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Mentoring Arabic Debate Practices as a Community Engagement Program to Improve Communicative Competence

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Abstract

Arabic language learning in many Islamic educational communities still faces challenges, particularly in developing students' oral communication skills. Although learners are exposed to Arabic through formal instruction and religious texts, opportunities for interactive and expressive language use remain limited. This community engagement program aimed to improve participants' communicative competence through mentoring Arabic debate practices as a sustained and participatory activity. The program involved students from an Islamic educational community and was implemented through structured mentoring sessions that emphasized guided debate, collaborative interaction, and reflective discussion. Rather than positioning debate as a competitive event, the program framed it as a communicative exercise supported by continuous accompaniment. The outcomes of the program indicate increased confidence, greater willingness to speak Arabic, improved fluency, and clearer organization of spoken expression. Participants also demonstrated enhanced interactional awareness and basic argumentative skills during debate activities. Overall, the program shows that mentoring-based Arabic debate practices can effectively transform a supportive language environment into an active communicative space. This community engagement model offers a practical approach to enriching Arabic speaking activities beyond the formal classroom, particularly in non-Arab contexts where opportunities for authentic oral communication are limited.

Kata Kunci:
Debat Bahasa Arab, Kompetensi Komunikatif, Keterampilan Berbicara, Pendampingan Bahasa, Pengabdian Masyarakat.

Abstrak

Pembelajaran bahasa Arab di banyak komunitas pendidikan Islam masih menghadapi tantangan, khususnya dalam pengembangan keterampilan berbicara. Meskipun peserta didik telah mendapatkan paparan bahasa Arab melalui pembelajaran formal dan teks keagamaan, kesempatan untuk menggunakan bahasa Arab secara interaktif dan ekspresif masih terbatas. Kegiatan pengabdian kepada masyarakat ini bertujuan untuk meningkatkan kompetensi komunikatif peserta melalui pendampingan praktik debat bahasa Arab sebagai aktivitas berkelanjutan dan partisipatif. Program ini melibatkan peserta dari komunitas pendidikan Islam dan dilaksanakan melalui sesi pendampingan terstruktur yang menekankan praktik debat terpandu, interaksi kolaboratif, dan refleksi bersama. Debat tidak diposisikan sebagai kegiatan kompetitif, melainkan sebagai sarana komunikasi yang didukung oleh pendampingan berkelanjutan. Hasil kegiatan menunjukkan peningkatan kepercayaan diri, kemauan berbicara bahasa Arab, kelancaran berbahasa, serta keteraturan dalam menyampaikan gagasan. Peserta juga menunjukkan peningkatan kemampuan interaksi dan keterampilan argumentatif dasar. Secara keseluruhan, program ini menunjukkan bahwa pendampingan debat bahasa Arab berbasis komunitas efektif dalam mengaktifkan lingkungan

berbahasa dan memperkaya praktik berbicara bahasa Arab di luar kelas formal.

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INTRODUCTION

Arabic language proficiency, particularly oral communication skills, remains a central aspiration within many Islamic educational communities (Baharun, 2025; Masnun et al., 2025; Solehudin, 2024). While learners are often exposed to Arabic through formal classroom instruction, religious texts, and memorization-based activities, opportunities for structured, interactive, and expressive language use are still limited (Bukhari & Dewey, 2023; Habib, 2025; Habib et al., 2025). As a result, many students demonstrate adequate receptive knowledge of Arabic but experience difficulty in articulating ideas, defending opinions, and engaging in spontaneous spoken interaction (El Majidi et al., 2024; Solehudin, 2024). This condition highlights the need for practical language enrichment programs that move beyond conventional instructional routines and emphasize authentic communication (Solehudin, 2025).

Debate practices in Arabic offer a promising medium for addressing this challenge. Arabic debate encourages learners to speak confidently, organize arguments, respond to opposing viewpoints, and negotiate meaning in real time. Unlike routine speaking exercises, debate activities create a dynamic communicative environment where language is used purposefully and meaningfully. Through structured argumentation, students are trained not only to speak fluently but also to listen critically, formulate responses, and employ appropriate linguistic strategies. In this sense, Arabic debate functions as both a linguistic and intellectual exercise that supports the development of communicative competence.

However, in many educational communities, especially in non-Arab contexts, Arabic debate activities are rarely implemented in a systematic manner (Abdilah & Holilulloh, 2022). When debate is introduced, it often lacks sustained guidance, clear mentoring structures, and continuity of practice. Learners may be unfamiliar with debate formats, turn-taking strategies, or the use of persuasive language in Arabic. Consequently, the potential of debate as a communicative tool remains underutilized. This situation calls for a community-based mentoring approach that emphasizes accompaniment, guidance, and gradual skill development rather than formal assessment or experimental instruction.

