



## Investigation on the Students' Perceptions of the Arabic Speaking Skills toward the Contextual Teaching Learning Implementation

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### Abstract

This study explores the students' perceptions of the results of Contextual Teaching Learning (CTL) implementation in the Arabic speaking skill lectures based on the typical characteristics of the Student-Centered Learning approach in their class. The researchers need information on whether implementing a method in the context of the Arabic language skills in tertiary institutions meets the Student-Centered Learning approach criteria. In addition, most of the research still focuses on describing the method's implementation. It ignores the achievement of the method on the criteria for the Student-Centered Learning approach. This study uses an exploratory investigation to understand implementation results in-deeply. Thirty AFL students with different cultural backgrounds completed a questionnaire about their perceptions of successful implementation. The findings reveal that implementing CTL in teaching the Arabic speaking skills meets the typical characteristics of the Student-Centered Learning approach. Moreover, some students also give positive suggestions to achieve a more optimal standard. Therefore, this study provides some recommendations and directions for further studies.

**Keywords:** *Contextual Teaching Learning; Student-Centered Learning; Arabic Speaking Skills; AFL students; Characteristics of Student-Centered Learning*

### Introduction

Speaking skill is one of the most important language skills to be mastered by all students in higher education majoring in language education. Speaking skill is the primary goal of foreign language learners in order to be able to communicate fluently (Aburezeq, 2020; Beniss & Bazzaz, 2014). In line with this opinion, Hasan confirms that the essential function of language for humans is to communicate with each other (Hasan, 2014). Likewise, Abdallah and Mansour reinforce the previous opinions that the focus of attention of language learning is speaking, and it is more prioritized

compared to reading and writing (Abdallah & Mansour, 2015), It facilitates humans to convey information, feelings, emotions, ideas, and beliefs. Therefore, there is no doubt that the top priority in language education is speaking proficiency.

Even though it is said to be a top priority, in reality, most foreign language learners still need help communicating in that language. In the context of the Arabic speaking skills, several researchers from various countries have reported that learners tend to show low proficiency in spoken Arabic (Altweïssi, 2022; Ritonga et al., 2021; Soliman & Khalil, 2022). This low proficiency comes from several reasons, such as traditional teaching methods focusing only on teacher explanations and inadequate time allocation for learning in classes (Linur & Mubarak, 2022; Namaziandost et al., 2019, 2020). On the other hand, several researchers also revealed that speaking skill is among the most difficult to develop in regular classroom conditions (Marlius et al., 2021; Zaid et al., 2022), as it is common in formal learning classes. Therefore, an exciting and innovative learning approach that can help Arabic learners focus on speaking practice needs to be used to overcome these problems.

In recent years, a learning approach focused on student activity (Student-Centered Learning, abbreviated as SCL) has been recommended to overcome learning problems. SCL puts the learner at the center of learning activities through active involvement of student participation. Several studies have proven that this approach has positively improved student achievement and skills (Dada et al., 2023; Dunbar & Yadav, 2022; Katawazai, 2021; Trinidad, 2020). This empirical evidence is, of course, based on a primary reason, such as the broad opportunities for the students to express themselves in class so that they can freely set targets to achieve their learning outcomes. Supporting this statement, freedom of expression in the learning process positively affects students' perceptions and emotions, and it is an important indicator of the success of the learning process (Kulakow & Raufelder, 2020). In Indonesia, for the last three years, the Ministry of Education and Culture has transformed the education ecosystem by launching the *Merdeka Belajar* (Freedom of Learning) program, which is oriented towards the creativity and innovation of educators to focus students' activeness in the learning process (Kemendikbud RI, 2020).

However, looking at the phenomenon of the Arabic learning in Indonesia, especially in speaking, the traditional learning approach only pays attention to the activeness of the teacher compared to the activeness of students. Teachers still dominate the process. It certainly has a fatal impact on the motivational aspect and the results of students' speaking skills. Therefore, teachers need to implement the SCL approach in learning Arabic speaking skills to provide broad opportunities for students to achieve indicators of these abilities, such as conveying their thoughts, feelings, and ideas to the interlocutor (Aburezeq, 2020).

