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### Enhancing Muhadatsah Skills Through Structured Question Cards in Arabic Language Learning

Herdah<sup>a,1</sup>, Raodhatul Jannah<sup>b,2\*</sup>, Rara Mutiah<sup>c,3</sup>, Rahmatika<sup>d,4</sup>

<sup>a</sup>Institut Agama Islam Negeri Parepare, Indonesia

<sup>b</sup>Institut Agama Islam Negeri Parepare, Indonesia

<sup>c</sup>Institut Agama Islam Negeri Parepare, Indonesia

<sup>d</sup>Institut Agama Islam Negeri Parepare, Indonesia

<sup>1</sup>[herdah@iainpare.ac.id](mailto:herdah@iainpare.ac.id), <sup>2</sup>[raodhatuljannah@iainpare.ac.id](mailto:raodhatuljannah@iainpare.ac.id)\*, <sup>3</sup>[rarasudarsono23@gmail.com](mailto:rarasudarsono23@gmail.com),  
<sup>4</sup>[rahmatikabohari@gmail.com](mailto:rahmatikabohari@gmail.com)

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#### ABSTRACT

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##### \*Corresponding

##### Author:

Name: Raodhatul Jannah

Email:

[raodhatuljannah@iainpare.ac.id](mailto:raodhatuljannah@iainpare.ac.id)

e.ac.id

Phone/WA:

085340279219

This study aims to evaluate the effectiveness of structured question cards in improving the muhadatsah (Arabic speaking) skills of students in the Arabic Language Education Study Program at IAIN Parepare. The research was motivated by the limited fluency and coherence observed in students' oral production, indicating the need for an instructional medium that provides systematic scaffolding. A quasi-experimental design employing a pre-test and post-test without a control group was used, involving 20 students as participants. In addition to oral tests, data were collected through classroom observations across four treatment sessions and interviews to examine supporting and inhibiting factors throughout the learning process. Results revealed a significant improvement in students' speaking skills, with mean scores rising from 64.3 to 82.7, representing a 28.6% increase. A t-test value of 9.84, which exceeded the critical value at the 0.05 significance level, confirmed the significant impact of the media on muhadatsah development. The study also found that a supportive classroom environment, systematically designed cards, and collaborative practice served as major facilitating factors, whereas variations in initial ability and limited class time posed challenges. These findings suggest that structured question cards constitute an effective and practical instructional medium for enhancing learners' oral communicative performance in Arabic language education.

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##### Keyword

Structured Question; Muhadatsah Skills; Arabic Language Learning

#### ملخص

يهدف هذا البحث إلى تقييم فاعلية استخدام بطاقات الأسئلة المهيكلية في تنمية مهارة المحادثة العربية لدى طلاب برنامج تعليم اللغة العربية في الجامعة الإسلامية الحكومية بباري باري، وقد انطلق من ملاحظة ضعف مستوى الطلاقة والتماسك في الأداء الشفهي لدى الطلاب، مما يدل على الحاجة إلى وسيلة تعليمية تقدم دعماً تدريجياً ومنظماً لتنمية

هذه المهارة. اعتمد البحث على المنهج شبه التجريبي بتصميم الاختبار القبلي والبعدي دون مجموعة ضابطة، وشملت العينة ٢٠ طالباً. وجمعت البيانات من خلال الاختبارات الشفهية، والملاحظة الصفية خلال أربع جلسات تطبيقية، إضافة إلى المقابلات للكشف عن العوامل الداعمة والمعيقة أثناء عملية التعلم. أظهرت النتائج وجود تحسن ملحوظ في مهارة المحادثة لدى الطلاب، حيث ارتفع متوسط الدرجات من ٦٤.٣ إلى ٨٢.٧ بنسبة زيادة بلغت ٢٨.٦٪. كما أظهرت نتائج اختبار (t) أن القيمة المحسوبة بلغت ٩.٨٤، وهي أعلى من القيمة الجدولية عند مستوى الدلالة ٥.٠٠٠، مما يدل على وجود أثر دال إحصائياً لاستخدام هذه الوسيلة في تنمية مهارة المحادثة. كما بينت النتائج أن البيئة الصفية الداعمة، والتصميم المنهجي للبطاقات، والتعلم التعاوني من أبرز العوامل الميسرة، في حين شكّلت تفاوت مستويات الطلاب الأولية وضيق الوقت المخصص للتدريس بعض التحديات. وتشير هذه النتائج إلى أن بطاقات الأسئلة المهيكلّة تُعد وسيلة تعليمية فعّالة في تحسين الأداء التواصلّي الشفهي في تعليم اللغة العربية.

