



Interaction-Driven Arabic Language Acquisition in an Authentic Linguistic Ecosystem: A Case Study of Indonesian Students in Madinah

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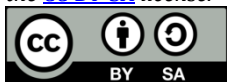
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ABSTRACT

This study explores how *bi'ah lughawiyyah* contributes to Arabic language acquisition among Indonesian students in Madinah, Saudi Arabia, through a qualitative exploratory case study approach. Informed by second language acquisition and sociolinguistic perspectives, this study examines how authentic Arabic-speaking environments facilitate linguistic development through interaction, participation, adaptation, and negotiation across academic, religious, and social contexts. Data were collected from 23 Indonesian students at the Islamic University of Madinah and Taibah University through questionnaires, documentation, and in-depth interviews with two selected participants. The data were analyzed through systematic coding and thematic interpretation. The findings show that *bi'ah lughawiyyah* functions as an authentic linguistic ecosystem where Arabic acquisition develops through communication needs, sustained interaction, repeated practice, and negotiation between *fushā* and *'āmmiyyah*. The analysis identifies Interaction-Driven Arabic Language Acquisition as an emerging conceptual model that contextualizes interaction processes within authentic Arabic-speaking environments rather than proposing a new conceptual paradigm. The findings provide pedagogical implications for developing immersive and interaction-oriented Arabic learning environments for non-native learners.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Second Language Acquisition (SLA) has become a central field in applied linguistics that examines how individuals develop additional language competence, the factors influencing successful learning, and the conditions that facilitate meaningful language use (Ellis, 1997; Ortega, 2023). Contemporary SLA perspectives emphasize that language acquisition is not limited to formal classroom instruction but also emerges through interaction, social participation, and exposure to authentic communicative practices (Ellis, 2015). From an ecological perspective, language learning is viewed as a dynamic process shaped by the relationship between learners, linguistic resources, and the social environments in which communication takes place (Eliasson, 2015). Therefore, language environments should not be understood merely as sources of input but as spaces that provide opportunities for learners to participate in meaningful interactions.

Arabic language acquisition remains challenging despite the global significance of Arabic as the language of the Qur'an, Hadith, Islamic scholarship, diplomacy, and international communication (Fauzi & Anindiati, 2021; Sapitri et al., 2025). Many learners in non-Arabic-speaking contexts continue to struggle with spontaneous communication because Arabic instruction often emphasizes grammatical knowledge and vocabulary acquisition rather than authentic language use (Yul et al., 2023). As a result, learners may develop linguistic knowledge without achieving sufficient communicative competence in real-life contexts (Samin et al., 2025). This condition highlights the importance of examining *bi'ah lughawiyyah* as a context that enables learners to experience Arabic not only as an academic subject but also as a medium of meaningful communication.

Previous studies have demonstrated that *bi'ah lughawiyyah* contributes to Arabic development by increasing opportunities for language input, interaction, and practice within structured educational environments (Muttaqin et al., 2024; Rahmi et al., 2024). Recent research by Habibie et al., (2026) further shows that a community-driven *bi'ah lughawiyyah* in Salaf Pesantren Sidogiri can transform grammatical knowledge (*qawa'id*) into communicative competence through authentic interaction, peer-mediated learning, and language socialization within the pesantren community. However, these studies primarily examine intentionally designed environments where language practices are facilitated by institutional structures. Limited attention has been given to how Arabic acquisition develops in naturally occurring Arabic-speaking contexts, where learners encounter Arabic as a necessity of academic, religious, social, and everyday participation. Therefore, this study investigates how *bi'ah lughawiyyah* functions within an authentic Arabic-speaking ecosystem and how interactional processes shape learners' development of Arabic communicative competence.

Authentic Arabic-speaking environments provide a valuable context for examining how second language acquisition develops beyond formal instructional settings. From an interactionist SLA perspective, language development is facilitated through meaningful communication, negotiation of meaning, and learners' active engagement with linguistic resources (Gass & Mackey, 2020; Long, 1996). Complementing this view, ecological and sociocultural perspectives emphasize that language acquisition is shaped by learners' participation within social environments where linguistic resources are embedded in everyday practices. Madinah is a city in Saudi Arabia, represents such a context, where Indonesian students encounter Arabic across academic, religious, public, and social

domains. Within this environment, learners do not merely receive Arabic exposure but actively participate in communicative practices, negotiate meanings, adapt to different Arabic varieties, and develop strategies for navigating real-life interactions.