Community engagement programs provide an effective framework for such initiatives. Through mentoring-based activities, language practitioners and facilitators can work closely with learners in an interactive and supportive environment. Mentoring allows for direct modeling of language use, immediate feedback, and continuous encouragement, fostering a learning atmosphere that is collaborative rather than evaluative. In the context of Arabic debate, mentoring emphasizes practice, reflection, and confidence-building, enabling participants to develop communicative competence through repeated exposure and guided interaction.

Several community service initiatives have addressed the development of Arabic language learning through community-based and participatory approaches. Zakiyah (2024) implemented a service-learning program at the madrasah level, emphasizing the importance of Arabic for religious understanding and cultural awareness. The program successfully increased students' motivation,

learning awareness, and environmental support for Arabic language use, highlighting the foundational role of community engagement in Arabic education.

Other community service programs focused on creating supportive Arabic-speaking environments and performative language activities. Annas (2025) demonstrated that Arabic language competitions in pesantren contexts enhanced learners' motivation and confidence in speaking, although the activities were largely event-based. Similarly, Insaniyah and Adawiyah (2025) showed that optimizing community roles through mentoring, language clubs, and participatory workshops effectively fostered an Arabic-speaking environment in pesantren. In a higher education context, Raudatussolihah et al. (2025) emphasized the development of *bi'ah lughawiyah*, where debate clubs functioned as part of a broader linguistic ecosystem supporting *maharah al-kalam*.

While these community service programs successfully strengthened motivation, confidence, and Arabic-speaking environments, most of them positioned debate and speaking activities as complementary components rather than the core focus of sustained mentoring. This condition indicates the need for community engagement programs that specifically center on mentoring Arabic debate practices as an intensive communicative activity to systematically develop communicative competence.

This community engagement program was designed to facilitate Arabic debate practices through structured mentoring sessions tailored to the participants' linguistic needs and social context. The program focused on creating a safe and participatory space where learners could actively engage in debate, experiment with language, and gradually improve their spoken communication skills. Rather than positioning debate as a competitive academic activity, the program framed it as a communicative exercise aimed at empowering participants to express ideas clearly, respectfully, and confidently in Arabic.

By implementing mentoring-based Arabic debate practices within a community engagement setting, this initiative seeks to contribute to the enrichment of Arabic speaking activities beyond the formal classroom. The program demonstrates how sustained accompaniment and practice-oriented interaction can support the development of communicative competence, particularly in educational communities where Arabic functions as a foreign or second language. Through this approach, Arabic debate becomes not merely a linguistic exercise, but a meaningful communal practice that strengthens communication, collaboration, and learner confidence.

METHOD

This community engagement program employed a mentoring-based approach focused on practical accompaniment in Arabic debate activities (Gradini & Dhari, 2025; Green et al., 2022). The program was designed as a participatory language enrichment initiative rather than a research-oriented intervention. Its primary orientation was to support participants through guided practice, collaborative interaction, and continuous mentoring in order to strengthen their communicative competence in Arabic. The mentoring process emphasized learning by doing, reflective practice, and gradual confidence building in spoken Arabic.

The program involved students from an Islamic educational community who were interested in improving their Arabic speaking abilities, particularly in expressing opinions and engaging in structured discussion. Participants came from diverse language backgrounds and possessed varying levels of Arabic proficiency. The community setting provided a supportive and familiar environment,

allowing learners to participate actively without the pressure of formal evaluation. Mentors consisted of Arabic language facilitators who had experience in debate practices and communicative language activities.

The mentoring sessions were conducted regularly and organized into structured stages. Each session began with an orientation phase, during which mentors introduced debate themes, key vocabulary, and basic argumentative expressions relevant to the topic. This phase aimed to equip participants with linguistic resources necessary for effective communication.

The core activity of each session involved guided Arabic debate practices. Participants were divided into small groups to encourage equal participation and active speaking opportunities. Mentors facilitated the debates by modeling expressions, managing turn-taking, and encouraging respectful interaction among participants. Rather than focusing on winning or losing arguments, the debates emphasized clarity of expression, responsiveness, and communicative effectiveness.