The results of previous research have shown that language learning using SCL approach has a positive impact on students' foreign language skills. Satriani's research highlights the results of implementing the CTL approach in learning English in Indonesian junior high schools. The results show that the CTL approach has positive results on students' writing skills and has proven successful in growing their active

participation and motivation in the learning process (Satriani et al., 2012). Like Satriani, Farnscy also reports the successful implementation of the CTL approach on Indonesian students' English argumentative writing skills (Franscy et al., 2019). Moreover, Indrilla reports that the results of experimental interventions from implementing CTL in Indonesian junior high school classes improve English writing skills compared to conventional approaches (Indrilla, 2018). On different skill aspects, Haerazi tries to implement CTL approach in English reading classes directly. The results show that CTL approach provides empirical evidence on the achievement of passing grades in reading results and student motivation (Haerazi et al., 2019). The studies above prove that the main favorable implication of implementing CTL as an approach that focuses on SCL is the result of students' language skills and motivation. Therefore, recommendations from this implementation certainly need to be carried out actively in educational institutions. On the other hand, two recent research results have recommended using methods that focus more on student activeness and engagement in the foreign language learning process (Ao & Jamir, 2022; Bell & Lygo-Baker, 2019).

However, previous studies have yet to specifically investigate the implementation of CTL in teaching speaking skills towards the student achievement results based on SCL characteristics. SCL characteristics consist of several aspects, such as active, constructive, collaborative, enthusiastic, dialogic, contextual, reflective, multisensory, and high-order thinking skills training (HOTS) (Richards & Farrell, 2011). On the other hand, researchers have yet to widely investigate SCL in the Arabic speaking skill learning at the tertiary level. SCL in learning Arabic still focused on formal learning at the school level (Aprianto et al., 2020; Azmi & Puspita, 2019; Bahrudin et al., 2021), and they have yet to touch on the aspects of CTL implementation.

Referring to the gaps stated above, the researchers certainly need to research as it is urgent. An investigation of achievement standards needs to be conducted to prove whether the implemented approach focuses on student activity as a characteristic of SCL. This study aims to investigate one fundamental issue: the investigation of student perceptions regarding CTL implementation results towards the achievement of the Arabic speaking skill lecturing process based on the characteristics of SCL approach. Thus, this study focuses on answering the following research questions: What are the students' perceptions towards the results of CTL implementation in the Arabic speaking skill lectures based on the typical characteristics of SCL approach?

## **Method**

An investigative exploration design (Stebbins, 2001) was conducted in this study to investigate students' perceptions regarding the results of CTL implementation in teaching the Arabic speaking skills based on the typical characteristics of SCL approach. This design is suitable for investigating the CTL implementation results and provides flexibility in a comprehensive manner reflecting the problems studied (Schutt, 2018). CTL approach was executed for six months (July 2022 to December 2022) by a lecturer of Arabic speaking skills at an Islamic State University in Palangka Raya, Central Kalimantan. It is the only university with an Arabic Language Education undergraduate program in Central Kalimantan, established in 2008. This undergraduate program was

accredited A by the National Accreditation Board for Higher Education (BAN-PT) in 2019 and is still active until 2024.

This study involved thirty third-semester students who had attended lectures on the Arabic speaking skills using CTL approach. Detailed information about their profile is provided in Table 1:

Table 1. Students' Profile

<b>Gender</b>	<b>Students</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Male	11	37%
Female	19	63%
Total	30	100%
<b>Age</b>	<b>Students</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
19	15	50%
20	9	30%
21	4	13,3%
22	2	6,7%
Total	30	100%
<b>Cultural Ethnicity</b>	<b>Students</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Dayakese	12	40%
Banjarese	7	24%
Malay	3	10%
Javanese	6	20%
Batakese	1	3%
Sasambo	1	3%
Total	30	100%

