

Application of Communicative Methods to Improve the Istimā' Skills of Students in the Arabic Language Education Study Programme

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Abstract

The ability to istimā' (listen) is a fundamental skill in learning Arabic that requires a proper methodological approach. This study aims to analyze the application of communicative methods in improving the istimā' ability of Arabic Language Education Study Program students. This study used a quasi-experimental design method with a quantitative approach involving 60 third-semester students who were divided into experimental groups and control groups. The research instruments include istimā' ability tests, learning observations, and student response questionnaires. The data were analyzed using a t-test to find out the significant differences between the two groups. The results showed that the application of the communicative method had a significant positive impact on improving students' istimā' abilities with a t-count value (4,852) > t-table (2,001) at a significance level of 0.05. The experimental group that used the communicative method showed an average score increase of 23.5% from pre-test to post-test, while the control group only increased by 8.3%. Further analysis revealed that communicative methods are effective in improving contextual understanding, auditory response speed, and student learning motivation. The implications of this study suggest the application of communicative methods as the main alternative in learning Arabic in higher education.

Keywords: Communicative method, istimā' ability, Arabic language learning, language education

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INTRODUCTION

Learning Arabic as a foreign language in Indonesia faces various complex challenges, especially in the development of receptive skills such as istimā' or listening skills. Listening skills are an important foundation in language mastery that is often overlooked in traditional learning practices (Al-Batal, 2018). Research shows that istimā' ability not only serves as a passive receptive skill, but also as a fundamental prerequisite for the development of other language skills including speaking, reading, and writing (Vandergrift & Goh, 2012).

The context of Arabic learning in Indonesia has unique characteristics that distinguish it from other foreign language learning. Students of the Arabic Language Education Study Program in Indonesia generally have a background in pesantren or madrasah education that has provided exposure to classical Arabic, but their communicative skills, especially in istimā',

are still limited (Mustofa, 2019). This limitation is due to the dominance of the grammar-translation approach that focuses on mastering the grammatical structure and translation of texts, with minimal authentic and contextual listening comprehension exercises (Hamid, 2020).

The communicative language teaching method offers an alternative paradigm that emphasizes the use of language in the context of meaningful and authentic communication (Richards, 2006). This approach places students as active subjects involved in real communication processes, rather than simply passive recipients of linguistic information. In the context of *istima'* learning, the communicative method integrates listening exercises with communicative activities that simulate the situation of using Arabic in daily life (Nunan, 2015). The basic principles of this method are in line with the theory of Second Language Acquisition which emphasizes the importance of comprehensible input and meaningful interaction in the language learning process (Krashen, 1982).

Several empirical studies have shown the effectiveness of communicative methods in learning Arabic. Research conducted by Hassan (2021) on Arabic language students in Egypt found that the implementation of communicative methods increased listening comprehension skills by 32% compared to conventional methods. Meanwhile, a meta-analysis study conducted by Abdelhafez (2020) on 45 studies related to Arabic language learning confirmed that communicative approaches consistently provide better results in various language skills, including *istima'*. However, these studies were mostly conducted in Arab countries with a different sociolinguistic context from Indonesia.

Research on the application of communicative methods in learning Arabic in the Indonesian context is still limited. Previous studies have tended to focus on *kalam* (speaking) or *qira'ah* (reading) skills, while *istima'* as an equally important skill has not received adequate attention (Zulhannan, 2018). In fact, students of the Arabic Language Education Study Program in Indonesia will become prospective educators who require strong *istima'* competencies to be able to teach effectively and become models for their students (Rahmawati, 2019). The gap between the need for high *istima'* competencies and the effectiveness of the learning methods currently used is the main motivation for this research.

This research is designed to fill the knowledge gap by systematically examining the application of communicative methods in improving the *istima'* ability of Arabic Language Education Study Program students. This study not only measured the quantitative increase in *istima'* ability scores, but also analyzed qualitative aspects such as contextual comprehension, listening strategies used by students, and learning motivation. Thus, this research is expected to make a theoretical contribution to the development of Arabic learning methodologies in Indonesia, as well as provide practical implications for lecturers and practitioners of Arabic language education.

