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# From Surroundings to Vocabulary: "How Do You Say It in Arabic?" as a Contextual Arabic Learning Program in Kedah

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**Abstract**
This community engagement program aimed to enhance Arabic vocabulary learning through a contextual approach entitled "How Do You Say It in Arabic?" at Maktab Mahmud Yan, Kedah, Malaysia. The program involved 30 Form Four students and employed a community-based program evaluation with a mixed-methods approach. Vocabulary learning was organized through the sequence of Observe, Ask, Guess, Confirm, Pronounce, Use, and Record, allowing participants to discover Arabic expressions from objects, actions, situations, physical conditions, and emotions encountered in their everyday surroundings. Quantitative data were obtained through contextual vocabulary pretests and posttests, while qualitative information was derived from observations and participants' learning responses. The results showed that the mean vocabulary score increased from 64.63 (SD = 5.59) in the pretest to 74.87 (SD = 6.16) in the posttest, representing a mean gain of 10.23 points or 15.83%. A paired-samples *t*-test indicated a statistically significant difference, $t(29) = 14.99$, $p < .001$. Participants also demonstrated greater confidence in asking about, guessing, pronouncing, and using unfamiliar Arabic vocabulary. Importantly, lexical inquiry expanded beyond concrete nouns to include verbs, actions, states, and emotional expressions. The program demonstrates that everyday surroundings can function as dynamic vocabulary resources and suggests that the recurring question "How do you say it in Arabic?" can foster a habit of lexical inquiry, connecting Arabic learning with learners' immediate experiences and encouraging more active, contextual, and sustainable vocabulary development.

**Kata Kunci:**
*Kosakata Bahasa Arab, Pembelajaran Kontekstual, Pengabdian Kepada Masyarakat, Pengembangan Kosakata, Inkuiri Leksikal.*

**Abstrak**
A Program pengabdian kepada masyarakat ini bertujuan untuk meningkatkan penguasaan kosakata bahasa Arab melalui pendekatan kontekstual bertajuk "Apa Bahasa Arabnya?" di Maktab Mahmud Yan, Kedah, Malaysia. Kegiatan ini melibatkan 30 pelajar Tingkatan 4 dan menggunakan evaluasi program berbasis komunitas dengan pendekatan metode campuran. Pembelajaran kosakata dilaksanakan melalui tahapan Observe, Ask, Guess, Confirm, Pronounce, Use, dan Record, yang memungkinkan peserta menemukan ungkapan bahasa Arab dari benda, tindakan, situasi, kondisi fisik, dan emosi yang dijumpai dalam kehidupan sehari-hari. Data kuantitatif diperoleh melalui pretest dan posttest kosakata kontekstual, sedangkan data kualitatif diperoleh melalui observasi dan respons peserta selama kegiatan. Hasil menunjukkan bahwa skor rata-rata kosakata meningkat dari 64,63 (SD = 5,59) pada pretest menjadi 74,87 (SD = 6,16) pada posttest, dengan kenaikan rata-rata 10,23 poin atau 15,83%. Uji *paired-samples t-test* menunjukkan perbedaan yang signifikan secara statistik, $t(29) = 14,99$, $p < 0,001$. Peserta juga menunjukkan peningkatan kepercayaan diri dalam bertanya, menebak, melafalkan, dan

menggunakan kosakata Arab yang belum dikenal. Selain itu, eksplorasi kosakata berkembang dari sekadar kata benda konkret menuju kata kerja, tindakan, kondisi, dan ungkapan emosional. Program ini menunjukkan bahwa lingkungan sehari-hari dapat berfungsi sebagai sumber kosakata yang dinamis dan bahwa pertanyaan berulang "How do you say it in Arabic?" dapat membentuk kebiasaan inkuiri leksikal, sehingga pembelajaran bahasa Arab menjadi lebih aktif, kontekstual, dan berkelanjutan.

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## INTRODUCTION

Vocabulary is a fundamental component of Arabic language learning because learners need adequate lexical knowledge to understand messages, construct sentences, and communicate meaningfully. Knowing vocabulary, however, involves more than recognizing the meanings of isolated words. Learners must also be able to retrieve words when they encounter objects, actions, situations, and emotions in real-life communication (Nation, 2022; Webb et al., 2023). Recent second-language research further indicates that repeated encounters, contextual variation, and meaningful exposure can strengthen lexical learning and retention (Kim & Webb, 2022; Uchihara et al., 2022; Oikawa & Uchihara, 2026).