البطاقات الأسئلة المهيكلّة؛ مهارة المحادثة؛ تعلم اللغة العربية

الكلمات الرئيسية

## INTRODUCTION

The development of higher education in the global and digital era demands innovative learning approaches capable of fostering students' communication competencies in more creative, adaptive, and collaborative ways (Gunawan et al., 2025; Pare & Sihotang, 2023). The shift in educational orientation from teacher-centered to student-centered learning has positioned language proficiency, particularly in foreign language learning, as one of the key indicators of success in modern education (Devanti & Muftiana, 2023). In the context of Arabic language learning at Islamic higher education institutions, speaking ability or muhadatsah constitutes a core competency that determines the extent to which students are able to use language as an instrument of academic and social communication (Kurniawati et al., 2025).

Nevertheless, various studies have revealed that students' muhadatsah skills in many State Islamic Higher Education Institutions (Perguruan Tinggi Keagamaan Islam Negeri / PTKIN) remain below expected standards (Fatoni, 2017; Alenawati, 2023). Common obstacles include students' passivity, lack of self-confidence, fear of making mistakes, and limited opportunities to practice spontaneous conversation (Nurdini, 2025; Ritonga et al., 2021; Ritonga et al., 2021). Preliminary observations conducted in the Arabic Language Education Study Program at IAIN Parepare indicate that many students still rely heavily on memorized dialogues and demonstrate limited ability to develop natural conversations. This condition is further exacerbated by the limited variety of instructional strategies that actively and contextually encourage communicative interaction.

These challenges highlight the need for a learning model capable of providing scaffolding, linguistic stimuli, and structured opportunities for language exploration. One potentially effective medium is the use of structured question cards (Rahmadani et al., 2025). This medium not only assists students in initiating conversations based on specific topics, but also encourages language improvisation, meaning negotiation, and more dynamic two-way communication. From the perspective of interactional theory and Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), structured questions function as scaffolding tools that enable students to move from their actual level of competence toward their potential competence through social interaction (Mariyono, 2024).

Several previous studies have demonstrated that question-based media can enhance participation and self-confidence in language learning (M. Ritonga et al., 2024). A study conducted by Nursakina Husen, for instance, found that the use of question cards improved students' speaking fluency and motivation in English language learning (Husen, 2024). Similarly, Nurdiniawati reported that card-based media enriched students' vocabulary mastery and facilitated communication in Arabic language learning (Nurdiniawati, 2020). However, studies specifically examining the effectiveness of structured question cards in muhadatsah learning within the context of Islamic higher education, particularly at IAIN Parepare, remain very limited.

This research gap provides a significant foundation for developing a more innovative muhadatsah learning model that aligns with students' needs. The use of structured question cards is considered relevant because it simplifies the communication process, provides clear thematic direction, and simultaneously allows students the creative freedom to construct conversations independently (Erta Mahyudin et al., 2025). This strategy is consistent with the principles of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), which positions interaction as the core of language learning while emphasizing authentic contexts and the functional use of language (Putri & Az-Zahra, 2024).

Accordingly, this study aims to empirically examine the implementation and effectiveness of structured question cards in improving students' muhadatsah skills and to identify factors influencing their use in Arabic language learning. To provide a clearer focus, this study seeks to answer the following research questions: (1) How is the implementation of structured question cards in muhadatsah learning? (2) To what extent do structured question cards improve students' muhadatsah skills? (3) What are the supporting and inhibiting factors affecting the implementation of structured question cards in muhadatsah learning? The findings of this study are expected to contribute to the development of innovative Arabic language learning practices within PTKIN environments while offering an applicable, communicative, and replicable learning model as a best practice for improving Maharah al-Kalam in Islamic higher education institutions.

## METHOD

This study employed a quantitative approach using a pre-experimental one-group pre-test–post-test design. This design enabled the researcher to measure changes in students' muhadatsah abilities before and after the implementation of structured question card media. The research procedure was conducted in three stages: administering a pre-test, implementing the treatment over four instructional meetings, and administering a post-test with topics of equivalent difficulty.