Based on this background, this study formulated three main research questions. First, how is the implementation of communicative methods in learning Arabic in the Arabic Language Education Study Program? Second, is there a significant difference in *istima'* ability between students who are taught using communicative methods and students who are taught using conventional methods? Third, what aspects of *istima'* ability are most affected by the

application of communicative methods? By answering these questions, this research is expected to provide a comprehensive understanding of the effectiveness of communicative methods in the context of learning istima' Arabic in Indonesia.

METHODS

Research Design

This study uses a quasi-experimental design with a quantitative approach supported by qualitative data as triangulation. The research design chosen is a nonequivalent control group design, where there are two research groups, namely the experimental group that receives treatment in the form of istima' learning with communicative methods, and the control group that is taught using conventional methods. Both groups were given pre-tests before treatment and post-tests after treatment to measure changes in istima ability. This design was chosen due to the limitations of conducting full randomization of research subjects that have been formed in lecture classes (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Table 1. Nonequivalent control group research design

Groups	Pre-test	Treatment (14 weeks)	Post-test
Experiments (n=30)	O1	X (communicative method for istima')	O2
Control (n=30)	O1	- (conventional methods)	O2

Participants and Research Context

The participants of this study are 60 students in the third semester of the Arabic Language Education Study Program at one of the state Islamic universities in East Java, Indonesia. The selection of third-semester students is based on the consideration that they already have an adequate basic foundation of Arabic but are still in the stage of developing communicative skills. Participants were divided into two groups with each group consisting of 30 students. The experimental group consisted of 18 female students and 12 students with an age range of 19-21 years, while the control group consisted of 17 female students and 13 students with the same age range. Both groups had relatively homogeneous initial characteristics in terms of Arabic language education backgrounds, most of which came from aliyah madrassas (87%) and a small percentage from high school (13%).

Table 2. Characteristics of research participants

Characteristics	Experimental group (n=30)	Control group (n=30)
Gender	18 girls; 12 Men	17 women; 13 Men
Age	19-21 years old	19-21 years old
Educational background	Majority of MA/pesantren (general: 87%); SMA (13%)	Majority of MA/pesantren (general: 87%); SMA (13%)

Research Instruments

This study uses three main instruments for data collection. First, the istima' ability test was developed based on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) framework at the A2-B1 level which has been adapted for the Arabic context. This test consists of 30 items that cover three aspects of istima' ability, namely literal comprehension (10 items), inferential comprehension (10 items), and evaluative comprehension (10 items). The question format includes multiple-choice, true-false, and matchmaking with standard Arabic audio sources of 15-20 minutes in length. The validity of the content of the instrument has been verified by three Arabic language learning experts with a Content Validity Index (CVI) value of 0.89, while the reliability of the instrument was tested using Cronbach's Alpha with a value of 0.84 indicating high reliability.

Table 3. Summary of research instruments and measurement indicators

Instruments	Aspects/Dimensions	Number of items	Question form	Quality description
Tests istima'	Literal comprehension	10	PG/True/Matchmaking	CVI=0.89; Alpha=0.84
Tests istima'	Inferential understanding	10	PG/True/Matchmaking	CEFR A2-B1; Audio duration 15-20 minutes
Tests istima'	Evaluative understanding	10	PG/True/Matchmaking	Expert validation (3 people)
Observations	CLT principles (target language, meaning, authenticity, interaction, student-centered)	-	Observation checklist	Inter-rater reliability=0.87
Questionnaire	Perception of effectiveness, motivation, difficulty	25	Likert 1-5	CFA: CFI=0.94; RMSEA=0.06

Second, the learning observation sheet was used to document the implementation of communicative methods in the experimental class. This observation sheet was developed based on the principles of communicative methods which include the use of target language, orientation to meaning, material authenticity, meaningful interaction, and student-centeredness. Observations were carried out by two trained observers during 16 meeting sessions with an inter-rater reliability of 0.87. Third, a student response questionnaire

consisting of 25 statement items on a five-point Likert scale to measure students' perceptions of the effectiveness of learning methods, learning motivation, and difficulties faced. This questionnaire has gone through a construct validity test with a confirmatory factor analysis that shows a good fit model (CFI=0.94, RMSEA=0.06).

