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The Role of Duolingo in Developing Arabic Speaking Skills

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Abstract

Speaking skills (mahārah al-kalām) are an important component of Arabic language learning because they enable oral communication. In instructional practice, however, learners often receive insufficient opportunities for speaking practice. Digital language learning applications such as Duolingo offer a supplementary means of supporting independent and sustained practice. This study examines Duolingo's potential contribution to Arabic speaking development and considers how its features may support oral practice. A library research approach was employed, using content analysis of relevant literature. The review suggests that audio-based exercises, repetition, adaptive practice, and gamification can support motivation, willingness to practise, and confidence. Speech-recognition functions discussed in the literature may also support pronunciation practice where they are available in the relevant course and application version. Nevertheless, vocabulary and pronunciation practice do not by themselves establish comprehensive communicative competence. Duolingo also has limitations in the depth of content and opportunities for extended interaction. It is therefore best positioned as a supplementary resource combined with teacher guidance and appropriate instructional strategies. Evidence from studies of other target languages should be distinguished from evidence specifically concerning Arabic.

Keywords: Duolingo; Arabic speaking skills; Arabic language learning; mobile learning; gamification

A. Introduction

Arabic plays an increasingly important role in education, religion, and global communication. Proficiency involves not only knowledge of structures and vocabulary but also the ability to communicate actively. Fadlan Masykura Setiadi emphasises the importance of speaking skills (mahārah al-kalām), particularly for non-native learners, because speaking enables communication and the practical application of language knowledge. Contemporary Arabic instruction therefore requires approaches that are practical and communicative as well as theoretical.

Many learners nevertheless struggle to speak Arabic despite understanding linguistic theory. Schools and other educational institutions often devote more attention to reading and writing, leaving limited opportunities for speaking. Speaking development requires purposeful, repeated, and sustained practice. Restricted classroom time makes intensive practice difficult, while conventional teaching methods, limited methodological variety, and a lack of resources for independent practice can reduce motivation. Digital language learning applications have consequently been adopted as alternative learning resources. Duolingo combines mobile learning with game-like activities and accessible practice. The literature describes adaptive learning systems that adjust task difficulty to users' progress and selectively revisit vocabulary or structures that require further practice. Such features may support independent learning beyond the classroom, although their precise availability and contribution to speaking depend on the course and application version.

Previous studies report positive contributions from Duolingo to Arabic learning. Al-Gifari et al. (2025) and Yazid et al. (2023) discuss its contribution to vocabulary development, while Fikri (2025) examines its use in Arabic speaking instruction. Related work on virtual Arabic instruction provides a broader pedagogical context: Faizin and Akmalia (2021) investigate discovery learning in an online Arabic programme. Their study concerns a teaching method rather than Duolingo, but it provides a useful reference for

considering how instructional design can support technology-mediated language learning.

It is therefore important to examine Duolingo's role in supporting Arabic speaking. This review considers how the application may contribute to speaking development, how its features can support oral practice, and how it can be positioned within Arabic instruction. Speaking is an important practical expression of language proficiency and is needed in everyday, academic, and religious contexts. Arabic instruction that offers insufficient opportunities for sustained oral practice may consequently leave important learning needs unmet.

Theoretical Framework

Speaking skills are fundamental to communication, self-expression, and social interaction in Arabic. They are particularly important in education because they enable learners to participate actively and apply their language knowledge in meaningful situations.

Twenty-first-century learning emphasises responsive and collaborative environments that support critical thinking, creativity, and cooperation. Technology can help provide such environments. Interactive digital resources, including applications, simulations, and educational games, can combine multimedia content with adaptable activities to encourage engagement and participation.

Duolingo is a language learning platform developed in the United States by Luis von Ahn and Severin Hacker. The source literature describes its development from 2011 and its extensive international reach, reporting more than 500 million users across 194 countries. These figures reflect the accounts cited in the source manuscript rather than a current measurement undertaken in this review. AI-supported functions discussed in the literature include answering questions, providing corrections, and simulating everyday interactions. Such functions may offer contextualised practice, but they should not be assumed to be available in every language course. Mobile

access can make Arabic learning more practical and flexible by allowing learners to study at different times and locations.

Duolingo offers interactive language learning through game-like activities and different exercise types. It provides courses in a range of languages and allows users to work through material and monitor their progress. The application can be accessed through mobile devices and the website, with free access and optional paid services. Course scope, progression, and available functions vary across languages and versions.

Features that combine audio input, oral production, and feedback are potentially relevant to speaking development because they can provide additional practice outside class. Their contribution should nevertheless be assessed in relation to the actual exercises available to Arabic learners, rather than inferred from the platform's general capabilities.

B. Method

This study used a library research approach. Library research involves examining books, journal articles, historical records, documents, and other written sources to obtain information relevant to a research topic. Here, the reviewed literature provided the principal source of data.

The approach was used to develop an understanding of the topic without conducting direct classroom observations. Relevant literature was examined to explore Duolingo's role in Arabic speaking development and the pedagogical implications of its use.

