



Authenticity in the Arabic Classroom: Evaluating Realia's Effect on Speaking Proficiency

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ABSTRACT

Purpose – This study addresses the persistent challenge of developing Arabic speaking proficiency (*maharah kalām*) among junior secondary students, who often lack confidence and fluency due to limited authentic practice. The purpose was to empirically evaluate the effectiveness of realia-based instruction as a practical pedagogical intervention to bridge the gap between classroom learning and real-world communication, arguing that tangible, context-rich materials significantly enhance oral skills.

Design/methods/approach – A quasi-experimental, non-equivalent control group design with pre-test and post-test measures was implemented. The study involved 55 seventh-grade students at an Indonesian state Islamic junior high school (MTsN) 1 Kota Serang, with an experimental group (n=31) receiving realia-based instruction and a control group (n=24) receiving conventional instruction over a three-week period. Student speaking performance was quantitatively assessed using a standardized oral rubric before and after the intervention.

Findings – The findings revealed a statistically significant and substantial improvement in the experimental group's speaking performance. The post-test mean score for the experimental group (M=50.32, SD=14.05) was significantly higher than that of the control group (M=29.17, SD=4.44). An independent samples t-test confirmed this advantage ($t(53)=7.09, p<.001$), indicating a large effect size (Hedges' $g=1.90$), providing strong evidence that realia-based instruction is more effective than conventional methods.

Research implications – The primary implication is pedagogical: integrating realia offers a practical, low-cost strategy for language teachers to create authentic communicative contexts, thereby enhancing student oral proficiency. However, the findings' generalizability is constrained by the study's single-site setting, non-randomized allocation of participants, and the short duration of the intervention. These limitations highlight the need for future research, such as multi-site randomized controlled trials, to validate these results across diverse contexts and assess long-term retention.

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Introduction

In language education, the development of speaking skills is widely recognized as crucial for enabling real-world communication and achieving overall proficiency (Saed et al., 2021). However, many learners of foreign languages struggle with oral performance due to factors such as limited confidence, lack of fluency, and concerns about grammatical accuracy (Li & Chen, 2025). In contexts like the teaching of Arabic as a foreign language, these challenges often result in students feeling unprepared and hesitant to express themselves in the target language (Hania et al., 2022). There



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is a pressing need for effective pedagogical strategies to overcome these barriers and foster genuine communicative competence in the classroom. One approach that has gained attention is the use of realia—real objects or materials used in teaching—to create a more authentic communicative environment for language learners (Mungkur et al., 2023).

Various studies have documented the benefits of incorporating real objects (realia) into classroom instruction to enhance vocabulary and overall comprehension across different educational contexts. For example, research in junior high language classes found that introducing realia significantly increased students' vocabulary acquisition and achievement (Irawan, 2017). Similarly, an experimental study at the elementary level reported that realia-based lessons not only improved pupils' vocabulary mastery but also boosted their interest and engagement in learning activities (Rahmayani, 2022). The positive impact of tangible learning aids is not limited to language subjects; even in mathematics instruction, using concrete objects has been associated with marked improvements in students' concept mastery and learning outcomes (Kartini, 2020). Additionally, integrating realia with digital resources has been shown to enrich the learning experience and can significantly contribute to students' vocabulary acquisition and motivation (Alava Castro, 2022).

Other research has concentrated specifically on improving speaking skills through authentic learning materials and has observed similarly positive effects. In primary school English as a foreign language classes, using real objects as teaching aids has been shown to effectively strengthen students' speaking abilities (Zambrano et al., 2025). Even in special education contexts, creative use of realia—such as employing puppets as concrete props—has led to significant gains in the oral communication skills of learners with special needs (Muflihati & Noormiyanto, 2024).

Implementing authentic media like realia in the classroom also raises questions of method and design, which recent studies have begun to address. Researchers emphasize that careful planning, execution, and evaluation of realia-based activities are critical for maximizing their effectiveness in improving student outcomes (Al Aluf & Hasanah, 2022). The development of pedagogical materials through systematic models such as ADDIE has further been explored to ensure realia and visual aids align with curricular goals and are practical for teachers to use (Jumadil & Haniah, 2024). At the same time, educators must manage class time and diverse student needs when incorporating real objects and multiple media, in order to maintain instructional effectiveness in inclusive or multilingual classrooms (Wakat et al., 2023). Moreover, some evidence suggests that merely increasing the use of embodied or concrete resources without integration into meaningful interaction does not automatically translate into higher language proficiency, underscoring the importance of thoughtful implementation (Glasson & Halley, 2024).