Furthermore, a sociolinguistic perspective highlights the importance of understanding how learners manage the relationship between formal Arabic (*fuṣḥā*) and colloquial varieties (*‘āmmiyyah*) across different communicative contexts. Although previous studies have emphasized the roles of exposure, immersion, and interaction in language learning, limited attention has been given to how these processes operate within naturally occurring Arabic-speaking communities. Therefore, examining the experiences of Indonesian students in Madinah provides insights into how authentic linguistic environments facilitate Arabic development among non-native learners through interactional participation, contextual adaptation, and sociolinguistic negotiation.

To address this gap, this study explores how authentic interaction within *bi’ah lughawiyyah* contributes to Arabic language acquisition among Indonesian students in Madinah. Rather than assuming that exposure alone determines acquisition, this study examines how communication needs, meaningful interaction, repeated language use, and learners’ adaptation to diverse communicative contexts shape Arabic development. Through an exploratory qualitative case study perspective, *bi’ah lughawiyyah* is understood not merely as a place where Arabic is used but as an interactional ecosystem in which learners participate in socially situated language practices. Based on the patterns identified from the case, the study develops an emerging conceptual understanding, which describes how interaction processes are contextualized within an authentic Arabic-speaking environment. Accordingly, this study examines how *bi’ah lughawiyyah* shapes Arabic language acquisition among Indonesian students in Madinah. Specifically, this study aims to explore: (1) What are the characteristics of *bi’ah lughawiyyah* experienced by Indonesian students in Madinah as an authentic Arabic-speaking environment? (2) How do students negotiate the use of *fuṣḥā* and *‘āmmiyyah* across different communicative domains? (3) How do authentic interactional experiences shape learners’ Arabic language development? (4) What factors support or constrain Arabic development within this environment?

2. METHODS

Research Design

This study employed an exploratory qualitative case study design to examine how *bi’ah lughawiyyah* shapes Arabic language acquisition among Indonesian students living in Madinah, Saudi Arabia. A qualitative case study approach was selected because it enables an in-depth investigation of contemporary phenomena within their real-life sociocultural contexts through multiple sources of evidence (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Yin, 2009). As emphasized by Yin, (2009), case studies are particularly appropriate for exploring “how” and “why” questions concerning contemporary events over which researchers have limited control. Accordingly, the case examined in this study was Indonesian students’ experiences of acquiring and using Arabic within Madinah’s authentic Arabic-speaking environment, where Arabic functions across academic, religious, and social domains. Rather than focusing on controlled instructional settings, this study explores how learners

experience Arabic competence through interaction, participation, adaptation, and negotiation of meaning in everyday communicative contexts.

Research Context and Participants

This study involved 23 Indonesian students from the Islamic University of Madinah and Taibah University, Saudi Arabia, who experienced Arabic use within an authentic *bi'ah lughawiyyah* across academic, religious, and social contexts. These participants constituted the bounded case of Indonesian learners studying in Madinah and experiencing Arabic use across academic, religious, and social contexts. All participants completed a semi-structured questionnaire exploring their Arabic exposure, interaction experiences, language use, and challenges during their engagement with the Arabic-speaking environment. To obtain deeper contextual insights, two participants were purposively selected for in-depth interviews based on their length of residence and intensity of Arabic use. The interviews were used to provide contextual depth and illustrate different patterns of Arabic engagement within the case rather than to achieve theoretical saturation. Participant P01 was a master's student who had lived in Madinah for eight years and demonstrated greater engagement with academic Arabic (*fushḥā*), while participant P02 was an undergraduate student with four years of residence who reported more frequent use of everyday Arabic involving *'āmmiyyah*. Their different experiences showed how learners use Arabic in various communication contexts. Participant characteristics are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. *Characteristics of Case Participants*

Characteristics	Category	n	%
University	Islamic University of Madinah	20	87.0
	Taibah University	3	13.0
Field of Study	<i>Sharī'ah</i>	9	39.1
	<i>Da'wah and Uṣūl al-Dīn</i>	9	39.1
	Arabic Language	3	13.0
	Hadith	1	4.3
	Qur'anic Studies	1	4.3
Degree Level	Undergraduate	17	73.9
	Master's	4	17.4
	Doctoral	2	8.7
Previous Educational Background	Islamic boarding school	18	78.3
	Senior high school/vocational school	3	13.0
	<i>Madrasah 'Aliyah</i>	2	8.7