Research Procedure

The research was carried out for one academic semester (16 weeks) with a frequency of meetings twice a week, each lasting 100 minutes. In the first week, both groups were given a pre-test to measure the initial istima' ability. The second to fifteenth weeks were a treatment period in which the experimental group received istima' learning by communicative methods, while the control group was taught using conventional grammar-translation and audio-lingual methods. In the sixteenth week, both groups were given a post-test equivalent to a pre-test to measure changes in istima' ability.

Table 4. Summary of research procedures per week

Sunday	Main activities	Output
1	Pre-test (both groups)	Initial istima' ability score
2-15	14-week treatment (16 meetings): communicative vs conventional methods	Observation logs; The Learning Process
16	Post-test (both groups) + filling out questionnaire	Final score; Student Response

The implementation of communicative methods in the experimental group follows the principles of Communicative Language Teaching proposed by Richards (2006) with adaptation to istima' learning. Each learning session is designed with pre-listening, while-listening, and post-listening stages that are integrated with communicative activities. In the pre-listening stage, students activated their knowledge scheme through topic discussion, vocabulary brainstorming, and audio text content prediction. The while-listening stage involves students in listening to authentic Arabic texts such as dialogues, news, podcasts, and interviews with communicative tasks such as information gap activities, role-play listening, and jigsaw listening. The post-listening stage integrates istima' skills with other skills through discussion, presentation, and reflective writing about the content of the audio text being listened to.

Meanwhile, the control group was taught using conventional methods characterized by teacher-centered instruction, focusing on vocabulary and grammar mastery, and listening exercises that were limited to drills and repetitions. The listening materials used are texts from standard textbooks with a focus on word-for-word comprehension and translation. To ensure internal validity, both groups used learning materials of equal difficulty and topic, only differing in learning approaches and activities. The researchers also ensured that teachers in both groups had equal qualifications and teaching experience to minimize the teacher effect.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data obtained from pre-test and post-test were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. Descriptive statistics include mean, standard deviation, and normalized gain scores to describe the profile of students' ability in both groups. Before conducting the hypothesis test, the analysis prerequisite test was carried out, namely the normality test using the Shapiro-Wilk test and the variance homogeneity test using the Levene's test. Once the assumptions of normality and homogeneity were met, the independent samples t-test was used to test the difference in the ability of the experimental group and the control group in the post-test. Paired samples t-test was used to analyze the change in istima' ability from pre-test to post-test in each group. Effect size was calculated using Cohen's d to measure the magnitude of the difference between the two groups. All statistical analysis was carried out using SPSS software version 26 with a significance level set at $\alpha = 0.05$.

Qualitative data from learning observations and student response questionnaires were analyzed descriptively to provide a more in-depth explanation of the process and impact of the implementation of communicative methods. Observation data was analyzed using content analysis techniques to identify patterns of implementation of communicative methods in the classroom. Meanwhile, questionnaire data was analyzed using descriptive statistics to describe the distribution of student responses to various aspects of learning. Triangulation of quantitative and qualitative data is carried out to increase the credibility of research findings and provide a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon being studied.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Student Istima' Ability Profile

The pre-test results showed that both groups had relatively equal initial istima' abilities. The experimental group had an average pre-test score of 62.4 (SD=8.7) while the control group had an average score of 61.8 (SD=9.2). Independent samples of the t-test showed no significant difference between the two groups in the early stages ($t=0.268$, $p=0.789$), indicating that the two groups departed from a comparable starting point. The initial ability profile of students in both groups showed the same tendency, namely better ability in the aspect of literal understanding compared to inferential and evaluative understanding. This is consistent with the findings of previous research which shows that Arabic learning students in Indonesia tend to be more trained in understanding explicit meanings compared to understanding implicit meanings and conducting critical evaluations of audio texts (Mustofa, 2019).