The participants consisted of 20 students from the Arabic Language Education Study Program at IAIN Parepare. They were selected through purposive sampling based on several criteria established in consultation with the course lecturer: (1) enrollment in the Maharah al-Kalām al-Asāsiyah course during the research period, (2) regular attendance throughout the instructional sessions, and (3) willingness to participate in all stages of the study, including the pre-test and post-test. These criteria were applied to ensure that

participants had comparable exposure to the treatment and completed the entire research procedure.

The research instrument was a speaking skill (muhadatsah) test assessed using an adapted Harris scoring rubric, which covered pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar, fluency, and comprehension. Each aspect was scored to obtain the total score of each student in both the pre-test and post-test (Leeming & Harris, 2025; A. W. Ritonga, 2021).

In addition to the speaking assessment rubric, the study employed structured question cards as the primary instructional media during the treatment sessions. The cards were designed thematically and arranged progressively from simple to more complex conversational prompts to facilitate students' speaking practice.



**Figure 1.** Examples of Structured Question Cards Used in Muhadatsah Learning

Each card contained guiding questions related to students' daily communication contexts, such as self-introduction, daily activities, hobbies, and personal experiences. The structured sequence of questions was intended to assist students in maintaining conversational flow and reducing hesitation during oral interaction activities.

The data were analyzed through several stages. First, individual scores were calculated using percentage scores derived from the total points obtained. Second, the mean scores were calculated to identify the general tendency of students' speaking ability. Third, the scores were classified into the categories of Excellent, Good, Fair, and Poor based on predetermined score intervals. Furthermore, the percentage distribution of each category was calculated to describe students' achievement profiles. Improvement in students' abilities was analyzed by comparing the mean scores of the pre-test and post-test. Finally, a paired-sample t-test was employed to determine the significance of differences between students' scores before and after the treatment. The decision-making criterion stated that the difference would be considered statistically significant if the obtained t-value exceeded the critical t-table value at the predetermined significance level.

Prior to conducting the paired-sample t-test, the assumptions of normality were examined using the Shapiro–Wilk test because the sample size was relatively small ( $n = 20$ ). A significance value greater than .05 indicated that the data were normally distributed.

Since the study employed a one-group pre-test–post-test design, homogeneity of variance testing was not required because the comparison involved paired observations from the same participants rather than independent groups.

## RESULTS&DISCUSSION

### 1. The Implementation of Structured Question Card Media in Muhadatsah Learning

The implementation of structured question cards was conducted over four meetings in the Maharah al-Kalām al-Asāsiyah course involving 20 students. Each session was designed to provide gradual speaking practice through thematic cards related to students’ daily lives. A summary of the treatment implementation is presented in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Summary of the Muhadatsah Treatment Using Structured Question Cards

Meeting	Activity Focus	Sample Topics	Card	Main Observation Results
1	Introduction to the media and basic practice	Self-introduction, hometown, routines	daily	Students appeared nervous but were assisted by the structured flow of questions
2	Pair-speaking fluency practice	Daily activities, campus life		Students became more confident and responded more quickly
3	Small-group conversation practice	Personal experiences		Interaction became more dynamic, and sentence variation increased
4	Advanced speaking practice	Family, hobbies, place descriptions		Speech flow became clearer, and long pauses decreased

Observational findings from the first meeting indicated that several students were still hesitant when speaking; however, the structured questions on the cards helped them maintain the flow of conversation. During the second meeting, topics closely related to students’ daily experiences enabled them to respond more quickly and confidently. The lecturer actively provided corrective feedback regarding pronunciation and sentence structure.

In the third meeting, small-group activities created more dynamic interaction. Students who had initially been passive gradually became more involved because the cards provided clear conversational boundaries and direction. By the fourth meeting, noticeable improvements were observed in speaking clarity, fluency, and vocabulary accuracy. Thus, the implementation of this medium assisted students in developing ideas, reducing pauses, and maintaining conversational focus during muhadatsah practice.

The findings demonstrate that speaking instruction developed through gradual stages can reduce students’ cognitive burden in producing Arabic sentences. The sequential structure of the questions functioned as scaffolding that enabled students to initiate conversations with greater confidence. This support allowed students to focus more on

linguistic aspects such as vocabulary, sentence patterns, and pronunciation without having to simultaneously generate topics spontaneously.

The sequence of activities, beginning with basic exercises, pair work, small-group interaction, and concluding with consolidation activities, also enriched the quality of classroom interaction. These varied learning activities made the instructional process more communicative and natural. The transition from intensive lecturer guidance toward semi-autonomous interaction in small groups indicates that the effectiveness of the cards lies not only in their content but also in the manner in which they are implemented.

