

From Speaking Barriers to Structured Support: A Multi-Stakeholder Qualitative Needs Analysis of Arabic Oral Production

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ABSTRACT:

Developing the ability to speak Arabic spontaneously remains difficult when learners must retrieve vocabulary, construct sentences, manage pronunciation, and respond under social pressure at the same time. This study examined the linguistic, affective, pedagogical, and institutional conditions shaping Arabic speaking instruction and identified the forms of support considered necessary by different stakeholders. A qualitative descriptive study was conducted as a multi-stakeholder needs analysis involving 17 participants: five Arabic language teachers, five school leaders, and seven learners from five madrasah and pesantren settings in Indonesia. Individual semi-structured interviews were analysed using Framework Analysis with a hybrid deductive-inductive coding strategy. Five interrelated themes were generated: (1) limited linguistic resources intersect with affective pressure during spontaneous speech; (2) textbook-oriented practice constrains independent oral production; (3) learners and teachers favour structured speaking support; (4) familiar topics and peer interaction create lower-risk spaces for practice; and (5) institutional support is evident, although dedicated resources and sustained speaking routines remain limited. The findings suggest that Arabic speaking difficulty is not a vocabulary problem alone but a production bottleneck created by the interaction of lexical limitations, fear of error, restricted opportunities to speak, and insufficient instructional support. Integrating the cross-stakeholder findings, the study proposes a three-layer support architecture comprising linguistic support, interactional scaffolding, and ecological enabling conditions. This framework clarifies how pedagogical support can bridge the gap between knowing Arabic and using it in increasingly independent oral interaction.

Keywords: arabic as a foreign language, arabic speaking skills, oral production, instructional scaffolding, learner needs

1. Introduction

Speaking is one of the clearest points at which language knowledge is tested in real time. In Arabic language education, learners may recognise vocabulary and understand grammatical patterns yet still hesitate when they must select words, organise them into an acceptable utterance, pronounce the response, and react to another speaker within a few seconds. Arabic-specific research has repeatedly documented this gap between knowledge and oral performance. Daud & Pisal (2014) found that language difficulty, especially limited vocabulary, disrupted fluency during Arabic speaking tasks, while contextual support changed how demanding a task became. More recent work with Arabic language pre-service teachers similarly identified vocabulary and semantics, language structure, emotional factors, and teaching methodology as intertwined sources of difficulty (Güngenci and Yildiz 2024).

The affective dimension makes this production problem more complex. Speaking exposes errors immediately and often publicly, so learners may experience anxiety even when they possess relevant linguistic knowledge. Among Malaysian secondary-school learners, speaking anxiety was negatively associated with Arabic learning outcomes (Ismail, Rasit, and Supriyatno 2023). Nassif (2019), working with beginning learners of Arabic, likewise showed that foreign-language anxiety was entangled with oral production and attention to linguistic form. At a broader level, Teimouri et al. (2019) meta-analysis of 105 independent samples found a mean negative association of $r = -.36$ between second-language anxiety and achievement. These findings make it difficult to treat hesitant speaking simply as evidence that learners have not learned enough vocabulary or grammar.

A second problem concerns the organisation of instruction. Prepared dialogues and textbooks can provide essential linguistic input, but they do not automatically create the conditions required

for spontaneous language use (Khair and Nur 2025). Communication-oriented language teaching gives a central role to using language for meaningful purposes while retaining attention to linguistic form (Littlewood 2014), and interaction research shows that learners benefit from opportunities to receive input, negotiate meaning, produce output, and respond to interlocutors (Loewen and Sato 2018). The same tension is visible in Arabic education. Soliman & Khalil (2024) report that teachers may value communicative goals while classroom activities still rely heavily on more traditional written work and limited listening-speaking practice. Hussien (2018) similarly argues for a clearer communicative orientation in Arabic teaching, learning, and assessment.

Arabic speaking research has responded through a range of instructional routes. Learners employ multiple techniques to compensate for limited foundations in online Arabic speaking courses (Yazid et al. 2022), digital platforms can provide useful vocabulary and visual support for beginners (Ritonga et al. 2022), and telecollaborative exchanges can create meaningful spaces for target-language communication and cultural learning (Al Khateeb and Hassan 2023). Recent evidence also points to the importance of learning environments and authentic interaction. Boulares (2025) found that an immersion-oriented programme built around authentic interaction improved advanced learners' fluency and linguistic confidence, while (Nurjannah et al. 2026) showed that sustained Arabic speaking practice depends on thematic vocabulary support, speaking routines, peer communities, and institutional conditions beyond isolated classroom activities.