After collecting the literature, the authors conducted content analysis to identify and interpret information relevant to the research questions. Each source was read carefully and examined in depth. The analysis sought a systematic account of the material and an interpretation grounded in the reviewed texts. The resulting discussion was intended to address the research questions and inform educational practice.

C. Results and Discussion

Duolingo in Pronunciation and Vocabulary Practice

Speech-recognition functions discussed in the Duolingo literature allow learners to repeat utterances and receive responses to their pronunciation. Where available in the relevant course, these functions may provide opportunities for repeated oral practice and help learners become more willing and confident to speak. The present literature review does not independently verify the availability or accuracy of these functions across Arabic course versions.

Gamification can create an interactive environment that encourages active participation. Elements such as points, challenges, and rankings can support motivation and attention during practice. By participating actively in game-like learning activities, students may develop habits relevant to independent learning.

When pronunciation practice and gamification are combined, they may support sustained engagement with speaking activities. Feedback, points, and challenges can encourage learners to continue practising and reduce reluctance to attempt unfamiliar utterances. These potential benefits concern opportunities for practice and should be distinguished from a demonstrated improvement in comprehensive Arabic speaking proficiency.

Kurniati et al. (2025), from Universitas Jambi, report that students at SMK Negeri 6 Kota Jambi were enthusiastic about using Duolingo, particularly when earning points or completing challenges. Their observations also describe students becoming more willing to speak spontaneously in class using vocabulary encountered in the application. Importantly, that study concerns English speaking instruction, so its findings provide a comparison rather than direct evidence of Arabic learning outcomes.

The same study reports an increase in the mean speaking score from 2.6 at pre-test to 3.9 at post-test, with improvements discussed in relation to vocabulary, grammar, fluency, pronunciation, and communication. These

figures are results reported in the reviewed English-language learning study, not data collected in the present review or measurements of Arabic speaking gains (Kurniati et al., 2025).

Motivation and Willingness to Speak

Language learning applications such as Duolingo can offer enjoyable, relatively low-pressure opportunities for independent practice. Ease of use and flexible access may encourage learners to study more regularly. Audio exercises can support listening practice and familiarity with Arabic sounds. Where speech-recognition exercises are available, they may provide additional opportunities for oral production.

Gamification elements such as points, streaks, levels, and challenges can help sustain motivation. Contextualised examples and everyday expressions may make the material more relevant, while adaptive practice can adjust exercises to users' performance. Together, game-like elements and personalised practice may encourage engagement and consistency.

Some exercise patterns resemble audiolingual practice by emphasising repeated sounds and sentence patterns rather than extended grammatical explanation. Listening and imitation can help learners become familiar with oral forms. Repeated practice and feedback may gradually build confidence. The importance of organising practice is also relevant to Akmalia and Faizin's (2021) investigation of the recitation or assignment method in virtual nahwu instruction. Their findings concern grammar learning in a different instructional setting and do not directly demonstrate Duolingo's effects on speaking.

Implications and Limitations of Duolingo Use

The functions discussed in the literature can help learners work at their own pace and provide flexible opportunities for practice. Integrating application-based activities with classroom instruction may diversify learning and reduce the monotony associated with conventional routines. Duolingo can thus provide a supplementary resource for independent language practice.

Game-like learning can encourage participation and engagement with content. The challenges students complete may prompt them to retrieve vocabulary, make choices, and remain attentive. Faizin (2020), for example, presents the "ABC 5 Dasar" game as a means of organising Arabic vocabulary practice. Although this is a traditional game rather than a digital application, it offers a relevant pedagogical example of using play to engage learners in vocabulary retrieval. Its relevance to Duolingo lies in the instructional use of game elements, not evidence that the two approaches produce identical outcomes.

The reviewed literature also identifies limitations in the depth of learning supported by Duolingo. Some learners may not use all available functions or attend to corrective feedback, focusing instead on completing levels. Repetitive exercises and limited opportunities for extended interaction may also restrict communicative development. The source manuscript additionally reports limitations concerning dictionary access and direct conversation with native speakers; such limitations should be understood in relation to the versions examined by those studies, rather than as permanent features of the platform. Teacher guidance and supplementary activities are therefore needed to connect application-based practice with broader communicative goals.

D. Conclusion

This literature review suggests that Duolingo can serve as a supplementary resource for Arabic speaking development. Audio-based exercises, repeated practice, adaptive learning, and gamification may support motivation, willingness to practise, and learner engagement. Pronunciation and speech-recognition functions may offer additional opportunities where they are available in the relevant course. However, claims about these functions require attention to the Arabic course and version used, and evidence from other target languages should not be treated as direct evidence of Arabic speaking gains.

Duolingo has limitations in supporting in-depth language knowledge and comprehensive communicative competence. It is therefore most appropriately combined with teacher guidance and suitable instructional strategies. Classroom conversation, feedback, and meaningful interaction can complement independent practice so that vocabulary and pronunciation work contribute to broader Arabic speaking development.

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