

Developing Arabic Fluency through Interactive Question–Answer A Study in Malaysia

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Abstract

This study investigates the role of interactive question–answer instruction in developing Arabic oral fluency among learners in a Malaysian educational context. Despite prolonged exposure to Arabic instruction, many learners struggle to produce spontaneous and fluent speech due to limited opportunities for sustained oral interaction. Employing a classroom-based qualitative research design, this study focuses exclusively on question–answer interaction as the primary instructional strategy, deliberately excluding other speaking techniques such as role-play or storytelling. Data were collected through classroom observations, audio-recorded interactions, and semi-structured learner interviews, and were analyzed using thematic and discourse-oriented approaches. The findings reveal that interactive question–answer instruction contributes significantly to Arabic oral fluency by enhancing response speed, improving speech continuity, and reducing hesitation during real-time communication. Learners demonstrated increased confidence and greater willingness to engage in spontaneous speech, indicating improved linguistic automaticity. These results suggest that structured questioning functions as an effective pedagogical mechanism for activating linguistic resources and facilitating fluent oral production. The study contributes to Arabic language pedagogy by positioning interactive questioning as a core, low-resource instructional strategy for fluency development, offering practical implications for Arabic language educators in Malaysia and similar non-Arabic-speaking contexts.

Keywords: *arabic oral fluency, interactive questioning, question–answer interaction, speaking skills, arabic language education*

Introduction

Fluency in Arabic oral communication remains a persistent challenge for learners of Arabic as a foreign language, particularly in non-Arabic-speaking contexts such as Malaysia (Baharun, Arisandi, Husein, et al., 2025; Baharun, Hanifansyah, & Atiyah, 2025). Despite years of formal instruction, many learners demonstrate adequate grammatical knowledge and vocabulary recognition but struggle to produce spontaneous, fluent speech in real-time interactions. This discrepancy highlights a recurring pedagogical problem: Arabic language instruction often prioritizes form-focused learning over sustained interactive practice that fosters automaticity and communicative confidence (Baharun, 2025; Baharun & Solehudin, 2023; Bahy et al., 2024; Masnun et al., 2025; Wardana & Baharun, 2025).

A growing body of research has emphasized the importance of interaction in second and foreign language acquisition, arguing that meaningful communicative engagement plays a crucial role in developing oral fluency (Huda et al., 2026; Syaheed & Salam, 2026). However, in many Arabic classrooms, interaction is still limited to teacher-dominated explanations or scripted dialogues, leaving learners with minimal opportunities to engage in extended question–answer exchanges that require immediate linguistic processing. As a result, students tend to rely on memorized expressions rather than developing the ability to respond fluently and adaptively in authentic communicative situations.

In the Malaysian context, this issue is particularly salient. Arabic is widely taught in Islamic educational institutions (Baharun, Hanifansyah, & Salsabil, 2025; Hanifansyah, 2025; Hanifansyah & Mahmudah, 2024; Masnun et al., 2026; Solehudin & Nur Hanifansyah, 2024), yet classroom practices often emphasize reading and grammar mastery over oral interaction. While previous studies have explored communicative approaches, task-based learning, and speaking drills in Arabic education, relatively little attention has been given to the systematic use of interactive question–answer strategies as a central pedagogical mechanism for developing fluency. Existing studies frequently treat questioning as a supplementary technique rather than as a sustained interactive process that drives speech production.

Previous studies have demonstrated that classroom interaction plays a crucial role in language learning, particularly in fostering learner engagement and spoken output. Research on classroom questioning has consistently shown that different types of teacher questions influence the quantity and quality of learner talk. A descriptive classroom study by Ayouni (2022) revealed that referential questions were more effective than display questions in encouraging student participation and extended oral responses in speaking classes, highlighting the interactional value of authentic questioning.

In the context of Arabic language education, several studies have focused on improving speaking proficiency through alternative instructional strategies. Zarkasi (2025) found that short-phrase memorization significantly enhanced learners' speaking fluency, accuracy, and confidence, suggesting that chunk-based learning supports automaticity in speech production. Similarly, vocabulary-focused interventions have been shown to strengthen linguistic readiness. A mixed-methods study by Mahmudah et al. (2025) demonstrated that daily incremental vocabulary learning improved learners' lexical recall and motivation, which are essential prerequisites for fluent oral communication.