This issue is particularly relevant to Arabic language education in Malaysia. Although Arabic is taught in various Islamic educational institutions, learners may still experience difficulty retrieving vocabulary spontaneously in actual communication. Research among Malaysian learners has demonstrated that vocabulary size and depth remain important dimensions of Arabic proficiency, while communicative and interactive approaches can support vocabulary development (Baharudin et al., 2023; Hanifansyah & Mahmudah, 2024). Studies conducted in Kedah have similarly highlighted the value of communicative, immersive, and peer-supported activities in encouraging learners to use Arabic more actively (Masnun et al., 2024, 2025).

One practical challenge is the gap between knowing a word and being able to retrieve it when it is needed. A learner may recognize مِفْتَاح (miftāḥ, key) in a textbook but fail to recall the word when seeing an actual key. The same difficulty occurs with vocabulary that refers not only to objects but also to actions and human experiences. Learners may want to express ideas such as "to spill" (اِنْسَكَبَ), "to squeeze" (عَصَرَ), "to become red" (اِحْمَرَّ), "to feel anxious or restless" (قَلِقَ), "to be sad" (حَزِنَ), "to be joyful" (فَرِحَ), or "to be happy" (سَعِدَ), yet may not be able to retrieve these expressions spontaneously. This suggests that vocabulary learning should move beyond lists of nouns toward a broader lexical repertoire involving objects, actions, events, conditions, and emotions.

Contextual vocabulary learning offers a useful framework for addressing this gap. Learning becomes more meaningful when lexical forms are associated with visible objects, ongoing actions, concrete experiences, and communicative situations. Research on incidental and contextual vocabulary acquisition has shown that meaningful exposure, repetition, retrieval, and encounters across varied contexts can contribute to stronger lexical representations (Dang et al., 2022; Webb et al., 2023; Arai & Takizawa, 2024; Chandy et al., 2024; Oikawa & Uchihara, 2026). Such principles are also compatible with situated learning, which views learning as participation in meaningful social and environmental contexts rather than as the accumulation of decontextualized information (Lave & Wenger, 1991).

Based on this perspective, the "How Do You Say It in Arabic?" program transforms the surrounding environment into a source of vocabulary discovery. Participants are encouraged to observe what they see, what people are doing, what is happening around them, and even what they or others are feeling. They can then generate simple questions such as "How do you say 'bottle' in Arabic?", "How do you say 'to spill' in Arabic?", "How do you say 'to squeeze' in Arabic?", "How do you say 'restless' in Arabic?", or "How do you say 'happy' in Arabic?" The facilitator provides or confirms the Arabic expression, after which participants pronounce, repeat, record, and use the newly acquired vocabulary in a simple phrase or sentence. In this way, everyday experiences become spontaneous opportunities for lexical learning.

The central feature of the program is therefore lexical inquiry. Rather than giving participants a predetermined vocabulary list, the program encourages them to identify their own lexical gaps. The recurring question "How do you say it in Arabic?" functions as a trigger for noticing, questioning, retrieval, repetition, and contextual use. This process gives participants an active role in determining what vocabulary they need. Similar research in Malaysia has demonstrated the potential of communicative strategies, verb-focused learning, and interactive activities for strengthening Arabic vocabulary and learner engagement (Hanifansyah & Mahmudah, 2024; Masnun et al., 2024; Najmuddin & Masnun, 2026).

Nevertheless, the present program differs from approaches that focus primarily on memorizing vocabulary, learning a predetermined set of verbs, using flashcards, or practicing vocabulary within formal lessons. Its distinctive feature lies in turning the physical and experiential surroundings of participants into continuously changing lexical prompts. A cup can generate a noun, spilled water can generate a verb, a person's facial expression can generate an adjective or emotional expression, and an ongoing activity can generate a verb or phrase. Thus, the meaning of surroundings in this program extends from the physical environment to the experiential environment.

This distinction is important because recent research among Malaysian learners has specifically explored Arabic verb retention through guessing-based prompts, suggesting that active retrieval can strengthen engagement and retention (Najmuddin & Masnun, 2026). The present community program extends this principle by integrating nouns, verbs, adjectives, emotional states, actions, and situational expressions within naturally occurring environmental encounters rather than limiting learning to one lexical category.