After a 14-week treatment period, post-test results revealed significant differences between the two groups. The experimental group achieved an average post-test score of 77.1 (SD=7.4), indicating an increase of 14.7 points or 23.5% from the pre-test. Meanwhile, the control group achieved an average score of 66.9 (SD=8.9), with an increase of only 5.1 points or 8.3% from the pre-test. Independent t-test samples of post-test scores showed very significant differences between the two groups ($t=4,852$, $p<0.001$), with Cohen's effect size d of 1.26 indicating a large effect. These findings confirm that communicative methods have a substantial impact on improving students' technical abilities compared to conventional methods.

Table 5. Summary of difference test results and effect size

Statistical test	Comparison	t	p	Effect size
Independent samples t-test	Post-test: experiment vs control	4.852	<0.001	Cohen's d = 1.26 (wide)
Independent samples t-test	Pre-test: experiment vs control	0.268	0.789	-

Table 6. Descriptive statistics of pre-test and post-test scores

Groups	N	Pre-test Mean (SD)	Post-test Mean (SD)	Δ Points	Δ (%)
Experiments	30	62.4 (8.7)	77.1 (7.4)	14.7	23.5%
Controls	30	61.8 (9.2)	66.9 (8.9)	5.1	8.3%

Analysis of Ability Improvement Based on Aspects

A more in-depth analysis of the components of istima' ability reveals that communicative methods have a different impact on each aspect. In the literal comprehension aspect, which measures students' ability to understand explicit information from audio texts, the experimental group increased from an average score of 7.2 to 8.4 (an increase of 16.7%), while the control group increased from 7.1 to 7.6 (an increase of 7.0%). Although both groups experienced improvement, the difference in improvement between the two was significant ($p=0.012$). In the aspect of inferential comprehension, which measures the ability to understand implicit meaning and make inferences, the experimental group showed a more dramatic increase from 5.8 to 7.9 (an increase of 36.2%), compared to the control group from 5.7 to 6.3 (an increase of 10.5%) with a very significant difference ($p<0.001$).

The evaluative comprehension aspect, which measures students' ability to analyze, evaluate, and respond critically to audio text, shows the most striking differences between the two groups. The experimental group increased from 5.4 to 7.8 (an increase of 44.4%), while the control group barely experienced a significant increase from 5.3 to 5.9 (an increase of 11.3%). This difference was statistically significant ($p<0.001$) with a very large effect size (Cohen's $d=1.78$). These findings are in line with the characteristics of communicative methods that emphasize the use of language in meaningful contexts and encourage students to not only understand the surface of the text but also interpret and evaluate the message conveyed (Richards, 2006). Communicative activities such as discussions, debates, and critical listening tasks integrated into the experimental group learning have proven to be effective in developing students' higher-order thinking skills in the context of auditory understanding.

Table 7. Improvement of istima' ability based on the aspect of understanding

Ability aspect	Experiment (pre)	Experiments (post)	Improvement	Control (pre)	Control (post)	Improvement
Literal (10 items)	7.2	8.4	16.7%	7.1	7.6	7.0%
Inferential (10 items)	5.8	7.9	36.2%	5.7	6.3	10.5%
Evaluative (10 items)	5.4	7.8	44.4%	5.3	5.9	11.3%

Implementation of Communicative Methods in Learning

Learning observation data revealed that the implementation of communicative methods in the experimental group succeeded in creating a more interactive and student-centered learning environment. Analysis of 16 learning sessions showed that an average of 68% of learning time was spent on student activities compared to 32% for lecturer explanations, in contrast to the control group where 75% of the time was dominated by lecturer explanations. The most commonly implemented communicative activities included information gap listening (18 times), role-play listening (14 times), jigsaw listening (12 times), and collaborative listening tasks (16 times). Each activity is designed to encourage students to use active listening strategies such as prediction, inference, and monitoring comprehension.