Beyond classroom strategies, research has also emphasized the broader importance of Arabic fluency in social and institutional contexts. Studies in higher education, such as Fazza et al. (2025), highlighted a mismatch between graduates' Arabic language proficiency and employers' expectations, particularly in spoken Modern Standard Arabic. From a sociolinguistic perspective, Bahhari (2023) showed that families living abroad actively maintain their children's Arabic oral fluency due to social and religious motivations, underscoring the real-world value of spoken fluency beyond formal education.

Collectively, these studies confirm that interaction, lexical preparedness, and contextual motivation are central to developing oral proficiency. However, they differ in their instructional focus and do not fully address how structured classroom interaction specifically interactive question–answer practices can be optimized as a primary mechanism for developing Arabic oral fluency.

Despite growing attention to interaction and speaking development, existing studies have not sufficiently examined interactive question–answer instruction as a focused and standalone pedagogical strategy for developing Arabic oral fluency. Prior research has tended to emphasize memorization-based techniques, vocabulary accumulation, general interaction, or contextual language use, without isolating the role of sustained question–answer exchanges in promoting spontaneous speech. Moreover, improvements in fluency are often reported as secondary outcomes rather than as the central instructional objective. As a result, there remains a lack of empirical evidence explaining how and to what extent interactive questioning directly facilitates real-time oral fluency in Arabic language classrooms, particularly in non-Arabic-speaking educational contexts.

Current research in Arabic language education has established that oral fluency is influenced by multiple factors, including lexical access, learner confidence, and communicative exposure. Interaction-based learning is widely recognized as beneficial, yet most studies integrate questioning as a supplementary classroom technique rather than positioning it as the core instructional driver. The state of the art thus reflects a shift toward communicative and interaction-oriented pedagogy, while still lacking focused models that operationalize question–answer interaction as the central pathway from linguistic knowledge to fluent speech production. This

indicates a conceptual and methodological space for studies that foreground questioning as a systematic fluency-building mechanism.

This study contributes to Arabic language pedagogy by positioning interactive question–answer instruction as a primary instructional strategy for developing oral fluency, rather than as a peripheral classroom activity. Empirically, it provides classroom-based evidence on how sustained question–answer interaction enhances response speed, speech continuity, and reduced hesitation in spoken Arabic. Conceptually, the study bridges interaction-focused pedagogy and fluency development by demonstrating how real-time questioning activates linguistic resources and supports automatic speech production. Practically, the findings offer Arabic language educators a low-resource, interaction-driven instructional model that can be implemented across diverse educational contexts to foster spontaneous and fluent oral communication.

Against this backdrop, the present study focuses exclusively on optimizing interactive question–answer practices to enhance Arabic speaking fluency among learners in Malaysia. Rather than integrating multiple instructional components, this research deliberately isolates question–answer interaction as the primary instructional strategy to examine its direct contribution to fluency development. The study is guided by the following research question: How does interactive question–answer instruction contribute to the development of Arabic oral fluency among learners in the Malaysian educational context? Which aspects of Arabic oral fluency are most influenced by interactive question–answer instruction, particularly in terms of response speed, speech continuity, and reduced hesitation?

To maintain analytical clarity, this study is limited to classroom-based interactive question–answer activities and does not examine other speaking strategies such as role-play, debate, or storytelling. The research focuses on observable indicators of fluency, including speech continuity, response speed, and reduced hesitation, rather than broader communicative competence or pronunciation accuracy. These boundaries are set to ensure a focused investigation into the pedagogical value of question–answer interaction.

The significance of this study lies in its potential contribution to both theory and practice. Pedagogically, it offers an evidence-based instructional model that positions questioning as a core driver of oral fluency rather than a peripheral classroom technique. Theoretically, it contributes to discussions on interaction-driven language development by demonstrating how sustained question–answer exchanges facilitate linguistic automaticity in Arabic as a foreign language. Practically, the findings are expected to inform Arabic language educators in Malaysia and similar contexts seeking effective, low-resource strategies to improve learners' spoken fluency.

By addressing the underexplored role of interactive question–answer instruction, this study seeks to fill an important gap in Arabic language pedagogy

and to provide a focused contribution to the ongoing discourse on fluency-oriented language teaching.