The lecturer's role throughout the learning process was highly influential in ensuring the successful use of the cards. Immediate feedback enabled students to correct pronunciation and grammatical errors quickly and contextually. Such intervention ensured that the cards functioned optimally as communicative support tools rather than merely static instructional guides.

The use of question cards also succeeded in creating a more active and inclusive classroom atmosphere. Structured questions provided opportunities for all students to participate in classroom interaction. This increased interaction suggests that the medium helped reduce language anxiety and improve students' willingness to speak, two factors that frequently hinder foreign language learning.

Nevertheless, the study also found that several students still depended heavily on the sequence of questions provided on the cards. This finding indicates the need for further strategies to train students' improvisational and spontaneous speaking abilities. In other words, structured question cards are effective as guided-speaking media, but they should be combined with freer communicative activities to foster greater language independence.

In addition to improving speaking fluency, the question cards also contributed to the enhancement of students' linguistic accuracy. Guidance in the form of interrogative prompts and key phrases helped students construct more organized and grammatically appropriate sentences. This strengthened students' grammatical competence, which serves as the foundation for developing more complex oral expression.

Meaning negotiation processes also emerged during the use of the cards, particularly when students requested clarification or repeated questions during interaction. Such activities reflect the principles of communicative language learning, in which meaning is constructed through interaction. The learning rhythm likewise became more stable because the cards minimized long pauses and reduced students' confusion when initiating conversations.

Furthermore, structured question cards facilitated differentiated learning within heterogeneous groups. Higher-proficiency students tended to elaborate their responses more extensively, while beginner-level students were still able to participate using simpler sentence patterns. This condition created a more inclusive classroom environment. In the long term, the use of question cards trains students to develop communicative thinking habits, such as maintaining conversational flow, expanding discussion topics, and sustaining dialogue. Therefore, this medium not only supported classroom learning sessions but also contributed to the development of sustainable speaking competence.

These findings are consistent with the study conducted by Ahmad Fawaid, which revealed that question-guided media can reduce language anxiety and increase oral participation in mixed-level classrooms (Fawaid & Damayanti, 2024). Similarly, research by Arsad and Irma confirmed that scaffolding through structured questioning effectively enriches students' verbal responses while maintaining interactional focus (Bahri & Idris, 2017). Over time, the use of question cards also cultivates communicative thinking habits, including maintaining conversational continuity, developing discussion topics, and sustaining interaction. Consequently, the media not only facilitates classroom learning activities, but also contributes to the long-term development of speaking competence.

2. The Effectiveness of Structured Question Card Media in Improving Muhadatsah Skills

The effectiveness of the media was examined by comparing students' pre-test and post-test results. The pre-test was conducted without the use of question cards, while the post-test was administered after four treatment sessions using structured question cards.

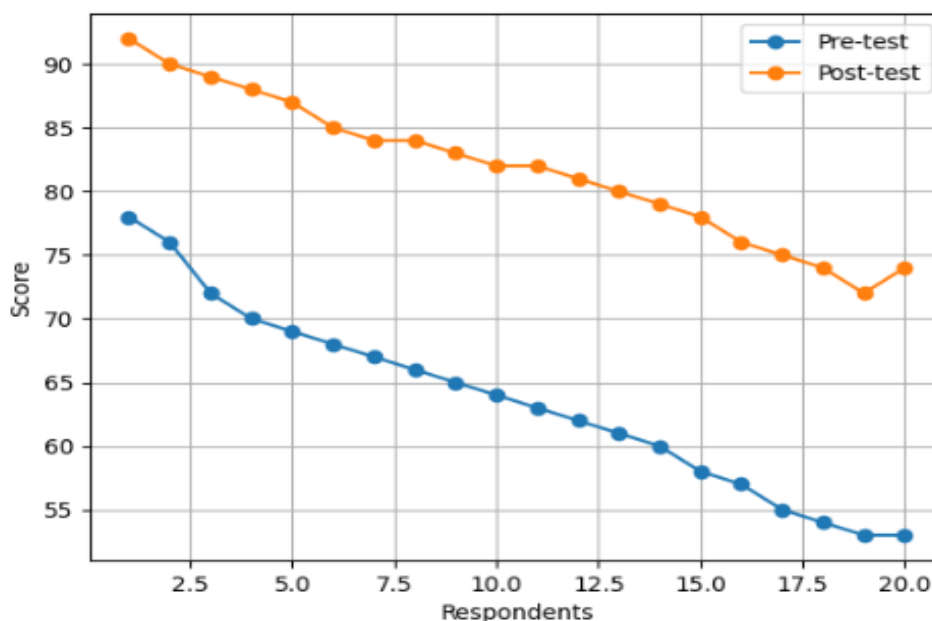


Figure 2. Comparison of Pre-test and Post-test Scores

Table 2. Learning Outcome Improvement

Pretest	Posttest	Score Increase	Percentage Improvement
64.3	82.7	+18.4 points	+28.6%