Accordingly, the "How Do You Say It in Arabic?" community program was developed to promote contextual Arabic vocabulary learning in Kedah, Malaysia. It seeks to transform participants' everyday surroundings into accessible learning resources through a simple cycle of observing, asking, identifying, pronouncing, repeating, and using Arabic vocabulary. The program is intended not merely to increase the number of words known by participants but also to cultivate a habit of lexical inquiry, through which learners become increasingly curious about how objects, actions, situations, and emotions encountered in everyday life can be expressed in Arabic.

The program therefore contributes to community-based Arabic language learning by shifting vocabulary acquisition from predetermined lists to everyday experience, from passive recognition to active inquiry, and from classroom-bound learning to contextual participation. Through this approach, Arabic vocabulary is expected to become more closely connected with learners' immediate experiences, making lexical learning more communicative, memorable, and potentially sustainable beyond the formal duration of the community program.

## METHOD

This community engagement activity employed a community-based program evaluation with a mixed-methods approach to examine the implementation of the "How Do You Say It in Arabic?" program. The design combined quantitative evidence of participants' vocabulary development with qualitative information obtained from observations, lexical inquiry records, and participants' reflections. Rather than functioning as a controlled experiment, the evaluation was intended to document changes occurring during the program and to understand how participants engaged with contextual Arabic vocabulary learning (Chacón-Moscoso et al., 2021; Creswell & Creswell, 2023). Mixed evidence was considered appropriate because community-based educational programs require attention not only to measurable learning outcomes but also to participation, interaction, and the ways learners respond to learning activities in authentic settings (Crossman et al., 2024; Porto, 2023).

The program was conducted at Maktab Mahmud Yan, Kedah, Malaysia, and involved 30 Form Four students as participants. All participating students were included in the program evaluation. The participants had previous exposure to Arabic through formal learning at school, while the present activity was designed to extend that exposure into contextual and spontaneous vocabulary use.

The program treated the learners' immediate physical and experiential environment as a source of Arabic vocabulary. Consequently, the target vocabulary was not restricted to nouns referring to visible objects such as books, chairs, bottles, doors, trees, or vehicles. It also included verbs, actions, events, states, adjectives, and emotions that arose naturally during interaction. For example, learners could ask how to express "to spill" (اِنْسَكَبَ), "to squeeze" (عَصَرَ), "to become red" (اِحْمَرَّ), "to feel anxious or restless" (قَلِقَ), "to be sad" (حَزِنَ), "to be joyful" (فَرِحَ), or "to be happy" (سَعِدَ) in Arabic. This broader lexical orientation was intended to encourage learners to associate Arabic words with what they saw, did, experienced, and felt rather than limiting vocabulary learning to predetermined lists.

The implementation of the "How Do You Say It in Arabic?" program followed a contextual learning sequence consisting of Observe, Ask, Guess, Confirm, Pronounce, Use, and Record. The sequence was designed to encourage active retrieval, interaction, and repeated use of newly encountered vocabulary. Retrieval practice and repeated encounters have been shown to support productive second-language vocabulary learning and retention (Koval, 2022; Chiu & Hawkins, 2023; Kim & Webb, 2023).

Participants first observed objects, activities, situations, changes, and emotional states occurring in their surroundings. The facilitator encouraged them to notice not only *what things were* but also *what people were doing, what was happening, and how someone might be feeling*.

When participants encountered something whose Arabic equivalent they did not know, they formulated the central question, "How do you say it in Arabic?" Questions could therefore emerge naturally from different lexical categories. Examples included "How do you say 'bottle' in Arabic?", "How do you say 'to spill' in Arabic?", "How do you say 'to squeeze' in Arabic?", "How do you say 'restless' in Arabic?", and "How do you say 'happy' in Arabic?"

Before receiving the answer, participants were encouraged to retrieve or guess the Arabic equivalent from their existing knowledge. The purpose was not merely to obtain the correct answer but to activate prior lexical knowledge and identify individual vocabulary gaps. Successful effortful retrieval has been associated with stronger second-language vocabulary learning (Koval, 2022).

The facilitator subsequently confirmed, corrected, or supplied the appropriate Arabic lexical item. Where one word could carry different meanings depending on context, clarification was provided. For instance, the Indonesian/Malay expression corresponding to "memerah" could refer either to squeezing something, عَصَرَ, or becoming red, اِحْمَرَّ. This step encouraged participants to understand that Arabic vocabulary should be selected according to contextual meaning rather than through word-for-word translation.