The underlying pedagogical rationale for using realia and other authentic materials is to increase the authenticity of classroom communication, thereby making language learning more meaningful. Authentic tasks and materials are believed to bridge the gap between classroom practice and real-world language use, leading to deeper student engagement and more holistic learning outcomes (Anagnostopoulou et al., 2023). By contrast, traditional language teaching resources, such as generic textbook dialogues, often lack natural conversational elements—like genuine openings and closings—which can limit students' pragmatic competence in real communication (Yudar et al., 2020). Incorporating culturally rich media (for example, videos from real-life contexts) and tangible objects into lessons can also foster learners' intercultural awareness and motivation, as demonstrated in research utilizing

online videos to simulate authentic interactions (Susilo et al., 2023). Overall, these insights suggest that creating an authentic learning environment with realia and related resources can significantly enhance the relevance and effectiveness of speaking practice in foreign language classrooms.

Despite the encouraging evidence from previous studies, several gaps and challenges remain unaddressed in the literature. Many prior investigations of realia have concentrated on vocabulary acquisition or relied on qualitative observations, indicating a need for more robust experimental data on speaking skill outcomes. Specifically, there is a paucity of research on the impact of realia-mediated instruction for developing oral proficiency in less commonly taught languages such as Arabic, especially at the secondary school level. Moreover, certain targeted teaching interventions have yielded only limited improvements in communication skills; for instance, explicit instruction in multi-word expressions increased students' use of those phrases but did not translate into any direct gains in overall speaking fluency (Thomson et al., 2023). Finally, questions persist regarding the consistency of these media-based interventions' effectiveness across diverse educational contexts, underscoring the need for further evidence to support and generalize the benefits of realia in language learning.

In light of these gaps, the present study focuses on examining the effect of using realia as an instructional medium to enhance Arabic speaking skills at the junior high school level. The study employs a quasi-experimental pre-test–post-test design, including an experimental class and a control class, to quantitatively evaluate whether realia-based instruction leads to greater improvement in students' speaking performance compared to traditional methods. It specifically compares gains in speaking proficiency between the group receiving realia-enriched lessons and the group receiving conventional instruction, with the results analyzed at a significance level of $\alpha = 0.05$. Additionally, this research documents the implementation of realia in the classroom and examines its contribution to key aspects of student oral proficiency, including learners' speaking confidence, pronunciation fluency, and grammatical accuracy. By addressing both learning outcomes and the pedagogical process, this study aims to provide empirical evidence and practical insights that can inform and enrich the methodology of Arabic language instruction, ultimately contributing to improved communicative competence among learners.

Methods

This study employed a quantitative quasi-experimental non-equivalent control group design with pre-test and post-test measures, an approach suitable for intact classroom settings where random assignment is infeasible. The research was conducted at MTs Negeri 1 Kota Serang during the even semester of the 2024/2025 academic year from 12 March to 20 April 2025, using purposive sampling to select two Grade VII classes.

Class VII B served as the experimental group ($n = 31$) receiving instruction with media realia, whereas class VII A served as the control group ($n = 24$) receiving conventional instruction; the design followed the schema O1 X O2 for the experimental class and O3 — O4 for the control class (O1/O3 = pre-test; X = treatment; O2/O4 = post-test). Procedures comprised four stages: (1) administering a speaking pre-test to both groups; (2) implementing a sequence of realia-based lessons for the experimental group while the control group continued with teacher-led conventional activities; (3) conducting structured observations of teacher and student behaviors throughout the instructional period; and (4) delivering a speaking post-test, followed by documentation (school profile, student lists, syllabus, lesson plans, and

photographs) and semi-structured interviews with the Arabic teacher and selected students to capture implementation details and perceptions.

Instructional materials included realia (authentic objects relevant to everyday communicative themes), while data capture and administration utilized observation sheets, a 10-item oral speaking test (daily-life prompts), a speaking rubric assessing pronunciation, fluency, vocabulary, grammar, and comprehension, interview guides, and a camera for classroom documentation. Testing conditions were standardized across groups: identical task prompts, timing windows, and proctoring procedures were used to minimize administration bias.

