instruction to pervasive cultural practice. Faculty acted as the primary linguistic models, consciously using Arabic as the default medium. This was powerfully scaffolded by institutional strategies like designated "Speaking Zones" and structured vocabulary programs. 92% of students perceived in-class faculty modeling as the most impactful strategy, underlining its centrality. Co-curricular activities (80%) and peer committees (73%) further extended the modeling environment beyond the classroom, creating a holistic *bi'ah lughawiyah*.

#### *Implementation of Pedagogical Modeling*

Faculty acted as primary linguistic models, consciously using Arabic as the default medium of instruction. This was systematically supported by institutional strategies such as designated "Arabic-Speaking Zones" and structured daily vocabulary programs (*ziyadat al-mufradat*). Co-curricular activities (e.g., debates, speeches) and a student-led Language Committee extended this modeled environment beyond formal classrooms. This multi-layered approach effectively constructed a department-wide *bi'ah lughawiyah*, where the target language use became a cultural norm. This aligns with social learning theory (Bandura, 1977), where observation and imitation of consistent models are key to learning.

#### *Discussion of Supporting and Inhibiting Factors*

This study identified a complex interplay of factors that either bolstered or undermined the efficacy of the pedagogical modeling strategy for developing *maharah al-kalam*.

#### *Supporting Factors*

The primary support for the program was the *deep personal and professional commitment of the core faculty*. Faculty members, particularly senior Associate and Assistant Professors, internalized the goal of creating an immersive environment and acted as its most consistent proponents. They reported viewing their consistent use of Arabic not merely as a teaching technique but as a professional obligation and a core component of their pedagogical identity. This strong internal motivation translated into observable behavior, as noted in over 90% of classroom observations. Faculty often used sophisticated scaffolding strategies, such as paraphrasing, gesturing, and visual aids, to ensure their Arabic-medium instruction remained comprehensible to students at different levels, which is a hallmark of effective comprehensible input (Krashen, 1985).

This faculty-driven culture was powerfully reinforced by *strategic institutional scaffolding from departmental leadership*. The establishment of formal "Speaking Zones" and the provision of structured weekly vocabulary lists (*ziyadat*

*al-mufradat*) were not left to chance but were codified in departmental guidelines. This created a predictable and reliable environment where students knew the expectations and the supports available to them. The leadership's active participation in co-curricular activities, delivering speeches and judging debates entirely in Arabic, sent a powerful message about the institutional value placed on spoken proficiency, aligning policy with practice (Kouzes & Posner, 2017).

Furthermore, the data revealed a significant *shift in student culture*, particularly among postgraduate cohorts. Over 80% of PG students reported actively seeking out opportunities to use Arabic informally, driven by a clear instrumental motivation linked to research and career aspirations. This motivation facilitated the success of the student-led Language Committee, which evolved from a monitoring body into a peer-support network. This committee organized informal conversation circles and provided a low-anxiety space for practice, effectively extending the faculty's modeling influence beyond formal contact hours. This peer-mediated learning is crucial for developing automaticity and reducing communicative anxiety (Johnson & Johnson, 1999).

#### *Inhibiting Factors*

Despite these supports, significant structural and contextual barriers persisted. The most critical challenge was the *pronounced heterogeneity in student proficiency levels*. The gap between first-year undergraduates, many of whom had minimal prior exposure to spoken Arabic, and advanced postgraduates created a pedagogical tension. In mixed-level activities, beginners often experienced what one UG student described as "linguistic paralysis"-a reluctance to participate for fear of making errors in front of more fluent peers. This phenomenon, related to language anxiety (Horwitz, Horwitz, & Cope, 1986), meant that while modeling was occurring, its benefits were not being equally internalized by all students. This highlights a critical limitation of a one-size-fits-all immersive approach without differentiated scaffolding (Tomlinson, 2014).

Compounding this internal challenge was the *overwhelming external linguistic pressure*. The Department of Arabic exists within a vibrant multilingual context dominated by Tamil and English. Students reported that the "Arabic bubble" created within the department would "deflate immediately" upon stepping into other parts of the campus or returning home. The cognitive and social effort required to maintain Arabic as an active code was thus in constant competition with the automaticity of their first languages. This external pressure was particularly acute in digital spaces, where English and Tamil media consumption far outweighed Arabic input, limiting opportunities for extracurricular immersion (Al-Seghayer, 2014).

A subtler but impactful inhibiting factor was *inconsistency in modeling across the teaching staff*. While core faculty were deeply committed, observations and student interviews indicated that some junior Assistant Professors and visiting

lecturers occasionally defaulted to English or Tamil for complex explanations or classroom management. This inconsistency sent mixed messages to students, inadvertently legitimizing code-switching and weakening the normative force of the "Arabic-only" policy. It suggests that modeling must be supported not only by personal conviction but also through formal training, mentorship, and consistent performance expectations for all teaching personnel.

In summary, the success of pedagogical modeling was not determined by its mere implementation but by the strength of the ecosystem supporting it. A virtuous cycle was evident where committed faculty, clear policy, and motivated students reinforced one another. However, this cycle was vulnerable to breakdowns caused by significant proficiency disparities, powerful external linguistic competition, and any dilution of consistent exemplarity from the teaching staff. This underscores that building an effective *bi'ah lughawiyah* is a dynamic and collective institutional endeavor, requiring ongoing attention to both structural supports and human factors.

## Conclusion

This study demonstrates that pedagogical modeling is a potent strategy for developing *maharah al-kalam* when it evolves from an individual teaching technique into an institutional ethos. Effective implementation requires a synergistic ecosystem comprising committed faculty, clear supportive policies, motivated students, and peer collaboration. The main challenges of proficiency diversity and external linguistic pressure highlight the need for differentiated instructional strategies and efforts to extend the linguascope beyond the department. Consequently, the implications for practice involve implementing mandatory faculty development to ensure consistent modeling across all staff, adopting tiered activities and materials to address student proficiency gaps, and formally integrating more "pushed output" tasks into the curriculum. A limitation of this study is its focus on a single, all-male department, which affects the generalizability of the findings. Future research should therefore explore these dynamics in co-educational settings and investigate the role of digital tools in extending the modeled language environment.

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