Following the debate activities, mentoring continued through reflective discussions. Participants were invited to share their experiences, challenges, and progress during the session. Mentors provided constructive feedback, highlighting effective language use and offering suggestions for improvement. This reflective component played a crucial role in reinforcing learning outcomes and maintaining participant motivation.

Mentors functioned as facilitators, language models, and motivators throughout the program. Their role was not to assess performance formally but to accompany participants in their learning journey. Mentors provided real-time support, corrected language use implicitly, and encouraged participants to take risks in speaking Arabic. By maintaining a supportive atmosphere, mentors helped participants overcome anxiety and develop greater confidence in oral communication.

Evaluation of the program was conducted informally through observation of participant engagement, consistency of attendance, and reflective feedback from participants. Emphasis was placed on observable improvements in participation, fluency, and willingness to speak Arabic during debate activities. Reflection sessions at the end of the program allowed both mentors and participants to discuss the overall experience and identify areas for future improvement and sustainability.

RESULT AND CONCLUSION

The implementation of the mentoring-based Arabic debate program produced several positive outcomes that were observable throughout the community engagement activities. These outcomes reflect improvements in participants' communicative practices, confidence in speaking Arabic, and engagement in interactive language use within a supportive learning environment.

One of the most evident outcomes was the increased willingness of participants to speak Arabic actively during group discussions and debate sessions. At the initial stages of the program, many participants demonstrated hesitation, limited spontaneous responses, and reliance on memorized expressions. As the mentoring sessions progressed, participants became more comfortable expressing opinions, responding to opposing arguments, and maintaining interaction in Arabic. The supportive presence of mentors and the non-evaluative nature of the activities contributed significantly to this positive change.

Another important result was the improvement in clarity and organization of spoken expressions. Through repeated exposure to debate formats and guided practice, participants

gradually developed the ability to structure their ideas more coherently. They began to use introductory phrases, connectors, and concluding statements more effectively when presenting arguments. This development indicated that Arabic debate practices helped participants move beyond fragmented speech toward more purposeful and meaningful communication.

The program also fostered greater interaction and collaborative communication among participants. Debate activities encouraged active listening, turn-taking, and respectful engagement with differing viewpoints. Participants showed increased awareness of conversational dynamics, such as waiting for their turn to speak and responding appropriately to others' statements. This interactional awareness strengthened the communicative atmosphere of the sessions and contributed to a sense of collective learning within the community.



Figure 1. A participant delivers an Arabic speech during a mentoring-based debate session as part of a community engagement program aimed at enhancing communicative competence through guided Arabic debate practices.

In addition to linguistic development, the mentoring program resulted in enhanced confidence and reduced speaking anxiety. Participants reported feeling more relaxed and motivated to use Arabic during debates, even when making linguistic errors. The mentoring approach, which emphasized encouragement and gradual improvement rather than correction and evaluation, created a safe space for experimentation. This emotional comfort played a crucial role in sustaining participant engagement and promoting consistent participation.

Furthermore, the program contributed to the development of basic argumentative and critical communication skills. Participants learned to support their opinions with reasons, respond to counterarguments, and articulate agreement or disagreement politely in Arabic. These skills enriched their communicative competence and demonstrated that debate practices can function as a holistic language activity integrating speaking, listening, and reasoning.

Overall, the outcomes of this community engagement program indicate that mentoring Arabic debate practices effectively supported the development of communicative competence within the educational community. The combination of structured debate activities, continuous mentoring, and

reflective interaction enabled participants to improve their Arabic speaking practices in a meaningful and sustainable manner. The results highlight the value of community-based mentoring as an alternative and complementary approach to formal language instruction, particularly in contexts where opportunities for active Arabic communication are limited.

Table 1. Outcomes of the Mentoring-Based Arabic Debate Community Engagement Program

Aspect of Development	Initial Condition	Observed Outcomes After Mentoring	Program Contribution
Participation in Arabic Speaking	Participants tended to be passive and hesitant in using Arabic during discussions	Participants became more active and willing to speak Arabic during debate sessions	Mentoring created a supportive environment that encouraged active oral participation
Fluency and Expression	Speech was fragmented and relied heavily on memorized phrases	Expressions became more fluent, structured, and communicative	Repeated debate practice helped participants organize ideas more coherently
Confidence in Speaking	Participants showed anxiety and fear of making mistakes	Participants demonstrated increased confidence and reduced speaking anxiety	Non-evaluative mentoring reduced pressure and promoted linguistic risk-taking
Argumentative Communication	Limited ability to express opinions and respond to others	Participants were able to present arguments and respond politely to opposing views	Guided debate activities strengthened basic argumentative skills
Interaction and Turn-Taking	Limited awareness of conversational dynamics	Improved interaction, listening skills, and turn-taking during debates	Mentors modeled and facilitated effective communicative interaction
Motivation to Use Arabic	Low motivation to use Arabic beyond formal settings	Increased enthusiasm and motivation to use Arabic in group activities	Debate themes and mentoring fostered meaningful language engagement