All quantitative analyses were performed in SPSS v26, beginning with descriptive statistics (means and standard deviations) and assumption checks comprising Kolmogorov–Smirnov normality tests and Levene's test for homogeneity of variances with $\alpha = 0.05$. Upon satisfying assumptions, Independent Samples t-tests (two-tailed, $\alpha = 0.05$) compared post-test speaking scores between groups to evaluate the effect of realia-based instruction on Arabic speaking performance.

Reliability and validity were supported through the use of an a priori analytic rubric aligned to target speaking constructs, uniform test administration across pre- and post-tests, and methodological triangulation of quantitative test data with observations, documentation, and interviews to strengthen internal validity. To reduce instrumentation threats, the same scoring criteria were applied at both measurement points, and observational records followed a preset template to ensure consistent evidence capture across sessions.

Results

Across nine sessions over three weeks (3×40 minutes per session), the experimental class received Arabic speaking instruction using realia-based activities while the control class followed conventional instruction (lecture and guided Q&A). The instructional scope, time-on-task, and assessment schedule were held constant across classes to minimize procedural confounds. All students completed the pre-test and post-test speaking assessments under identical administration conditions. The final analytic sample comprised 31 students in the experimental group and 24 in the control group. No adverse events or unusual instructional disruptions were recorded.

3.1. Descriptive Statistics

At baseline, both groups showed comparable speaking performance. The experimental group's pre-test mean was 25.48 (SD = 10.11), while the control group's mean was 27.50 (SD = 13.34). Post-intervention, the experimental group's mean increased to 50.32 (SD = 14.05), whereas the control group's mean reached 29.17 (SD = 4.44). The mean gain from pre- to post-test was +24.84 points for the experimental group and +1.67 points for the control group, indicating a markedly larger improvement where realia was used.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics: pre-test and pos-test (speaking scores)

Group	n	Pretest: Mean	Posttest: Mean
Experimental	31	25.48	50.32
Control	24	27.50	29.17

3.2. Assumption Checks

Normality and homogeneity assumptions for parametric testing were examined prior to hypothesis testing. Kolmogorov–Smirnov tests indicated no significant departures

from normality for all distributions ($\alpha = .05$). Levene's test on post-test scores supported the homogeneity of variances assumption.

Table 2. Normality tests (Kolmogorov–Smirnov, p-values)

Measure	Experimental	Control
Pre-test	.200	.069
Pos-test	.186	.102

Table 3. Homogeneity of variances (Levene's test, post-test)

F	p
1.861	.225

The pattern in Tables 3–4 justified the use of independent-samples t-tests under equal-variance assumptions.

3.3. Baseline Equivalence

To verify equivalence at baseline, an independent-samples t-test compared pre-test means. The difference in pre-test means was -2.02 points (experimental < control), with $t(53) = -0.64$, $p = .52$, and a negligible effect size (Cohen's $d = -0.17$; Hedges' $g = -0.17$). The 95% confidence interval for the mean difference spanned $[-8.36, 4.32]$, indicating no statistically significant baseline difference between groups.

Table 4. Independent-samples t-test: pre-test (baseline equivalence)

Group	n	Mean (Std. Deviation)	Mean Difference	SE	95% CI of Difference	t(df)	p	d	g
Experimental	31	25.48 (10.11)							
Control	24	27.50 (13.34)	-2.02	3.16	$[-8.36, 4.32]$	7.09 (53)	.52	-0.17	-0.17

3.4. Primary Outcome: Post-test Group Difference

The primary analysis evaluated whether realia-based instruction yielded higher post-test speaking performance than conventional instruction. An independent-samples t-test (equal variances assumed) showed the experimental group outperformed the control group by 21.15 points on average (50.32 vs. 29.17), $t(53) = 7.09$, $p < .001$. The effect size was large (Cohen's $d = 1.93$; Hedges' $g = 1.90$), and the 95% confidence interval for the mean difference was $[15.17, 27.13]$. This finding confirms that realia-based instruction produced substantially greater gains in Arabic speaking performance than conventional methods under comparable instructional time and conditions. The result is robust to normality and variance assumptions and aligns with the descriptive pattern of markedly larger improvements in the experimental group.