The table above describes that most students are women with a percentage of 63%, aged between 19-22 years, who come from various ethnic groups such as Dayakese, Banjarese, Malay, Javanese, Batakese, and Sasambo (Sasak, Samawa, Mbojo). As it is well known, Indonesia has a pluralistic and multicultural society with around 1331 cultural and ethnic groups (Central Bureau of Statistics, n.d.). This diversity is undoubtedly a challenge for foreign language teachers in Indonesia, where the acquisition of a foreign language has a position as a third language (L3) after the mother tongue or local/ethnic language (L1) and Indonesian (L2).

Before the research began, the researchers asked for the consent of the participants to fill out a willingness form to be involved in this study. The researchers also explained the research objectives, methods, and risks that might occur in this study (Hammersley & Traianou, 2012). The participants' privacy was also maintained by not mentioning their full names. The participants involved in this study were those who expressed their willingness to participate and were willing to fill out a questionnaire distributed to complete the research data.

After obtaining an agreement, the researchers gave an online questionnaire using Google Form. Regarding the questionnaire, the researcher adopted SCL criteria developed from the theory of Student-Centered Learning Development (abbreviated as SCLD) by Richards (Richards & Farrell, 2011). This questionnaire consisted of 5 items

covering important domains in SCL, such as Student-Centered Learning, levels of student selection, student activeness, and power. All assessment items used a Likert scale (with responses from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree). The data presented as a bar chart showed the percentage of participants' perceptions.

Structured group interviews were also used to obtain more detailed participant information (Creswell et al., 2007). Each interview lasted 20-30 minutes and was recorded using the audio feature on a researcher's smartphone. It allowed the researchers to concentrate on the interview process and make appropriate eye contact with the participants (Baxter & Gray, 2001). After the interview, the results of the recordings were given to the participants to increase credibility (Mann, 2011), and maintain ethics in data reconstruction from the results of this study (Harvey, 2015).

Thematic analysis was used to see similarities, relationships, and differences across the research data set (Gibson & Brown, 2009). Therefore, the data presented in this study were selected by considering the similarity of opinions and the relationship between participants' responses (Widodo, 2014).

## Result and Discussion

Based on questionnaire and interview data, this study investigated students' perceptions of the results of CTL implementation in the Arabic speaking skill lectures. Specifically, this research is divided into 5 SCLD sub-headings, such as understanding the needs and goals of learners, creating groups/communities of learners, learners' freedom in choosing themes, building positive interactions, and implementing interactive strategies. The findings are presented as follows.

### *Understanding the needs and goals of learners*

First, the researchers asked the students' opinions regarding the lecturer's understanding of the needs and goals of their learning outcomes. Table 2 shows thirty opinions on this matter. Twenty-one participants (70%) agreed that the lecturer had understood their needs and goals when performing Arabic speaking skill lectures. In contrast, nine participants (30%) strongly agreed with this perception. In other words, most students reported that the lecturer in the Arabic Speaking course had understood the needs and goals proclaimed by the students from the results of the lectures.

**Table 2. Students' Responses**

<b>Students' Perceptions Regarding Lecturers' Understanding of the Students' Needs and Goals</b>	<b>Students</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Strongly Agree	9	30%
Agree	21	70%
<b>Student Perceptions Regarding Creating Groups/Communities Activity in the Learning Process</b>	<b>Students</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Strongly Agree	10	34%
Agree	20	66%
<b>Students' Perceptions of Freedom in Selecting Themes</b>	<b>Students</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Strongly Agree	12	60%
Agree	18	40%

<b>Student Perceptions of Positive Interaction Built by the Lecturer</b>	<b>Students</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Strongly Agree	2	7%
Agree	28	93%

  

<b>Students' Perceptions of the Lecturer on Using Interactive Strategies</b>	<b>Students</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Strongly Agree	5	17%
Agree	25	83%

In addition to the data in Table 2, the participants provide reasons for their responses to the questionnaire statements. The following are the participants' responses to the aspects of the lecturer's understanding of the needs and objectives of the outcomes of Arabic speaking skills.