These strands of research are valuable, but they often locate the problem at one analytical level: learner difficulty, affect, teaching technique, technology, classroom interaction, or the wider language environment. Recent multi-stakeholder research has begun to connect classroom and

institutional perspectives (Nurjannah et al. 2026), yet less attention has been given to the specific support architecture required at the moment when learners must initiate and sustain spoken Arabic. This matters because the same classroom problem can be interpreted differently by different actors. A teacher may describe limited vocabulary, a learner may experience the same moment as fear of saying something incorrectly, and a school leader may see the difficulty as a consequence of limited practice time or inadequate resources. Designing support from only one of these perspectives risks solving only part of the problem.

Scaffolding provides a useful theoretical lens for interpreting such support, provided that it is not reduced to the presence of a particular medium. van de Pol et al. (2010) describe scaffolding in terms of contingent support, gradual fading, and the transfer of responsibility to the learner. In oral language instruction, this logic can be realised through vocabulary cues, sentence frames, model expressions, question prompts, graded task complexity, or interactional arrangements that make participation more manageable. The empirical question, however, is which forms of support are actually perceived as necessary across the learning system, and how those needs converge or diverge between learners, teachers, and institutional leaders.

Accordingly, this study examined Arabic speaking instruction through a qualitative multi-stakeholder needs analysis. It addressed three questions: (1) What linguistic, affective, pedagogical, and institutional barriers constrain learners' participation in Arabic speaking? (2) What forms of instructional support are perceived as necessary to help learners initiate

and sustain oral communication? and (3) What pedagogical principles emerge from convergence and divergence across learners', teachers', and school leaders' perspectives? Rather than evaluating the effectiveness of a pre-existing product, the study uses cross-stakeholder evidence to clarify the conditions that should inform subsequent instructional design.

2. Methodology

2.1 Research design

The study used a qualitative descriptive design organised as a multi-stakeholder needs analysis. The purpose was not to test an intervention or estimate relationships between variables, but to obtain a detailed account of the barriers, current practices, and instructional needs surrounding Arabic oral production. The design deliberately incorporated three positions in the educational system: learners as users of speaking activities, teachers as organisers of classroom interaction, and school leaders as actors responsible for curriculum implementation and institutional support.

2.2 Participants and setting

Seventeen participants took part: five Arabic language teachers, five school leaders (headteachers or vice-headteachers responsible for curriculum), and seven learners. They were drawn from five madrasah and pesantren settings in Indonesia where Arabic formed part of the formal curriculum. Participants were selected purposively because of their direct involvement in Arabic language learning and their capacity to comment on speaking instruction from different roles. Teachers were coded T1-T5, school leaders SL1-SL5, and learners L1-L7.

Table 1. Participant composition and analytical contribution

Stakeholder group	n	Role in the study	Primary contribution
Arabic language teachers (T)	5	Classroom practitioners	Speaking barriers, current pedagogy, media use, support needs
School leaders (SL)	5	Headteachers / curriculum leaders	Curriculum context, resources, institutional support

Learners (L)	7	Students with Arabic speaking experience	Speaking experience, affective barriers, media preferences, desired practice
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2.3 Data collection

Data were generated through individual semi-structured interviews using stakeholder-specific guides. Teacher interviews first explored the current condition of *muhadatsah*, existing strategies and media, perceived learning needs, relevant speaking themes, and expectations for improvement. Learner interviews addressed feelings during Arabic speaking, difficulties encountered in spontaneous responses, experience with existing media, preferred topics, and characteristics of an ideal speaking lesson. School-leader interviews examined curriculum policy, perceived speaking competence, resource availability, and institutional support.

The order of questions was important for the interpretation of the data. General barriers, existing practices, and needs were elicited before structured question cards were introduced as a possible form of support. This sequencing enabled the analysis to distinguish between needs that participants raised in response to open questions and their later evaluations of a proposed instructional format. The interview responses were collated in stakeholder-specific matrices. Quotations reported in this article are English translations of the original Indonesian responses, with semantic meaning retained.