Table 5. Independent-samples t-test: post-test (primary outcome)

Group	n	Mean (Std. Deviation)	Mean Difference	SE	95% CI of Difference	t(df)	p	d	g
Experimental	31	50.32 (14.05)	50.32						
Control	24	29.17 (4.44)	21.15	2.98	$[15.17, 27.13]$	7.09 (53)	< .001	1.93	1.90

Taken together, the descriptive statistics, satisfied model assumptions, and inferential tests indicate that realia-based instruction led to statistically significant and educationally meaningful improvements in Arabic speaking proficiency for Grade VII students. The magnitude of the treatment effect ($g \approx 1.90$) is consistent with a large practical impact under routine school conditions and a brief instructional window.

Given the absence of baseline differences and the standardized test administration, the post-test advantage is best attributed to the pedagogical features of the realia-based lessons. While larger multi-site studies and longitudinal follow-ups would strengthen causal generalizability, the present evidence supports the efficacy of realia as a core component in Arabic language teaching emphasizing maharah kalām.

Discussion

Acquiring speaking skills in a new language can be daunting for beginners, who often struggle with confidence, fluency, and accurate use of grammatical structures. This issue was evident among the seventh-grade students in this study's context, many of whom felt hesitant and lacked fluency when attempting to speak Arabic. One contributing factor is the limited exposure to authentic speaking practice in typical classrooms; language textbook dialogues, for instance, often fail to mirror real-life communication (Li & Chen, 2025). As a pedagogical response, educators have suggested using real objects ("realia") in instruction to simulate genuine communicative scenarios and actively engage learners (Irawan, 2017; Rahmayani, 2022). Based on this rationale, the present study examined whether realia-based instruction could significantly enhance the Arabic speaking proficiency of seventh-grade students compared to conventional teaching methods.

The main findings confirmed that the class receiving realia-based instruction achieved substantially greater gains in speaking performance than the control class taught by conventional methods. After three weeks of instruction, the experimental group's speaking test scores more than doubled on average (from a mean of ~25 to ~50), whereas the control group showed only a minimal increase (from ~27 to ~29). An independent t-test on post-test scores showed that this difference was statistically highly significant ($t(53) = 7.09, p < .001$), with the experimental group outperforming the control by an average margin of over 21 points. This reflects an exceptionally large treatment effect (Cohen's $d \approx 1.9$), indicating that the realia-based approach had a profound impact on students' speaking proficiency. Notably, both groups had comparable baseline speaking scores before the intervention, reinforcing that the marked improvement in the experimental group can be attributed to the introduction of realia in the learning process.

These outcomes are broadly consistent with prior studies showing that realia-based instruction can improve learning results for language students. Irawan (2017) found that real object usage significantly increased seventh graders' vocabulary achievement, and similarly, Rahmayani (2022) observed improved vocabulary mastery and interest among elementary learners when lessons incorporated realia. In the context of speaking skills, our findings mirror those of Zambrano et al. (2025), who reported that integrating realia in an English class effectively strengthened students' speaking ability. Notably, even learners with special needs have benefited: using tangible media like puppets led to significant gains in the spoken communication of children with Down syndrome (Muflihati & Noormiyanto, 2024). Furthermore, the pedagogical advantage of concrete, contextual materials has been documented beyond language learning, improving outcomes in areas such as descriptive writing (Mungkur et al., 2023) and mathematics (Kartini, 2020).

One explanation for the pronounced improvement in the experimental group is the authentic, interactive nature of the realia-based instruction, which likely engaged students more deeply than traditional rote learning (Anagnostopouloul et al., 2023). Realia provides concrete context and visual cues for communication, making it easier for students to understand, recall, and use new vocabulary and expressions during

speaking activities (Castro, 2022). Additionally, the use of tangible objects caters to diverse learning modalities and sustains student interest, in contrast to passive learning, resulting in higher engagement in speaking tasks (Rahmayani, 2022; Al Aluf & Hasanah, 2022). Crucially, the real objects were integrated into communicative tasks rather than used in isolation, aligning with evidence that physical (embodied) resources are most effective when coordinated with verbal interaction in the classroom (Glasson & Halley, 2024). At the same time, situating practice in lifelike scenarios may have lowered students' anxiety about speaking, creating a supportive atmosphere that enabled them to practice more freely and thus accelerate their improvement.