Participant 5

*I am an Islamic boarding school alumnus and have studied basic Arabic at that institution for about seven years. However, I realize that I need more confidence in my ability to practice speaking because, at the Islamic boarding school, I only studied nahwu and shorof as the basis for reading Arabic books. I am very grateful because the lecturer asks us to practice speaking in front of the class. It truly supports my Arabic language skills.*

Participant 7

*I come from a vocational education background. I have never had any experience learning Arabic before, let alone being able to practice speaking. I do not have the basic knowledge. However, the lecturer asked about my previous educational background at the beginning of the meeting, so he truly understood my ability level and did not push me too hard to practice speaking Arabic right away. When he gave me the opportunity to speak in front of the class, he continuously informed me a week beforehand so I could prepare myself. During practice in front of the class, he also asked other friends to help me if I needed help or could not remember the Arabic vocabulary.*

Participant 12

*I intend to continue my master's studies in the Middle East, and the lecturer already knows about it because the lecturer asked about it at the beginning of the lecture. To achieve that, of course, I need to practice speaking Arabic a lot. Fortunately, the lecturer facilitated me with Arabic YouTube video links to support my objectives.*

Participants' perceptions indicated that the Arabic Speaking skill lecturer understood each student's needs and goals. Lecturers who understand and are sensitive to students' individual needs and tendencies will encourage a pleasant atmosphere and have positive implications for the effectiveness of SCL. It is proven by the participants' statements that the lecturer provides active Arabic communication activities and facilities, for example, video links. This is in line with what Benson has conveyed; one of the reasons why SCL is more effective than other teaching methods is the teacher's sensitivity to the needs and tendencies of each student (Benson, 2013). Moreover, as Richards and Farrell recommended, to develop SCL, a teacher must also understand the needs and goals of the learners (Richards & Farrell, 2011).

*Creating learning groups/ communities*

The student participants were further asked about the form of lectures applied in class. Table 2 shows the responses of students to the form of a lecture. Twenty participants (66%) agreed that the lecturer of the Arabic speaking skills forms student groups before determining the theme to practice in each meeting, and ten participants (34%) strongly agreed.

The following interview data support the data in Table 2.

Participant 2

*During group division, the lecturer did not limit us in forming groups. The lecturer let us choose our friends to form a group with the same interests and hobbies.*

Participant 8

*I am happy to join a group that has similar goals to me. I do not hesitate to talk and share information about myself because our group has the same goal.*

Participant 23

*In my group, all the participants are male students. Because we are all male, it is easy for me to communicate. Frankly, I feel awkward when I have to group with women.*

As shown by the interview data above, the students said that the design of the Arabic Speaking course implemented was in the form of group divisions. The selection of group members is entirely up to the student's decision. This form of freedom in forming groups proves that it can create a learning community based on shared interests and goals the students want to achieve. Aligned with the results of this study, Richards and Farrell state that teachers must develop an understanding of language classes as a group of people (learning community) with the same goals, needs, and concerns in developing SCL (Richards & Farrell, 2011).

However, we believe freedom in choosing study group members cannot be fully applied if some students have more closed-off personalities (introverts). People with introverted personalities tend not to like socializing too much (Supiani et al., 2020), and tend to separate themselves from the group. Therefore, it is necessary to have teacher intervention in forming a study group so that the learning community is well-formed and SCL can run optimally. In line with this opinion, alternative solutions are offered to build a sense of community in the classroom (Dörnyei, 2001), such as helping students find comfortable partners and study groups to foster a sense of kinship for them. Good learning should encourage individual social and emotional competence in comfortable and conducive situations (Frydenberg et al., 2017).

#### *Freedom in choosing learning themes*

Some participants gave positive answers in selecting the theme/topic of discussion. Table 2 shows that eighteen participants (60%) agreed that the lecturer gave students the freedom to determine the theme for practicing Arabic speaking skills. Another twelve participants (40%) strongly agreed with this opinion.