2.4 Data analysis

The data were analysed using Framework Analysis, operationalised through the Framework Method described by Gale et al. (2013), with a hybrid deductive-inductive coding strategy. The interview domains provided sensitising categories, but the analysis did not treat them as final themes. First, the full dataset was read

repeatedly to establish familiarity. Second, meaningful segments were assigned initial codes such as *lexical limitation*, *fear of error*, *difficulty initiating speech*, *textbook dependence*, *need for prompts*, and *peer-supported practice*. Third, related codes were organised into a provisional analytical framework. Fourth, the framework was applied systematically across all stakeholder groups. Fifth, coded data were charted into a cross-stakeholder matrix. Sixth, convergence, divergence, and complementarity were examined across learners, teachers, and school leaders. Finally, categories were developed into interpretative themes that explained relationships between barriers and support needs.

Analytical quality was strengthened in three ways. Source triangulation was used to compare how the same issue appeared across the three stakeholder groups. Deviant cases were retained rather than absorbed into the dominant pattern; for example, one learner described being relatively confident while still struggling with lexical choice and pronunciation. The framework matrix also provided an audit trail linking participant responses, codes, categories, and final themes. These procedures are consistent with the emphasis on transparency, credibility, and meaningful coherence in qualitative inquiry (Tracy 2010).

3. Results

Framework Analysis generated five interrelated themes. The themes describe a movement from barriers encountered at the point of speaking towards the forms of support that participants considered necessary. Table 2 summarises the principal cross-stakeholder patterns.

Table 2. Cross-stakeholder thematic matrix

Theme	Convergence across stakeholders	Important nuance	Pedagogical implication
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1. Linguistic-affective bottleneck	Vocabulary limitations and limited oral fluency were recognised across all groups.	Anxiety varied by interactional setting; one learner reported confidence but lexical difficulty.	Support must address language access and communicative risk together.
2. Textbook-practice mismatch	Books and prepared dialogues remained dominant resources.	Participants did not reject textbooks; the problem was insufficient transition to independent speech.	Move from model dialogue to progressively less supported production.
3. Need for structured speaking support	Teachers and learners valued prompts, vocabulary support, model expressions, and graduated difficulty.	Positive views of cards followed explicit introduction of the card concept in later interview prompts.	Interpret the finding as support needs, not as proof that a card medium is preferred independently.
4. Familiar topics and peer interaction	Everyday themes, pairs, groups, and repeated practice were widely preferred.	Peer interaction appeared to reduce evaluative pressure for some learners.	Create low-risk, meaningful spaces for repeated oral production.
5. Institutional support with limited dedicated resources	School leaders supported stronger speaking instruction and practical media.	Dedicated programmes, resources, and routine speaking time were uneven.	Instructional support must be simple, reusable, and compatible with existing routines.

3.1 Limited linguistic resources intersect with affective pressure

The strongest pattern across the interviews was the interaction between limited linguistic resources and affective pressure during spontaneous speaking. Teachers repeatedly identified restricted *mufradat*, difficulty constructing sentences, reluctance to speak, and low confidence. T1 described the classroom problem in terms of interrupted oral production:

"Muhadatsah tends to become one-directional. Learners are often shy and have limited vocabulary, so they frequently stop halfway through the conversation." (T1)

Learners described the same difficulty from the inside. L1 connected anxiety directly with lexical retrieval:

"I feel nervous and worry about pronouncing words incorrectly. The hardest part is remembering vocabulary when I have to answer spontaneously." (L1)

However, anxiety was not uniform. L4 reported being reasonably confident but still experienced difficulty selecting appropriate vocabulary and pronouncing some Arabic words. This deviant case suggests that linguistic constraints can persist even when the affective barrier is comparatively weak. L7 added an interactional distinction, explaining that speaking with a peer felt normal whereas speaking in front of the whole class caused embarrassment. School leaders interpreted these patterns structurally, linking low speaking competence to restricted vocabulary, insufficient practice time, and limited opportunities for active oral use. The first theme therefore reflects a production bottleneck in which linguistic access and social pressure operate together rather than independently.

3.2 Textbook-oriented practice constrains independent oral production

All five teachers reported using textbooks, prepared dialogues, or both. These resources were not described as ineffective; they were useful for initial understanding and modelling. The limitation concerned what happened after the model had been presented. T1 stated:

"We have mainly used textbooks and memorised dialogues. They help at the beginning, but they are not varied enough for spontaneous practice." (T1)

T5 similarly explained that Arabic conversation still followed the dialogues in the textbook and had not yet become a distinct activity focused on developing speaking competence. Learners largely confirmed this account. L1 said that dialogue texts were helpful but became boring because the content was repetitive, while L7 summarised the routine as learning from books and memorising conversations. School leaders also described uneven provision of dedicated speaking programmes and limited use of specialised oral-learning media. The issue was therefore not a simple opposition between textbooks and communication. Rather, the dataset showed a missing transition from *reproducing a dialogue* to *constructing an utterance* in a less predictable interaction.