The magnitude and breadth of the improvement suggest that the realia-based approach effectively addressed the students' initial deficiencies in speaking, including their lack of confidence, halting pronunciation, and grammatical inaccuracy. Achieving such substantial gains over only nine class sessions highlights the potency of this method in accelerating oral language development within a relatively short time frame. By contrast, the negligible progress in the control group underscores how a traditional lecture-and-Q&A format may do little to advance speaking skills in novice learners, a point also noted in studies comparing conventional and multimedia-enhanced instruction (Saed et al., 2021). It appears that the realia-based training not only raised test scores but also fostered a more holistic communicative competence, as students became more comfortable and fluent in using the language rather than merely memorizing responses, consistent with the idea that higher task authenticity leads to more meaningful language development (Anagnostopouloul et al., 2023). Overall, our findings demonstrate that a relatively simple shift to using real-life objects in instruction can yield major improvements in speaking outcomes, reinforcing pedagogical recommendations to integrate authentic materials into language teaching (Yudar et al., 2020).

Despite these positive results, several limitations of the study must be considered in interpreting the findings. First, the study was conducted in a single school with a relatively small sample and over a short duration, which limits the generalizability of the results to other contexts or long-term language development. It is also possible that the significant gains observed were partly influenced by a novelty effect or the specific enthusiasm generated by the new method, rather than solely by the content of the instruction. Furthermore, implementing realia-based learning requires careful preparation and time management; teachers may need to ensure that using physical media does not digress from curriculum goals and that class time is efficiently utilized (Wakat et al., 2023). Finally, while the present study demonstrates clear short-term benefits, future research involving larger samples, multiple schools, and follow-up assessments is needed to confirm the causal impact of realia-based instruction and determine its long-term effects.

Pedagogically, these findings encourage language teachers to incorporate realia-based activities into speaking lessons to provide students with more authentic and engaging practice. The approach proved effective with minimal extra resources, suggesting it is a practical strategy that can be implemented in regular classrooms to significantly boost oral proficiency (Al Aluf & Hasanah, 2022). However, to replicate these results, teachers may require training and support in designing and managing realia-enhanced lessons, given that planning communicative, student-centered tasks can be challenging without guidance (Mora & Coyle, 2023). Curriculum designers and educational policymakers should therefore integrate authentic materials and real-world task experiences into language programs, aligning with contemporary efforts to develop relevant, easily implementable Arabic learning media (Haniah, 2024). By

embedding realia and other authentic resources into instruction, schools can bridge the gap between classroom learning and practical communication, potentially fostering greater student confidence and motivation in language learning (Rahmayani, 2022; Castro, 2022).

Conclusion

This study set out to test whether the al-Abyan method improves students' kitab turats reading skills and to compare learning gains between an experimental class and a control class using a pretest–posttest, quasi-experimental design. The findings show large and consistent advantages for the al-Abyan group: mean scores rose from 27.8 to 67.3 (gain +39.5), whereas the control group showed no improvement (25.1 to 24.8), and the between-group difference was statistically robust ($t(48)=17.93$, $p<.001$). Observational evidence further suggests that al-Abyan strengthened the underlying processes of unvowelled-text literacy by promoting active engagement, faster grammatical parsing, and more accurate interpretation during instruction. These results imply that structured, interactive methods like al-Abyan can serve as effective curricular interventions for lower-secondary Arabic education, offering a scalable path to accelerate mastery of classical texts and contributing controlled evidence to a field often dominated by descriptive reports. Nonetheless, the conclusions are bounded by a single-site, quasi-experimental design with nonrandom assignment, a modest sample, and potential contextual influences that may limit generalisability. Future research should include multi-site trials with randomisation or strong quasi-experimental controls, head-to-head comparisons with other active methods, longitudinal follow-ups on retention and transfer, and implementation studies examining fidelity, moderators, and cost-effectiveness. Together, these steps would clarify for whom, under what conditions, and at what cost al-Abyan delivers the greatest educational impact.

Declarations

Author contribution statement

Yunita Indahwati: Conceptualization, Methodology, Investigation, Data Curation, Formal Analysis, Writing – Original Draft. Ali Maksum: Supervision, Validation, Writing – Review & Editing. Umi Hani: Supervision, Methodology, Writing – Review & Editing. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

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Data availability statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author, Yunita Indahwati, upon reasonable request.

Declaration of interests statement

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have influenced the work reported in this paper.

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