To elaborate on the empirical evidence, the researchers used the following interview results to describe the students' opinions regarding the form of freedom in selecting themes applied by the lecturer of the Arabic speaking skills.

Participant 1

*The lecturer gave freedom to each group to determine the theme that will be practiced in front of the class. Coincidentally, my group consisted of female students who loved Korean dramas. So, the theme we raised was our perception regarding the influence of Korean culture on Indonesian society. We shared the task of finding information according to the theme, and then we translated it into Arabic to present in front of the class.*

Participant 12

*Following my goal, which is to continue my master's studies in the Middle East, I try to communicate this goal to my group mates and try to form a theme related to Arabic culture. I am grateful that we finally develop a relevant theme, such as the influence of Arab culture on Indonesian society. Of course, I am excited to find references related to this theme.*

Participant 23

*Our group is all boys; we love playing online games on our smartphones. It would be interesting if we presented the game strategy that we usually play together using Arabic in front of the class.*

The interview results above strengthen the participants' perceptions regarding this freedom. Various themes discussed and presented by each group were related to the context of their daily lives. It will help students to interact, collaborate, and work together to create concepts according to the themes they will present in front of the class. In line with the characteristics of CTL approach, students are fully involved in finding material and connecting it with real-life situations (Haerazi et al., 2019). This freedom is proven to direct students to be more active and willing to participate in learning. Cooke and Simpson (Cook & Simpson, 2008) emphasize that working in groups to select suitable topics can focus on students' learning. It may lead to the activeness of each group in interacting and discussing so that they are more motivated when learning occurs.

*Building positive interactions with positive feedback*

Based on the results of the questionnaire analysis, Table 2 showed that twenty-eight students (93%) agreed that the Arabic speaking skills lecturer had built positive interactions with students, and two (7%) students strongly agreed with this statement. It means that the lecturer has built positive interactions as expected by students.

The following interview data enriched participants' responses to the questionnaire question items:

Participant 7

*As I mentioned at the beginning, I am an alumnus of a vocational high school with no basic knowledge of Arabic. I realized when I stood in front of the class to practice speaking Arabic with the group; I was the one who had the most difficulty and stammered in speaking. I also realized that I was a burden in my group, which might have potentially reduced the score of my group mates. However, the lecturer continuously told us that each group was responsible for its members. If members experienced difficulties, the lecturer only helped indirectly but invited group members to help. That was a very positive response for me because it all depended on*



*how the sense of kinship of each group was formed and how the same goals and achievements were accomplished.*

Participant 9

*After each group completed their Arabic speaking practice assignment in front of the class, the lecturer invited all students to give a standing ovation and said Baarakallaahu fikum (may Allah bless you).*

Participant 10

*On several occasions, the lecturer often talked about his experience learning Arabic in a rented room with his roommates. My lecturer and his friends tried to stick new vocabulary on the room wall and set a target to memorize it in one week. From this story, I am interested in trying this method with a roommate who also takes an undergraduate program in Arabic education.*

The interview excerpts show that most students reported that the lecturer had built positive interactions. Positive interaction can be in the form of assistance to develop an atmosphere of collaboration and mutual support between students, positive feedback such as applause and prayer, and motivating stories from the lecturer's experience. In line with the research results above, Dornyei (Dörnyei, 2001) reveals that one indicator of the learning achievements with SCL approach is the success of teachers in building an atmosphere of mutual support between students and providing feedback on learning by helping to develop their self-confidence and self-esteem.

Rewards may also increase their motivation apart from providing positive feedback. Cellini et al. (Buchs et al., 2011) report a significant correlation between positive rewards and cooperative learning in the classroom. To make the reward relevant to the needs of students, lecturers can give them presents like an Arabic learning book.