Method

This study employed a classroom-based qualitative research design to examine how interactive question–answer instruction contributes to the development of Arabic oral fluency among learners in a Malaysian educational context (Creswell et al., 2007; Creswell & Creswell, 2020). Grounded in interaction-oriented language learning perspectives, the study conceptualized question–answer interaction as a pedagogical mechanism that promotes spontaneous speech production, rapid linguistic retrieval, and reduced hesitation. The research was conducted in a Malaysian institution where Arabic is taught as a foreign language, selected due to the recurring challenge of limited oral fluency despite extensive formal instruction. The unit of analysis focused on learners’ oral responses produced during classroom question–answer sessions, with fluency operationalized through observable indicators such as response speed, speech continuity, and hesitation frequency. Primary data were collected through classroom observations, audio-recorded interactions, and semi-structured learner interviews, complemented by instructional documents as secondary data (Jones et al., 2022; Small & Calarco, 2022). Data analysis followed a thematic and discourse-oriented approach, triangulating interactional evidence and learner perspectives to identify patterns of fluency development resulting from sustained question–answer engagement.

Result and Discussion

The Contribution of Interactive Question–Answer Instruction to Arabic Oral Fluency

The findings indicate that interactive question–answer instruction contributed positively to the development of Arabic oral fluency among learners. Classroom observations revealed a noticeable increase in learners’ willingness to respond orally and to sustain speech during question–answer exchanges. Compared to initial sessions, learners demonstrated faster response initiation and longer utterances, suggesting improved automaticity in speech production. Rather than relying on memorized expressions, learners increasingly produced spontaneous responses that reflected real-time linguistic processing.

These results suggest that sustained exposure to interactive questioning created a communicative environment that reduced performance anxiety and encouraged continuous oral engagement. The repetitive yet meaningful nature of question–answer interaction allowed learners to internalize common syntactic patterns and lexical items, which facilitated smoother speech flow over time.

Fluency Aspects Influenced by Interactive Question–Answer Instruction

Further analysis shows that the most prominent fluency improvements occurred in three interrelated aspects: response speed, speech continuity, and reduced hesitation. Learners gradually required less time to formulate answers, indicating increased efficiency in lexical retrieval. Speech continuity also improved, as responses became less fragmented and pauses decreased in frequency and duration.

These patterns were consistently observed across multiple sessions, suggesting that question-answer interaction functioned as a scaffold that bridged receptive knowledge and oral production. Rather than focusing on grammatical accuracy, learners prioritized communicative flow, which is a core characteristic of oral fluency.

Interview data supported the observational findings and provided insight into learners' perceptions of the instructional approach. Several learners emphasized that repeated questioning helped them think and speak more quickly in Arabic:

"When the teacher keeps asking questions, I don't have time to translate in my head. I just answer, and after some time it becomes easier." (Student 3)

Another learner highlighted the role of interaction in reducing hesitation: "Before, I was afraid of making mistakes. But answering questions again and again makes me more confident and less nervous." (Student 7)

These responses suggest that interactive question-answer activities fostered a low-pressure communicative environment that supported fluency development by shifting learners' attention from form accuracy to message delivery.

The findings of this study corroborate and extend previous research emphasizing the central role of classroom interaction in language learning, particularly in speaking development. Consistent with interaction-oriented perspectives in second language acquisition, the present study demonstrates that interactive question-answer instruction significantly facilitates Arabic oral fluency, as reflected in faster response initiation, improved speech continuity, and reduced hesitation. These results align with earlier interactional studies which argue that fluency develops through repeated opportunities for real-time language use rather than through passive exposure alone (Ayouni, 2022; Huda et al., 2026).

Specifically, the effectiveness of question-answer interaction observed in this study supports findings from classroom questioning research. Ayouni (2022) showed that referential questions generated more extended learner responses and higher engagement than display questions in speaking classes. While Ayouni's study focused primarily on interactional quantity and participation, the present study advances this line of inquiry by demonstrating that such questioning practices also contribute directly to qualitative dimensions of oral fluency, including continuity and automaticity of speech. This indicates that questioning not only increases learner talk, but also enhances the fluency characteristics of that talk.