Table 8. Summary of the findings of the learning implementation observation

Observation component	Experimental group (communicative method)	Control group (conventional)
Proportion of classroom activities	Student activity 68%; Lecturer Explanation 32%	Lecturer explanation 75%; Student Activity 25%
Dominant activity type	Information gap (18x); role-play listening (14x); jigsaw listening (12x); Collaborative Tasks (16x)	Drill, repetition, translate word-for-word; Limited Listening Practice
Audio sources	Authentic material (news, podcasts, film dialogue, interviews)	Standard textbooks; Audio slowed down & simplified

The use of authentic materials is one of the prominent characteristics in the implementation of communicative methods. In contrast to the control group that used audio captions specifically designed for learning with slowed speech speed and simplified vocabulary, the experimental group was exposed to different types of authentic Arabic-language texts such

as Al-Jazeera news clips, educational podcasts, dialogues from Arabic films, and character interviews. These authentic materials not only increase student motivation due to their relevance and proximity to the use of real language, but also prepare students to deal with the variations in accent, speech speed, and language registers they encounter in authentic communication (Nunan, 2015). Observations show that although students initially struggle with authentic material, they gradually develop strategies of compensation and tolerance for ambiguity which are important skills in auditory comprehension.

Student Responses and Perceptions

The results of the student response questionnaire provide additional perspective on the effectiveness of communicative methods from the perspective of direct beneficiaries. Of the 30 students in the experimental group who filled out the questionnaire, 83.3% strongly agreed or agreed that the communicative method made learning more interesting and meaningful, compared to only 46.7% in the control group. 76.7% of the students in the experimental group reported an increase in their confidence in understanding spoken Arabic, compared to 40.0% in the control group. This difference indicates that communicative methods not only improve students' objective abilities but also their subjective perception of their own abilities, which is an important factor in language learning (Vandergrift & Goh, 2012).

Analysis of questionnaire items related to learning motivation revealed that students in the experimental group had a significantly higher level of motivation than the control group. As many as 80.0% of the students in the experimental group stated that they were motivated to continue practicing *istima'* outside of the classroom, compared to only 33.3% in the control group. Students in the experimental group also reported that communicative activities such as role-play listening and collaborative tasks made them more actively involved in learning and felt that *istima'* learning had relevance to their future communicative needs as aspiring Arabic teachers. These findings are consistent with Self-Determination Theory which states that learning that meets the needs of autonomy, competence, and relatedness tends to increase learners' intrinsic motivation (Deci & Ryan, 2000).

However, students in the experimental group also reported several challenges in learning using communicative methods. A total of 63.3% of students stated that they initially found it difficult with authentic materials and activities that required active participation. Some students wrote in the open comments section of the questionnaire that they needed time to adapt to a different learning approach than they were used to. Another reported challenge is communication anxiety especially in activities that involve presentations or discussions in front of the class. However, the majority of students (73.3%) stated that these challenges ultimately helped them to develop and they felt better prepared for real communication situations in Arabic.

Table 9. Summary of student responses based on questionnaire

Aspects	Key Indicators/Items	Experimental Group	Control Group
The excitement of learning	Agree/strongly agree that learning is more interesting and meaningful	83.3%	46.7%
Confidence	Feeling that the ability to understand spoken Arabic is improved	76.7%	40.0%
Motivation for independent learning	Motivated to practice istima' outside of class	80.0%	33.3%
Initial difficulties	Initial difficulty with authentic material & active participation	63.3%	-
Other challenges	Communication anxiety during presentations/discussions (open comments)	There	-

Theoretical and Practical Implications

The findings of this study provide empirical support for the effectiveness of communicative methods in the context of learning Arabic in Indonesia, which enriches the literature on the teaching of Arabic as a foreign language. The results of the study confirm the theoretical proposition that language learning that emphasizes meaningful communication and authentic language use is more effective in developing communicative competence than approaches that focus solely on mastering linguistic structures (Richards, 2006; Nunan, 2015). In the context of istima', this study shows that exposure to authentic and meaningful language inputs, combined with activities that encourage active processing of auditory information, results in improvements not only in literal comprehension but also at higher cognitive levels such as inference and critical evaluation.