3.3 Learners and teachers favour structured speaking support

When participants were asked what would make speaking more manageable, teachers and learners converged on a relatively small set of support features: clear prompts, accessible vocabulary, simple model expressions, visual support, and a progression from easier to more demanding questions. T3 described the need as follows:

"The medium should be simple, attractive, easy to use, and able to encourage learners to speak. It should include questions, vocabulary, and examples of simple Arabic expressions or sentences." (T3)

Learners framed the same need in terms of reducing uncertainty. L2 explained:

"It would be easier because I would already know what I need to answer. I would like pictures, vocabulary meanings, and simple model answers." (L2)

L4 specifically requested questions graded from easy to difficult and accompanied by new vocabulary, while L6 said that question prompts would help because they would reduce confusion about what to say. These responses indicate a need for structured speaking support rather than evidence that one physical medium is inherently superior. This distinction is important because structured question cards were explicitly introduced in later interview prompts. Participants' positive reactions therefore represent an evaluation of a proposed support format, whereas the recurring underlying needs - lexical help, response direction, examples, and graduated complexity - were also visible in the preceding discussion of general learning needs.

3.4 Familiar topics and peer interaction create lower-risk practice spaces

Participants also agreed that the content and social organisation of a speaking task mattered. Teachers recommended topics close to learners' everyday experience, including introductions, family, school, hobbies, the pesantren environment, and daily routines. Learners expanded these suggestions to social media, travel, shopping, food, sport, friends, and aspirations. Familiar topics were valued because they reduced the burden of deciding *what* to say while learners were also trying to decide *how* to say it.

"I want topics about hobbies and social media because they are close to everyday life." (L1)

Peer interaction was equally prominent. Learners asked for pair work, small-group practice, games, repeated attempts, and less reliance on memorisation. L6 wanted a less tense learning environment in which practice could take place with friends, and L7 explicitly contrasted comfortable peer interaction with embarrassment in whole-class performance. Teachers likewise wanted support that could be used in pairs so that more learners could speak at the same time. Peer work thus appeared to serve two functions: increasing opportunities for oral production and lowering the perceived social risk of speaking.

3.5 Institutional support is evident, but dedicated resources and routines remain limited

School leaders consistently supported stronger Arabic speaking instruction. At the same time, they described uneven implementation of dedicated speaking programmes, reliance on textbooks and simple media, and limited or non-specific budgets for *muhadatsah* resources. SL1 reported that a weekly speaking programme existed but was not implemented evenly across classes. SL2 and SL3 stated that no programme yet focused intensively on speaking, while SL5 noted that conversation activities remained closely tied to textbook content.

"The media available are still largely limited to textbooks, and resources specifically designed for muhadatsah remain limited." (SL2)

The significance of this theme lies in implementability. School leaders were receptive to additional instructional support, but the preferred solution was practical, simple, reusable, and easy to integrate into existing lessons. The data therefore suggest that speaking support should not depend on costly infrastructure or major timetable changes if it is to be sustained.

4. Discussion

4.1 Arabic speaking difficulty is a production bottleneck, not a vocabulary deficit

The findings support a more precise account of why learners may know Arabic yet fail to speak it spontaneously. Limited vocabulary is clearly important, as Daud & Pisal (2014) also found, but the present data show that vocabulary becomes especially constraining when it must be retrieved rapidly under the pressure of sentence construction, pronunciation, and public evaluation. Güngenci & Yildiz (2024) similarly locate Arabic speaking difficulty at the intersection of vocabulary, structure, emotion, and teaching methodology. The present study extends this literature by showing that stakeholders located the same problem at different levels: learners described fear and hesitation, teachers described linguistic insufficiency and participation problems, and

school leaders described limited practice opportunities and resources.

The situational nature of anxiety is particularly important. Learners were not uniformly anxious across all forms of speaking; some were more comfortable in peer interaction than in whole-class performance. This pattern aligns with Arabic-specific evidence that oral anxiety can constrain achievement (Ismail et al. 2023) and with broader evidence that second-language anxiety is negatively associated with achievement (Teimouri et al. 2019). It also complements Nassif (2019) finding that anxiety is intertwined with oral output processes among beginning Arabic learners. Pedagogically, the implication is that anxiety should not be addressed only through encouragement. The interactional environment itself can be redesigned to reduce communicative risk.