Table 3. Hasil Uji Normalitas Shapiro–Wilk

Variable	Statistic	df	Sig.
Pre-test	0.966	20	0.670
Post-test	0.972	20	0.806

Prior to conducting the paired-sample t-test, the normality of the data distribution was examined using the Shapiro–Wilk test. The results indicated that the pre-test scores were normally distributed ( $W = 0.966$ ,  $p = 0.670$ ), as were the post-test scores ( $W = 0.972$ ,  $p = 0.806$ ). Since both significance values exceeded 0.05, the assumption of normality was satisfied. Therefore, the paired-sample t-test was considered appropriate for further analysis.

**Table 4.** Impact of the Treatment on Students' Performance

Pretest Mean	Posttest Mean	Improvement	Statistical Result
64.3	82.7	+28.6%	$t(19) = 9.84$ , Significant

Since the obtained t-test value was higher than the t-table value, it can be concluded that there was a statistically significant difference between the pre-test and post-test scores. These quantitative findings were further supported by observational data gathered throughout the treatment sessions. Students demonstrated improvements in organizing ideas coherently, reducing speaking pauses, and using thematic vocabulary more appropriately. The question cards also helped reduce linguistic anxiety, enabling students to focus more on sentence structure rather than struggling to generate spontaneous topics. From the perspective of language acquisition theory, the medium contributed to the development of comprehensible output by encouraging students to elaborate responses based on guided stimuli.

In the short term, the use of question cards created a stable practice rhythm and strengthened students' speaking automatization. In the long term, the medium helped cultivate communicative thinking patterns, as students became accustomed to maintaining conversational flow during interaction. Therefore, the increase in test scores reflects not only improvements in content mastery, but also the development of more systematic language-use strategies.

Overall, both the statistical results and qualitative findings indicate that structured question cards were effective in significantly improving students' muhadatsah skills. This medium may therefore be considered a practical instructional tool that can be replicated in Arabic language classrooms with diverse proficiency levels. These findings are consistent with the study conducted by Fadilah and Jauhari, which reported that structured questioning strategies were able to enhance oral participation while simultaneously reducing speaking anxiety among Arabic language learners (Fadhilah & Jauhari, 2025). Accordingly, structured question cards can be regarded as a promising instructional medium for broader implementation in Arabic language learning contexts with heterogeneous student abilities.

### 3. Results and Discussion: Supporting and Inhibiting Factors in the Implementation of Muhadatsah Learning Using Structured Question Cards

The implementation of muhadatsah learning using structured question cards revealed a combination of supporting and inhibiting factors that influenced the effectiveness of the instructional process. The findings were obtained through classroom observations conducted during four treatment sessions as well as interviews with several

students. The following analysis summarizes how classroom conditions, media characteristics, social interaction, the lecturer's role, and students' personal factors contributed to both the success and challenges of the learning process.

The most dominant supporting factor was the presence of a conducive learning environment. A comfortable classroom, adequate lighting, and a relaxed atmosphere made students feel safer and more confident in attempting to speak without excessive fear of correction. This finding aligns with the perspective of Elaine Horwitz, who argues that anxiety is a significant variable affecting students' speaking performance. This affective aspect was proven to help reduce language anxiety, as reflected in one student's statement: "When the classroom atmosphere is relaxed, I feel more confident speaking even though I still make mistakes sometimes."

Another important supporting factor was the systematic and relevant design of the question cards. Questions arranged progressively from simple to more complex forms enabled students to follow the conversational flow more easily, preventing them from losing direction during dialogue. This finding is consistent with the concept of scaffolding, which explains how structured support can assist learners in progressing from guided performance toward language independence. The relevance of the topics to students' daily lives, such as family, campus activities, hobbies, and personal experiences, helped activate prior knowledge and accelerate vocabulary retrieval processes. One student explained:

"The questions are clear and sequential, so I can simply follow the flow from beginning to end."