From a practical perspective, this study offers a model for the implementation of communicative methods that can be adapted by Arabic lecturers in various higher education institutions in Indonesia. Key components that can be implemented include the use of varied authentic materials, the design of interactive and collaborative listening activities, the systematic integration of pre-while-post listening stages, and the creation of a student-centered learning environment. The study also shows the importance of balancing cognitive challenges with adequate scaffolding support, especially in the early stages of implementation when students are still adapting to new approaches. Lecturers need to facilitate a gradual transition from more controlled material to fully authentic material, as well as provide explicit training on listening strategies that can help students overcome difficulties.

Another important implication relates to the professional development of Arabic lecturers. The implementation of effective communicative methods requires a paradigm shift from the role of lecturers as the main source of knowledge (sage on the stage) to learning facilitators (guide on the side). This requires lecturers to develop competencies in designing

and managing communicative activities, selecting and adapting authentic materials, and providing constructive and formative feedback. Educational institutions need to provide training programs and workshops to equip lecturers with these skills. In addition, it is also necessary to develop learning resources that support the implementation of communicative methods, such as authentic Arabic material banks, communicative activity guides for various skill levels, and assessment instruments that are in line with communicative learning principles.

This research also has implications for the policy of the Arabic language learning curriculum in Indonesia. The finding that communicative methods significantly improve students' abilities shows the need to revise the curriculum to allocate a larger portion to the learning of receptive and productive skills with a communicative approach. The curriculum needs to be designed with an orientation on the development of communicative competencies that include not only mastery of linguistic systems but also the ability to use language in varied social contexts. Competency standards and learning indicators need to be clearly formulated to guide lecturers in implementing communicative methods consistently and systematically. The assessment system also needs to be aligned with a communicative approach, emphasizing authentic assessments that measure students' ability to use language for real communicative purposes (Brown & Abeywickrama, 2019).

CONCLUSION

This study confirms that the application of communicative methods has a positive and significant impact on improving the istima' ability of students of the Arabic Language Education Study Program. Empirical evidence shows that students who are taught using communicative methods achieve an increase in istima' ability by 23.5%, much higher than students taught by conventional methods which only increases by 8.3%. This difference is statistically significant with the large effect size, which indicates that communicative methods are not only different but substantially more effective in improving students' technical skills.

An in-depth analysis of the components of istima' ability reveals that communicative methods are most effective in improving evaluative comprehension skills, followed by inferential comprehension, and literal comprehension. This shows that communicative methods not only improve students' ability to understand explicit information from audio texts, but more importantly, develop their high-level thinking skills in the context of auditory understanding. Communicative activities that emphasize meaningful interaction, authentic materials, and active processing have proven effective in encouraging students to not only listen passively but also analyze, interpret, and evaluate the messages they hear.

The implementation of communicative methods succeeded in creating a more interactive, student-centered, and motivating learning environment. Observational data and student response questionnaires show that communicative methods increase students' active involvement in learning, their confidence in understanding spoken Arabic, and their intrinsic motivation to continue developing istima' skills. Although students face challenges in adapting to new learning approaches and more complex authentic materials, most of them assess that these challenges ultimately contribute positively to the development of their communicative competence.

Based on the findings of this study, several recommendations can be made for further research and practice of Arabic language learning. First, communicative methods need to be considered as the main approach in learning istima' Arabic in higher education, with necessary adjustments according to the local context. Second, Arabic lecturers need to be supported through professional development programs that equip them with the competencies to implement communicative methods effectively. Third, educational institutions need to develop learning resources that support the implementation of communicative methods, including authentic material banks and communicative activity guides. Fourth, further research needs to be conducted to explore the long-term effectiveness of communicative methods, their impact on other language skills, and the factors that mediate their success in various learning contexts. Thus, this research is expected to be a valuable contribution to the development of Arabic language learning methodologies that are more effective and responsive to the needs of students in this global era.

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