4.2 The missing bridge is between dialogue reproduction and supported production

The second theme reveals a recurring tension in language pedagogy: input and models are necessary, but they are not the same as interaction. Prepared dialogues can provide vocabulary, sentence patterns, and pronunciation models, yet learners who only reproduce a fixed script are not required to make the linguistic and pragmatic decisions demanded by actual conversation. This helps explain why Soliman & Khalil (2024) observed a gap between communicative aspirations and more traditional classroom practices in Arabic teaching. It also supports Littlewood (2014) argument that communicative work should involve purposeful language use while retaining appropriate attention to form.

Interaction research provides a mechanism for understanding the transition. Loewen & Sato (2018) emphasise the role of input, negotiation, and output in instructed second-language acquisition, while task-based language education seeks to create learner-centred opportunities to use language for meaningful goals (den Branden 2016). For the learners in this study, however, moving directly from a model dialogue to entirely open conversation would be unrealistic. The data

point instead to an intermediate zone of *supported production* in which learners are required to generate their own responses but are not left without linguistic or interactional resources.

4.3 Structured speaking support can be interpreted as scaffolding

The support features identified by participants - prompts, vocabulary banks, model expressions, visual cues, and graduated difficulty - are best understood as an instructional architecture rather than as attributes of a card. This distinction prevents the study from confusing a medium with its pedagogical mechanism. van de Pol et al. (2010) define effective scaffolding through contingency, fading, and transfer of responsibility. Applied to Arabic speaking, the logic suggests that beginners may initially receive a question, key vocabulary, and a sentence frame; as competence develops, the sentence frame can be removed, then lexical support reduced, until learners respond to increasingly open prompts with greater independence.

This interpretation is also consistent with evidence from Arabic learning technologies and environments. Ritonga et al. (2022) found that visual and vocabulary support in Duolingo was particularly useful for beginners, although the platform was less adequate for advanced speaking. Nurjannah et al. (2026) similarly identify scaffolded speaking routines and thematic vocabulary support as elements of a broader Arabic language environment. The present study adds an important design principle: support should be planned not only in terms of *what is provided* but also in terms of *what can later be withdrawn*.

4.4 Peer interaction and familiar contexts redistribute communicative risk

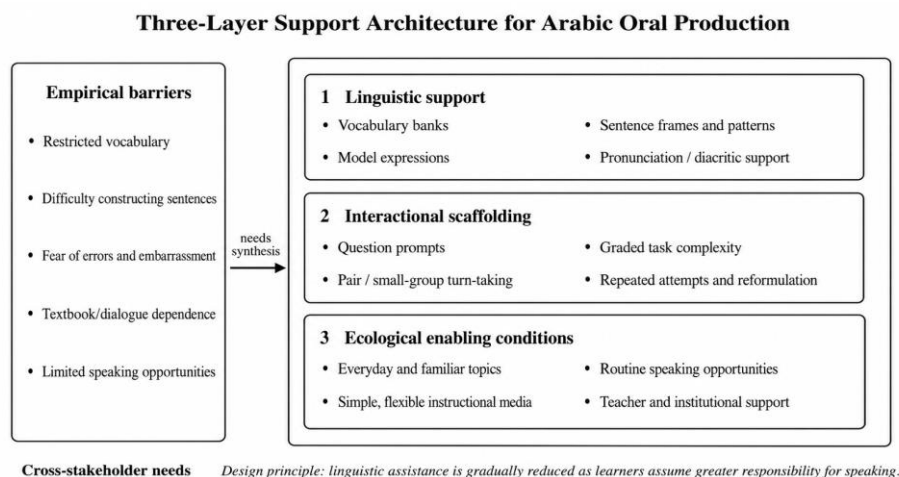
The value of pair and small-group work in the data cannot be reduced to classroom convenience. Peer interaction distributes speaking time across many learners at once, but it

also changes who is listening, who is evaluating, and how costly a mistake feels. This is compatible with interactionist work showing that participation structures and interlocutors influence opportunities for language learning (Loewen and Sato 2018). Al Khateeb & Hassan (2023) likewise show that interpersonal exchange can create meaningful target-language use, while Boulares (2025) links authentic interaction in an immersion-oriented Arabic programme with improved fluency and linguistic confidence.