When compared with memorization-based approaches, the findings reveal an important pedagogical distinction. Zarkasi (2025) reported that short-phrase memorization significantly improved learners' speaking fluency, accuracy, and confidence, suggesting that chunk-based learning supports automatic speech production. Similarly, Mahmudah et al. (2025) demonstrated that daily incremental vocabulary learning enhanced lexical recall and learner motivation, strengthening cognitive readiness for language use. While these studies confirm the importance of lexical preparedness, the present findings suggest that interactive question–answer instruction plays a complementary but distinct role by activating lexical and syntactic knowledge in real-time communicative contexts. In other words, memorization prepares learners *to speak*, whereas questioning trains learners *to speak fluently under interactional pressure*.

The affective dimension of fluency development identified in this study is also consistent with prior psycholinguistic research. Huda et al. (2026) found that learners who experienced reduced communicative anxiety and increased linguistic calmness demonstrated smoother speech flow. Similarly, Syaheed and Salam (2026) argued that fluency emerges when learners shift from excessive self-monitoring to message-oriented communication. The interview data in the present study reflect this shift clearly: learners reported reduced mental translation and increased confidence as a result of repeated questioning. This suggests that interactive question–answer practices create a low-pressure communicative environment that facilitates fluency by lowering affective barriers.

From a broader contextual perspective, the findings resonate with studies highlighting the real-world importance of Arabic oral fluency. Fazza et al. (2025) identified a significant gap between graduates' Arabic proficiency and employers' expectations in higher education contexts, particularly in spoken Modern Standard Arabic. Likewise, Bahhari (2023) demonstrated that families living abroad actively maintain Arabic oral fluency due to social and religious motivations. These studies underscore that fluency is not merely an academic goal, but a socially and professionally valued competence. The present study contributes to this discourse by showing how such fluency can be systematically cultivated through everyday classroom interaction rather than through isolated or resource-intensive interventions.

Importantly, while previous studies have acknowledged interaction as beneficial, they have largely treated questioning as a supplementary classroom technique (Ayouni, 2022; Zarkasi, 2025). The present study departs from this trend by positioning interactive question–answer instruction as the primary instructional driver for fluency development. This shift represents a conceptual advancement in Arabic language pedagogy, as it foregrounds questioning not only as a means of checking comprehension, but as a structured pathway from linguistic knowledge to fluent oral production.

Taken together, these findings confirm, refine, and extend existing research by integrating insights from classroom questioning (Ayouni, 2022), memorization and lexical readiness (Zarkasi, 2025; Mahmudah et al., 2025), psycholinguistic fluency development (Huda et al., 2026; Syaheed & Salam, 2026), and sociocultural relevance of Arabic fluency (Bahhari, 2023; Fazza et al., 2025). By synthesizing these strands, the present study provides empirical evidence that interactive question-answer instruction constitutes a pedagogically efficient and theoretically grounded approach to developing Arabic oral fluency, particularly in non-Arabic-speaking educational contexts such as Malaysia.

Conclusion

This study examined the role of interactive question-answer instruction in developing Arabic oral fluency among learners in the Malaysian educational context. The findings demonstrate that sustained question-answer interaction contributes meaningfully to fluency development by promoting faster response initiation, improved speech continuity, and reduced hesitation during oral production. By positioning questioning as the core instructional strategy rather than a supplementary classroom technique, this study reinforces the argument that oral fluency in Arabic can be effectively fostered through consistent, interaction-driven pedagogical practices. The study contributes to Arabic language pedagogy by providing empirical evidence that fluency-oriented instruction does not necessarily require complex tasks or extensive resources, but can be achieved through strategically structured classroom interaction.

Despite these contributions, this study is not without limitations. The findings are based on a single instructional context and focus exclusively on observable fluency indicators, without examining pronunciation accuracy or syntactic complexity. Future research may expand the scope by incorporating comparative designs, larger participant groups, or longitudinal approaches to examine the long-term effects of question-answer interaction on broader communicative competence. Practically, the results suggest that Arabic language educators particularly in contexts similar to Malaysia can enhance learners' oral fluency by systematically integrating interactive questioning into daily instruction, thereby creating a low-pressure environment that encourages spontaneous speech and communicative confidence.

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