#### *Implementing Interactive strategy*

The final investigation concerning students' perceptions after attending the Arabic Speaking course is the implementation of the lecturer's interactive strategy. Table 2 shows the results of this perception. In this survey, twenty-five students (83%) agreed that the lecturer had implemented an interactive strategy; the other five participants (17%) strongly agreed.

To support the questionnaire results, the researchers present the following interview data to elaborate on the opinions of the participants.

Participant 25

*Before the lecturing process began, there were several meetings (although not all meetings) where the lecturer started with ice-breaking, for example, a game focused on memorizing vocabulary. Each student had to remember one vocabulary that replaced their name. We had to concentrate on listening to what vocabulary was mentioned by other students. The lecturer would encourage us to sing Arabic songs if we did not respond when the word replacing our name was called. It was so much fun.*

Participant 27

*This course was two credits or 90 minutes. Of course, it would not be exciting only to review the material. Luckily, the lecturer understood the boredom and alternated it with games, like chain whispers. The lecturer whispered one sentence in Arabic to the representatives of each group. Then, the representatives returned to their respective groups and wrote them down on a sheet of paper. It all depends on how each representative listened to what the lecturer relayed. The information conveyed to group members would only be right if the representative was focused. If even one letter were wrong, it would reduce the score of each group.*

Participant 30

*Two games often used by lecturers were nurakkizu (vocabulary focus) and chain whispers. I think we need a game as an interlude during lectures, but I also hope there will be outdoor activities so that we can go out of class.*

As shown by interview data, the participants described at least two game strategies often used by the lecturer of Arabic speaking skills, such as vocabulary focus and chain whisper. These games are only applied at some meetings but only as an intermezzo when students feel bored. The interview data results of implementing the game prove that students are more motivated to participate in learning. Confirming the results of this statement, Dornyei (2001) suggests an activity, such as role-playing, to ensure the learning process is focused on students. Even though games are more synonymous with young learners, many studies have confirmed that at the tertiary level, games are also needed to maintain their motivation to participate in the learning process (Kuśnierek, 2015; Mubarak et al., 2020; Noels et al., 2019). Therefore, we hope lecturers in higher education will not be too rigid and dominate the learning process. Lecturers must apply a Student-Centered Learning approach by selecting interactive and innovative strategies.

On the other hand, the students are suggested to utilized outdoor learning to maintain their learning motivation. It might occur due to students' anxiety about mistakes in speaking Arabic that the other students might hear. The boredom of studying in the classroom may also be a triggering factor for the problem. Recent studies have confirmed and reported that foreign language anxiety and boredom are triggers for successful language learning in the classroom (Myhre et al., 2023). Therefore, outdoor learning design must be conducted to create an exciting way of learning, especially in language skills.

## **Conclusion**

This study reports on student perceptions regarding the lecturer's implementation of the Arabic speaking skills towards CTL implementation according to the typical characteristics of SCL. We find that the students consider that CTL implementation applied by the lecturer meet SCL characteristic standard. This empirical evidence provides several recommendations for successfully implementing a student-centered approach to learning Arabic at the tertiary level. First, lecturers must

understand the students' needs and goals for learning. Second, lecturers must give students the freedom to form study groups/communities. On other occasions, lecturers must also intervene in forming groups to help less social/introverted students. Third, the students are free to determine themes/topics relevant to their context. Fourth, positive feedback, such as applause and praise, can help maintain their motivation during the lecture. Giving rewards relevant to their needs may also be done to maintain their motivation. Fifth, lecturers must implement interactive language games, so students do not feel bored. Outdoor learning also needs to be considered to create an exciting way of learning.

Several limitations delimit this research. First, the recruited participants were only from one research site, making generalizing the results to other contexts is difficult. Second, this perceptual analysis only focused on the Arabic speaking skills. Third, this research was limited to analyzing the perception of achievement based on SCL characteristics and has yet to be investigated further to their speaking skill competence results. Therefore, future studies should expand to several provinces in Indonesia, and other skills (listening, reading, and writing) should be developed to overcome the current research limitations.

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