Participants listened to the Arabic word and repeated it individually or collaboratively. Attention was given to accurate pronunciation and, when needed, to its morphological form. Vocabulary learning in interaction can involve the simultaneous negotiation of meaning, pronunciation, grammatical function, and contextual use rather than meaning alone (Duran & Jakonen, 2023).

Newly acquired words were subsequently placed into short phrases or simple sentences. Thus, a vocabulary item was not treated as an isolated translation. For example, after learning اِنْسَكَبَ, participants could progress from recognizing the verb to producing a contextual expression such as اِنْسَكَبَ الْمَاءُ ("the water spilled"). Collaborative interaction and scaffolded peer participation were encouraged because interaction can provide opportunities for vocabulary development and oral language production (Homayouni, 2022).

Finally, participants recorded newly discovered vocabulary in a lexical inquiry log. Entries consisted of the word or expression initially identified in the surrounding environment, its Arabic equivalent, its lexical category, and a short contextual example where appropriate. The record allowed vocabulary that emerged spontaneously during the activity to be revisited rather than disappearing after a single encounter.

Through this cycle, the program did not provide a completely predetermined list of vocabulary. Instead, lexical items partly emerged from participants' questions and experiences. The facilitator consequently acted as a linguistic resource and learning scaffold rather than as the sole determinant of the vocabulary to be learned.

Four sources of data were employed to evaluate the program. First, a contextual vocabulary elicitation task was administered before and after the program. The task assessed participants' ability to produce Arabic equivalents from contextual prompts representing objects, actions, states, and emotions. Greater emphasis was placed on productive retrieval rather than simple multiple-choice recognition because the program specifically sought to develop the ability to retrieve Arabic vocabulary when learners needed to express something.

Second, a lexical inquiry log documented the vocabulary generated through participants' questions during the activities. The vocabulary was classified into broad categories such as nouns/objects, verbs/actions, states or conditions, emotions, and other contextual expressions. This record was used to identify which types of words most frequently stimulated learners' curiosity.

Third, an observation sheet was used to document participant engagement during the program. Observational indicators included willingness to ask questions, attempts to guess Arabic

equivalents, participation in pronunciation and repetition, ability to use vocabulary contextually, peer interaction, and spontaneous reuse of previously encountered words.

Fourth, participants completed a brief reflective response concerning their experiences with the program. The reflection focused on whether asking "How do you say it in Arabic?" encouraged them to notice vocabulary in their surroundings, which types of vocabulary they found most interesting or difficult, and whether they considered the approach useful for continuing Arabic learning outside formal classroom activities. The combination of achievement data, observation, and learner reflection enabled the evaluation to examine both learning outcomes and the process through which those outcomes developed (Crossman et al., 2024).

Quantitative data from the contextual vocabulary elicitation tasks were analyzed descriptively by comparing participants' performance before and after the program. Scores were summarized using frequency, percentage, mean, and change in mean score. Vocabulary responses were additionally classified according to lexical categories in order to examine whether development occurred primarily in nouns or extended to verbs, actions, conditions, and emotional vocabulary. Because the program involved a single group and was primarily designed as community engagement rather than a controlled intervention, quantitative findings were interpreted as evidence of program-associated change rather than causal effects (Chacón-Moscoso et al., 2021).

The qualitative data derived from observations, participants' questions, lexical inquiry logs, and reflective responses were analyzed thematically. The analysis involved familiarization with the data, initial coding, grouping recurring patterns, reviewing categories, and interpreting themes related to lexical curiosity, contextual association, active retrieval, learner participation, and perceived usefulness. The analysis followed principles of reflexive thematic analysis, in which themes are developed through systematic engagement with the data rather than treated as mechanically emerging categories (Braun & Clarke, 2021).

Finally, quantitative and qualitative findings were interpreted together. Improvements in vocabulary performance were compared with observational and reflective evidence to determine how participants experienced the process of observing, asking, guessing, confirming, pronouncing, using, and recording Arabic vocabulary. This integration was intended to provide a more comprehensive evaluation of the program than reliance on vocabulary scores alone.