Familiar topics serve a related function. When learners already know what they think about school, hobbies, food, family, or social media, they do not have to invent unfamiliar content while simultaneously searching for Arabic expressions. Daud & Pisal (2014) finding that contextual support changes the difficulty of speaking tasks is therefore visible here in a more everyday form. Topic familiarity can act as cognitive support, while peer interaction acts as social and interactional support.

4.5 A three-layer support architecture for Arabic oral production

Integrating the five themes, this study proposes a three-layer support architecture. It is an interpretative framework derived from stakeholder needs, not an effectiveness model that has already been experimentally validated. The first layer is *linguistic support*: vocabulary banks, sentence frames or patterns, model expressions, and pronunciation or diacritic support where needed. The second layer is *interactional scaffolding*: question prompts, graded task complexity, pair or small-group turn-taking, and repeated opportunities to attempt and reformulate responses. The third layer comprises *ecological enabling conditions*: familiar topics, routine speaking opportunities, simple and flexible media, teacher support, and institutional commitment



Cross-stakeholder needs Design principle: linguistic assistance is gradually reduced as learners assume greater responsibility for speaking.

Figure 1. Empirically derived three-layer support architecture for Arabic oral production.

The distinction between the three layers is deliberate. Linguistic support supplies resources for formulating an utterance; interactional scaffolding structures participation and should be progressively reduced as responsibility shifts to the learner; ecological enabling conditions make repeated speaking possible and sustainable. The framework therefore avoids treating every supportive condition as 'scaffolding' in the same theoretical sense. It also clarifies why an attractive medium alone is unlikely to change speaking practice if learners lack time to speak, partners with whom to interact, or routines that sustain target-language use.

4.6 Pedagogical implications

Four implications follow. First, Arabic speaking lessons should include a distinct stage of prompted production between model dialogue and free conversation. Second, support should be graduated: lower-level learners may need vocabulary and model expressions, whereas more proficient learners should receive increasingly open prompts. Third, pair and small-group interaction should be used strategically to expand speaking time and reduce the pressure of immediate whole-class performance. Fourth, speaking tasks should be built around familiar, meaningful topics and simple reusable resources so that practice can become routine rather than exceptional.

4.7 Methodological limitations and future research

The study has several limitations. The dataset consists of reported perceptions rather than direct observations of classroom interaction, so the analysis cannot show how long learners speak, how turns are organised, when they switch language, or how repair occurs in real time. The sample is also context-specific and is intended to support analytical rather than statistical generalisation. A further limitation concerns prompting within the interview design. Although participants discussed general barriers and media needs before the idea of structured question cards was introduced, later questions explicitly presented that concept. Positive evaluations of the cards should therefore be interpreted as stakeholder assessments of a proposed support format, not as entirely spontaneous preferences.

Future research can use the present framework to design and observe actual speaking tasks, compare different levels of support, and examine whether linguistic assistance can be faded without reducing participation. Classroom observation, interaction analysis, learner audio logs, and longitudinal designs would be particularly useful for testing whether supported production transfers to less structured speaking situations.

5. Conclusion

This study shows that difficulty in Arabic oral production is created by the interaction of limited linguistic resources, affective pressure, restricted speaking opportunities, textbook-oriented routines, and uneven instructional support. The

convergence of learners', teachers', and school leaders' accounts indicates that the central challenge is not simply to provide more vocabulary or more speaking activities, but to create a workable bridge between linguistic knowledge and real-time language use.

The empirical contribution lies in specifying the components of that bridge. Learners need access to vocabulary and model expressions, interactional structures that reduce uncertainty and distribute opportunities to speak, and an instructional environment in which familiar

topics, repeated practice, simple media, and institutional support make oral use sustainable. These findings are synthesised as a three-layer support architecture comprising linguistic support, interactional scaffolding, and ecological enabling conditions. Structured question cards may be one way to enact this architecture, but the conceptual contribution is broader than the card itself: Arabic speaking support should be designed around progressive responsibility for producing language, not around the mere presence of a new medium.

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7. Author Declaration

The authors declare that this manuscript is an original work and has not been published previously, either in whole or in part, nor is it currently under consideration for publication elsewhere. All sources and contributions from previous studies have been appropriately acknowledged and cited.

The authors further declare that there are no conflicts of interest, financial or otherwise, that could have influenced the conduct, interpretation, or reporting of this study.