The findings of this community engagement program reinforce and extend insights from previous community service initiatives in Arabic language education. Earlier programs have consistently shown that community-based and participatory approaches play a crucial role in strengthening learners' motivation, awareness, and engagement with Arabic. For instance, Zakiyah (2024) demonstrated that service-learning initiatives at the madrasah level successfully fostered positive learning attitudes and environmental support for Arabic use, confirming that community involvement constitutes a foundational element in Arabic language development.

Similarly, performative and environment-oriented programs have emphasized the importance of creating spaces that encourage learners to use Arabic more confidently. Annas (2025) highlighted how competition-based activities enhanced learners' confidence and enthusiasm for speaking Arabic in pesantren contexts, while Insaniyah and Adawiyah 2025 showed that optimizing community roles through mentoring, language clubs, and participatory workshops effectively nurtured an Arabic-speaking environment. In higher education settings, Raudatussolihah et al.

(2025) further demonstrated that *bi'ah lughawiyah* functions as a linguistic ecosystem in which activities such as debate clubs support the development of *maharah al-kalam*.

The present community engagement program aligns with these initiatives in recognizing the importance of motivation, confidence, and a supportive linguistic environment. However, it also addresses a key limitation identified in previous programs. While earlier community service activities positioned debate and speaking practices as complementary elements within broader language environments, this program deliberately placed Arabic debate mentoring at the center of the engagement process. Debate was not treated merely as an event, a club activity, or an optional extension of the language environment, but as a sustained communicative practice guided through continuous mentoring.

By centering mentoring-based Arabic debate practices, this program transformed the supportive environment described in earlier initiatives into an active communicative space. Participants were not only encouraged to use Arabic, but were also guided to articulate arguments, respond to opposing viewpoints, and engage in meaningful interaction over time. This sustained accompaniment enabled learners to move beyond increased motivation and confidence toward the gradual development of communicative competence, particularly in terms of fluency, interactional awareness, and argumentative expression.

In this sense, the program complements and advances previous community service efforts. It builds upon the motivational foundations established by service-learning and competitive activities, the environmental support fostered through *bi'ah lughawiyah*, and the communal engagement emphasized in pesantren-based programs. At the same time, it contributes a more focused and practice-oriented model by demonstrating how mentoring Arabic debate practices can function as an intensive communicative strategy within community engagement. This approach highlights the potential of debate, when supported by sustained mentoring, to serve not merely as a cultural or performative activity, but as a strategic medium for developing communicative competence in Arabic within educational communities.

CONCLUSION

This community engagement program demonstrates that mentoring Arabic debate practices can serve as an effective and meaningful approach to enhancing communicative competence within educational communities. By positioning Arabic debate as a sustained communicative activity rather than a one-time event or competitive exercise, the program provided participants with continuous opportunities to practice speaking, articulate ideas, and engage in interactive dialogue in Arabic within a supportive environment.

The findings indicate that mentoring-based debate practices contributed to increased confidence, improved fluency, clearer organization of spoken expression, and greater willingness to use Arabic in communicative contexts. The presence of mentors played a crucial role in fostering a non-evaluative atmosphere that encouraged participation, reduced speaking anxiety, and supported gradual skill development. Through guided interaction and reflective discussion, participants were able to move beyond passive language use toward more active and purposeful communication.

This program also highlights the importance of community engagement in Arabic language development. Building on previous community service initiatives that emphasized motivation, environmental support, and *bi'ah lughawiyah*, the present program demonstrates how a focused

mentoring model can transform a supportive language environment into an active space for communicative practice. In this sense, Arabic debate, when integrated into community-based mentoring, functions not merely as a performative or cultural activity but as a strategic medium for developing communicative competence.

Overall, the program contributes a practical model for community service in Arabic language education that prioritizes sustained accompaniment, interactive speaking practice, and collaborative learning. The mentoring Arabic debate approach offers a viable alternative and complement to formal classroom instruction, particularly in non-Arab contexts where opportunities for authentic oral communication are limited. Future community engagement initiatives may further explore the adaptation and sustainability of this model across diverse educational settings to strengthen Arabic speaking practices more broadly.

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