The program was conducted with respect for voluntary participation, privacy, and the educational interests of the students. Participation in evaluation activities did not affect participants' formal academic grades, and individual identities were removed from the reported data. Photographs, quotations, or identifiable information should only be included in publication when appropriate permission has been obtained. Because Form Four participants may be minors, school authorization, participant assent, and parental or guardian consent should be documented in accordance with the applicable institutional procedures. Participants were also informed that the data collected from vocabulary activities, observations, and reflections would be used solely for educational evaluation and academic reporting. These procedures are consistent with the emphasis placed on participant dignity, transparency, and reciprocal relationships in community-engaged educational work (Crossman et al., 2024; Porto, 2023).

## RESULT AND CONCLUSION

### Improvement in Arabic Vocabulary Performance

The results demonstrated a clear improvement in the Arabic vocabulary performance of the 30 Form Four students participating in the "How Do You Say It in Arabic?" community program at Maktab Mahmud Yan, Kedah. Participants obtained a mean pretest score of 64.63 (SD = 5.59), while the mean posttest score increased to 74.87 (SD = 6.16). The mean gain was 10.23 points, representing an increase of approximately 15.83% from the initial mean score.

**Table 1. Comparison of Participants' Pretest and Posttest Scores**

| Indicator | Pretest | Posttest |
|---|---|---|
| Number of participants | 30 | 30 |
| Mean | 64.63 | 74.87 |
| Standard deviation | 5.59 | 6.16 |
| Mean gain | | 10.23 |
| Percentage increase | | 15.83% |
| *t* | | 14.99 |
| *df* | | 29 |
| *p* | | < .001 |

A paired-samples *t*-test indicated that the difference between the pretest and posttest scores was statistically significant, $t(29) = 14.99$, $p < .001$. The estimated mean difference was 10.23 points, with a 95% confidence interval ranging approximately from 8.84 to 11.63 points. These results indicate that participants performed considerably better on the contextual vocabulary task following their participation in the program.

Nevertheless, the statistical difference should be interpreted within the scope of the program evaluation. Since the activity involved one group without a comparison group, the findings indicate program-associated improvement rather than definitive causal evidence. Factors such as repeated exposure, interaction with peers, facilitator support, and participants' prior Arabic knowledge may also have contributed to the observed improvement.

The increase from 64.63 to 74.87 is pedagogically meaningful because the program did not rely exclusively on memorizing predetermined vocabulary lists. Instead, vocabulary emerged from encounters with participants' immediate environment. Learners were encouraged to identify lexical gaps, attempt retrieval, receive confirmation, pronounce the word, and use it contextually. This pattern corresponds with research showing that active retrieval and repeated encounters can strengthen the learning and retention of second-language vocabulary (Koval, 2022; Webb et al., 2023). Webb et al.'s meta-analysis demonstrates that meaningful encounters with lexical items can produce measurable L2 vocabulary learning, while successful effortful retrieval has also been identified as an important mechanism in strengthening lexical memory.

The findings also support the value of contextual diversity in vocabulary learning. Participants did not repeatedly encounter words within a single fixed exercise but connected Arabic vocabulary with different objects, actions, situations, and personal experiences. Recent evidence suggests that encountering words across varied contexts can strengthen aspects of lexical knowledge by creating richer connections between lexical forms and meanings (Oikawa & Uchihara, 2026). Similarly, Chandy et al. (2024) found that contextual conditions and repeated encounters influenced the processing and learning of novel L2 vocabulary.

**From Naming Objects to Expressing Actions and Experiences**

One of the most important findings of the program was that participants' lexical inquiry gradually extended beyond concrete nouns. At the beginning of contextual vocabulary activities, the most accessible questions tended to concern visible objects in the immediate environment. Participants could, for example, ask for the Arabic equivalents of a bottle, chair, window, bag, tree, or other physical objects.

As the activities developed, however, vocabulary questions increasingly concerned actions, processes, physical conditions, and emotions. Participants sought Arabic expressions corresponding to meanings such as *to spill*, *to squeeze*, *to become red*, *to feel anxious or restless*, *to be sad*, *to be joyful*, and *to be happy*. Examples included اِنْسَكَبَ for "to spill," عَصَرَ for "to squeeze," اِحْمَرَّ for "to become red," قَلِقَ for "to feel anxious or restless," حَزِنَ for "to be sad," فَرِحَ for "to be joyful," and سَعِدَ for "to be happy."

This development is important because productive language ability requires substantially more than knowing the names of objects. Communication depends heavily on verbs and other lexical categories that allow speakers to describe what people do, experience, feel, and observe. By inviting participants to ask questions derived from unfolding situations, the program created opportunities for vocabulary acquisition that were closely associated with communicative intentions.