Social interaction also emerged as a significant supporting factor. Pair and small-group activities created opportunities for students to assist one another when facing difficulties in selecting vocabulary or constructing sentences. This collaborative situation fostered a more communicative classroom atmosphere and enabled students to receive immediate feedback from peers. Such interaction is closely related to Lev Vygotsky's socio-constructivist approach, which emphasizes that language development is accelerated through social support within the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). This was reflected in a student's comment:

"When working in pairs or groups, it feels easier because friends can help me if I forget certain words."

Another supporting factor was the lecturer's active role and the use of supplementary instructional media. Clear guidance, immediate correction, and continuous motivation from the lecturer helped build students' sense of security and willingness to take linguistic risks. The use of visual and audio media during the learning process also enriched the communicative context, enabling students to understand situations more easily and respond to questions more naturally.

On the other hand, several inhibiting factors were also identified during the implementation process. The most prominent obstacle was the variation in students' initial language proficiency, particularly in vocabulary mastery. This challenge indicates the need for differentiated instructional strategies in heterogeneous classrooms, such as providing

supporting vocabulary lists or sentence models before speaking practice. Students with lower proficiency levels required more time to understand questions, formulate responses, or initiate conversations. As one student stated:

“Sometimes I understand the question, but I still get confused about how to begin my answer.”

Another obstacle was limited instructional time. The relatively short duration of each meeting prevented some students from exploring the question cards in greater depth. This finding suggests that several students had not yet fully developed the ability to improvise without explicit structural support. Some students still appeared dependent on the cards and had not reached an optimal level of speaking spontaneity. One student remarked:

“If the cards are not available, I still feel confused about what to say.”

In addition, technical constraints related to unequal access to supporting technology also affected the continuity of practice outside the classroom. Limited access to devices or internet connectivity reduced some students’ opportunities to review materials or increase language exposure independently. Psychological factors such as shyness, anxiety, and introverted personality traits also emerged as internal barriers that reduced the intensity of students’ participation, even though the cards had already helped lower their cognitive burden during speaking activities.

Overall, the findings indicate that supporting factors were more dominant than inhibiting factors, particularly in terms of the learning environment, the structured media design, and collaborative classroom dynamics. The obstacles encountered were primarily technical and linguistic in nature and can potentially be addressed through extended practice time, more intensive language input, and strategies aimed at increasing students’ self-confidence. These findings confirm that structured question cards constitute a relevant, effective, and easily integrated medium for muhadatsah learning across various levels of student proficiency. The findings are consistent with the study conducted by Segaf Baharun, which emphasized that guided question-based media can strengthen oral interaction while simultaneously minimizing language anxiety (Baharun, 2023; Al Muhibbin et al., 2025). Therefore, structured question cards can be considered an effective and adaptable instructional medium for enhancing muhadatsah learning in diverse classroom contexts.

One limitation of this study is the absence of a control group, as the research employed a one-group pre-test–post-test design. Consequently, several threats to internal validity, including history effects, maturation, and testing effects, cannot be entirely ruled out. Improvements observed in students’ muhadatsah performance may have been influenced not only by the structured question cards but also by external learning experiences or increased familiarity with the assessment procedure. Therefore, future studies are encouraged to employ a quasi-experimental or true experimental design with a control group to provide stronger causal evidence regarding the effectiveness of structured question cards.

## CONCLUSIONS

This study demonstrates that the use of structured question cards is effective in improving students' muhadatsah skills through the provision of clear scaffolding, the reduction of speaking anxiety, and the enhancement of fluency and coherence in language production. The gradual question model, ranging from simple to more complex forms, provided instructional support that enabled students to practice speaking in a more structured manner, while pair and small-group interactions strengthened the social dimension of oral language acquisition. Therefore, this study contributes theoretically and pedagogically to the development of Arabic language learning strategies, particularly in strengthening communicative competence through guided interactive activities.

The findings also open broader opportunities for future implementation, including the development of card-based instructional modules, adaptation into interactive digital formats, and integration with improvisational speaking exercises to foster greater language spontaneity. Future studies may focus on examining the effectiveness of structured question cards on specific linguistic aspects, such as syntactic complexity or phonological accuracy, as well as conducting longitudinal investigations to evaluate the sustainability of students' speaking improvement after the media are no longer used. Accordingly, this study not only provides empirical justification for the effectiveness of structured question cards but also establishes a foundation for developing more systematic and sustainable innovations in muhadatsah learning.

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