For example, seeing water on a table could generate the question, *"How do you say 'spilled' in Arabic?"* Observing someone squeezing an object could lead to a question about عَصَرَ. A facial or emotional reaction could stimulate questions about حَزِنَ, قَلِقَ, اِحْمَرَّ, or فَرِحَ. The learning stimulus therefore emerged from an event rather than from a textbook heading.

This result is particularly relevant when compared with recent Arabic vocabulary research in Malaysia. Najmuddin and Masnun (2026) examined a guessing-based approach through the recurring prompt "What Is the Arabic Verb for…?" and reported the pedagogical potential of active guessing and retrieval for Arabic verb retention among Malaysian learners. The present program follows a related retrieval principle but expands the lexical scope from verbs alone to nouns, actions, physical states, emotions, adjectives, and situational expressions that emerge naturally from participants' surroundings.

Thus, the concept of *surroundings* in the present program should not be understood simply as a physical collection of visible objects. It includes an experiential environment. What learners see provides nouns, what people do provides verbs, what happens provides situational expressions, and what people feel provides emotional vocabulary. This broader conception distinguishes contextual vocabulary learning from approaches that merely label classroom objects.

**Contextual Meaning and Lexical Awareness**

Another important outcome concerned learners' awareness that translation is context dependent. Participants were encouraged not merely to ask for a direct equivalent but to clarify what they intended to express. This was especially important when a Malay or Indonesian lexical item could correspond to different Arabic words.

For example, the expression *memerah* could refer to the physical action of squeezing something, represented contextually by عَصَرَ, or to becoming red, represented by اِحْمَرَّ. The distinction encouraged learners to recognize that vocabulary cannot always be learned through a simple one-word-to-one-word correspondence.

This feature strengthened the program beyond basic vocabulary accumulation because learners were encouraged to consider the relationship between word, meaning, action, and context. Vocabulary knowledge is multidimensional, involving not only recognition of word meaning but also

knowledge of how and when lexical items are appropriately used. The contextual questioning process consequently encouraged participants to develop greater sensitivity to lexical choice.

This interpretation is consistent with communicative approaches to Arabic vocabulary learning previously documented in Malaysia. Hanifansyah and Mahmudah (2024) emphasized the importance of communicative strategies for developing Arabic vocabulary among learners at Maktab Mahmud Yan, particularly where linguistic knowledge needs to be connected with meaningful use. The current findings extend this perspective by demonstrating how learners' everyday questions themselves can become the starting point of vocabulary instruction.

**Increased Confidence in Asking and Using Arabic Vocabulary**

In addition to the quantitative vocabulary improvement, qualitative observations indicated an increase in participants' confidence. This outcome was not measured as a separate standardized psychological variable and should therefore be interpreted qualitatively. Nevertheless, participants appeared increasingly willing to ask questions, attempt answers, guess Arabic equivalents, repeat unfamiliar expressions, and use newly introduced vocabulary.

At the beginning of the program, some learners tended to wait for the facilitator to provide vocabulary. As the questioning procedure became familiar, participation became more active. The expression "How do you say it in Arabic?" offered a relatively low-risk entry point into Arabic learning because learners were not immediately required to produce a complete and grammatically sophisticated Arabic utterance. They could begin from something they genuinely wanted to know.

This simplicity appears to have pedagogical value. Asking a question acknowledges a lexical gap without presenting that gap as failure. In the program, not knowing a word became the starting point of participation. Consequently, lexical uncertainty could be transformed into curiosity.

The finding is compatible with previous evidence from the same Malaysian educational setting. Solehudin and Hanifansyah (2024) reported that Arabic public-speaking activities among Form Four learners at Maktab Mahmud Yan were associated with gains in vocabulary and increased speaking confidence. Similarly, dialogue-based Arabic activities conducted with learners at Maktab Mahmud Yan were reported to support confidence, fluency, and practical vocabulary use (Solehudin et al., 2024). These findings collectively suggest that opportunities to actively produce language in supportive environments may contribute not only to lexical development but also to greater willingness to participate.

However, the present program differs from formal public speaking or extended dialogue activities. Participants were not initially required to give speeches or maintain lengthy conversations. Instead, participation could begin with one simple lexical question. This makes the approach potentially useful for learners who possess some Arabic knowledge but hesitate to use it spontaneously.

**The Emergence of a Habit of Lexical Inquiry**

Beyond the increase in test scores, the most distinctive outcome of the program was the emergence of what can be described as a habit of lexical inquiry. Participants gradually became more attentive to words that they did not know and increasingly treated those lexical gaps as questions to be explored.

The pedagogical sequence can be represented as: Observe → Ask → Guess → Confirm → Pronounce → Use → Record

This sequence changed the role of the learner from a passive recipient of vocabulary into an active lexical investigator. Vocabulary was not always selected in advance by the facilitator. Instead, participants helped determine the lexical content through the questions generated from their experiences.

The Observe stage created awareness of the environment. Ask converted an unfamiliar concept into a linguistic question. Guess activated prior knowledge and retrieval. Confirm provided corrective linguistic input. Pronounce established a connection with spoken form. Use transferred the word into a phrase or sentence, while Record provided an opportunity for later review.

From this perspective, the recurring phrase *"How do you say it in Arabic?"* functions not merely as the title of the program but as a small learning mechanism. A single question can initiate noticing, retrieval, input, repetition, semantic clarification, and production.

The importance of retrieval within this mechanism is supported by second-language vocabulary research. Koval (2022) demonstrated the contribution of effortful retrieval to foreign-language vocabulary learning, while broader research has shown that repeated retrieval and appropriately distributed practice can strengthen lexical learning.

The environmental component adds another dimension. Oikawa and Uchihara (2026) demonstrate that contextual diversity can affect incidental vocabulary learning, suggesting that words encountered through varied contexts may acquire richer semantic associations. In the present program, lexical diversity arose naturally because the environment continually generated different prompts. A classroom, corridor, cafeteria, outdoor space, social interaction, physical action, or emotional response could each initiate a different vocabulary question.

**Relationship with Previous Arabic Vocabulary Programs in Malaysia**

The results also complement previous Arabic language initiatives in Malaysia. Masnun et al. (2024), for example, reported positive outcomes from the Senior Teaches Junior approach using *Kitab Af'al*, in which structured peer interaction supported Arabic vocabulary development. Such findings indicate that vocabulary acquisition can benefit when learners participate actively and interact with others rather than relying exclusively on teacher explanation.

Peer-based Arabic learning has similarly been identified as a useful collaborative strategy because learners can support each other in retrieving and using language (Hanifansyah et al., 2024). In the present program, this collaborative element appeared when one participant generated a question and other participants attempted to guess the Arabic answer. A question initiated by one learner could therefore become a vocabulary-learning opportunity for the entire group.

The results are also compatible with earlier findings emphasizing communicative strategies for Arabic vocabulary development at Maktab Mahmud Yan (Hanifansyah & Mahmudah, 2024). However, the present program adds a distinctive community-engagement dimension by shifting the source of vocabulary from structured instructional material toward the immediate experiences of participants.

The novelty of the program therefore does not lie simply in asking learners for Arabic translations. Translation questions are common in language learning. Rather, its contribution lies in systematically transforming spontaneous lexical curiosity into a repeatable contextual learning cycle. The surroundings continuously generate questions, and questions continuously generate opportunities for Arabic use.

Community-Based Significance of the Program

From the perspective of community engagement, the approach has several practical advantages. First, it requires relatively limited technological or material resources. The most important learning resource is the participants' own environment. Second, it can be adapted to different levels of Arabic ability because questions can range from simple concrete nouns to more complex verbs, emotional states, and situational expressions. Third, the practice can potentially continue beyond the formal program.

This final point is particularly important. If participants internalize the habit of asking how everyday experiences can be expressed in Arabic, vocabulary learning does not have to stop when the organized activity ends. A new object, action, situation, or feeling can become a future learning prompt.

Thus, sustainability in this program should not be understood only as repeating the same formal activity. A more meaningful form of sustainability is the continuation of lexical curiosity. Participants who habitually ask *"How do you say it in Arabic?"* possess a simple strategy for independently expanding their vocabulary.

Overall Interpretation

Taken together, the findings suggest that the "How Do You Say It in Arabic?" program was associated with meaningful development in participants' contextual Arabic vocabulary. The mean vocabulary score increased from 64.63 to 74.87, producing a mean gain of 10.23 points or approximately 15.83%. The pretest-posttest difference was statistically significant, $t(29) = 14.99$, $p < .001$.

More importantly, vocabulary learning expanded beyond the naming of concrete objects. Participants increasingly explored verbs, actions, events, physical states, and emotional expressions. Qualitative observations also indicated greater confidence in asking questions and attempting Arabic vocabulary.

These outcomes suggest three interrelated dimensions of program impact: lexical development, contextual awareness, and learner confidence. The quantitative improvement indicates stronger productive vocabulary performance, while the qualitative findings suggest changes in the way learners approached unknown vocabulary.

Accordingly, the principal contribution of the program may be summarized as a shift from vocabulary lists to lived experience, from receiving words to searching for words, and from lexical uncertainty to lexical inquiry. In this model, not knowing an Arabic word is not the end of communication but the beginning of a learning opportunity.

Nevertheless, these findings should be interpreted with appropriate methodological caution. The program involved only 30 Form Four students from one educational institution and did not include a control group. Furthermore, increased confidence was derived primarily from observation and participant responses rather than a validated confidence scale. Future implementations could therefore involve larger samples, delayed posttests to measure retention, comparison groups, and more systematic measures of speaking confidence. Future studies could also compare the acquisition of different lexical categories, particularly nouns, verbs, adjectives, and emotional vocabulary, to determine which categories benefit most from environmental lexical inquiry.

Despite these limitations, the findings indicate that a simple recurring question can function as a productive pedagogical tool when embedded within a systematic contextual process. The "How Do You Say It in Arabic?" program demonstrates how everyday surroundings can be transformed

into a dynamic vocabulary resource and how community-based Arabic learning can encourage learners not merely to memorize new words, but to continually search for the Arabic language within their everyday experiences.

## CONCLUSION

The "How Do You Say It in Arabic?" community program demonstrated that contextual vocabulary learning can be effectively integrated into learners' everyday surroundings. Among 30 Form Four students at Maktab Mahmud Yan, Kedah, the mean vocabulary score increased from 64.63 in the pretest to 74.87 in the posttest, with a mean gain of 10.23 points or approximately 15.83%. The difference was statistically significant, $t(29) = 14.99$, $p < .001$, indicating a meaningful improvement in participants' contextual Arabic vocabulary performance following the program.

Beyond the quantitative improvement, the program also broadened participants' lexical attention. Learners did not focus only on concrete nouns or visible objects, but increasingly explored vocabulary related to actions, processes, physical conditions, and emotions, such as "to spill," "to squeeze," "to become red," "restless," "sad," "joyful," and "happy." Participants also showed greater confidence in asking questions, attempting Arabic equivalents, repeating unfamiliar expressions, and using newly acquired vocabulary. These findings suggest that the program encouraged learners to transform ordinary experiences into opportunities for language learning.

The principal contribution of the program lies in the development of a habit of lexical inquiry through the recurring question "How do you say it in Arabic?" The sequence of Observe, Ask, Guess, Confirm, Pronounce, Use, and Record positioned learners as active participants in vocabulary discovery rather than passive recipients of predetermined word lists. In this approach, physical surroundings, human actions, events, and emotional experiences functioned as continuously available lexical resources.

From a community-engagement perspective, the program offers a practical and relatively simple model that can be implemented with limited resources and adapted to different Arabic-learning environments. Its significance lies not only in increasing vocabulary scores but also in encouraging sustained curiosity toward Arabic expressions encountered in everyday life. Thus, the program shifts vocabulary learning from memorization toward contextual exploration and from passive recognition toward active lexical retrieval.

Several limitations should nevertheless be acknowledged. The program involved only 30 students from a single institution and did not include a control group, limiting the extent to which the observed improvement can be attributed exclusively to the intervention. In addition, increased confidence was identified primarily through observation rather than through a standardized confidence scale. Future programs should involve larger and more diverse participant groups, comparison groups, delayed posttests to examine vocabulary retention, and validated instruments to measure confidence and willingness to communicate. Further studies may also compare the acquisition of nouns, verbs, adjectives, emotional expressions, and other lexical categories to determine which types of vocabulary benefit most from contextual lexical inquiry.

Overall, the findings indicate that a simple question can become a meaningful pedagogical mechanism when embedded in a systematic and contextual learning process. The "How Do You Say It in Arabic?" program demonstrates that everyday surroundings can serve as a living vocabulary

resource, enabling learners to continuously discover, retrieve, and use Arabic beyond the boundaries of conventional classroom instruction.

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