Data Collection and Analysis

Data were collected through semi-structured questionnaires, in-depth interviews, and supporting documents. The questionnaire was completed by 23 Indonesian students to explore their Arabic exposure, interaction experiences, language use, supporting factors, and challenges within the *bi'ah lughawiyyah* of Madinah. Two participants were purposively chosen for in-depth interviews to gain deeper insights into their Arabic use, negotiation between *fushḥā* and *'āmmiyyah*, language adaptation, and communication practices in different contexts. Data credibility was ensured through

source triangulation by comparing questionnaire responses, interview accounts, and relevant documentation. Data analysis involved organizing the data, coding, and thematic interpretation to identify recurring patterns of Arabic language acquisition within the case. The analysis examined learners' interaction experiences, language practices, adaptation processes, and sociolinguistic negotiation within the Arabic-speaking environment. By analyzing the data repeatedly, the study found common themes that later contributed to the development of an emerging conceptual model.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Results

Characteristics of Bi'ah Lughawiyyah as an Authentic Linguistic Ecosystem

Bi'ah lughawiyyah among Indonesian students in Madinah functioned as an authentic linguistic environment where Arabic was used as a medium of communication beyond classroom learning. Questionnaire findings showed that students encountered Arabic across academic, social, and community contexts. As presented in Table 2, 78.3% of respondents reported that they often or always used Arabic in daily life. Furthermore, 95.7% reported frequent interaction with native Arabic speakers, 100% experienced regular exposure to Arabic conversations in their surrounding environment, and 87.0% used Arabic beyond classroom activities.

Table 2. *Characteristics of Bi'ah Lughawiyyah in Madinah*

Indicator	Findings
Using Arabic in daily life	78.3% often/always
Interacting with native Arabic speakers	95.7% often/always
Exposure to Arabic conversations in the surrounding environment	100% often/always
Using Arabic beyond classroom activities	87.0% often/always

These findings indicate that Arabic exposure was not limited to formal instruction but occurred through various forms of participation, including university activities, religious activities, and everyday communication with Arabic speakers. However, the existence of an Arabic-speaking environment did not create identical learning experiences for all students. Differences appeared depending on students' daily activities, social networks, and opportunities for interaction. Interview data further explained these differences. P01 described his experience as mainly connected to academic and religious environments. He explained that Arabic was used frequently when interacting with lecturers, university staff, and international students: *“When the interlocutor is a non-Indonesian person, whether a foreign student, university staff member, or lecturer, Arabic fuṣḥā is used”* (P01). P01 also emphasized that the environment encouraged continuous language development as he said: *“The environment eventually forced this development, we have to survive”* (P01).

In contrast, P02 experienced Arabic use more strongly through interaction with local communities outside the university. He stated: *“The language used most frequently, certainly, was Arabic ‘āmmiyyah because we interacted with native Arab communities outside campus”* (P02). These experiences show that *bi'ah lughawiyyah* created opportunities for students to use Arabic, but their

language development depended on the types of interactions they experienced. Therefore, the Arabic environment was not only a source of exposure but also a space where learners actively used Arabic indifferent communication contexts.

Arabic Variety Negotiation across Communication Domains

Students' use of Arabic involved continuous negotiation between *fuṣḥā* and *ʿāmmiyyah* across different communication domains. The choice of variety was influenced by interlocutors, communicative purposes, and social settings. In general, *fuṣḥā* was associated with academic and formal interactions, whereas *ʿāmmiyyah* was more frequently used in informal communication with local communities. These patterns indicate that participants' language choices were shaped not only by their linguistic backgrounds but also by the communicative demands of their immediate environments. Table 3 summarizes the distribution of the two Arabic varieties across communication domains and the reasons underlying their use.

Table 3. *Distribution of Fuṣḥā and ʿĀmmiyyah across Communication Domains*

Variety	Contexts of Use	Reasons for Use
Fuṣḥā	Lectures, academic discussions, presentations, communication with lecturers and university staff	Academic requirements, formal communication, previous linguistic background
ʿĀmmiyyah	Local communities, transportation, markets, residential environments, informal conversations	Practical communication, spontaneity, social adaptation

As shown in Table 3, the use of *fuṣḥā* and *ʿāmmiyyah* corresponded to different communicative functions. *Fuṣḥā* was primarily used in academic settings, where formal language was expected and participants could draw on their previous Arabic learning experiences. In contrast, *ʿāmmiyyah* was more closely associated with everyday interactions that required spontaneous responses and practical communication. Nevertheless, these patterns did not indicate a strict separation between the two varieties. Rather, participants' accounts suggested that their language choices varied according to the context and their familiarity with the people with whom they interacted.

Interview data revealed different patterns between participants. P01 reported that *fuṣḥā* remained dominant because of his academic environment and previous Arabic learning background. He explained: "*If asked which one is used more often, it is certainly fuṣḥā because I still live in the campus environment*" (P01).

He further explained that his previous educational background influenced his preference as he said: "*Because in the Islamic boarding school before we came here we used fuṣḥā, not ʿāmmiyyah, so I became accustomed to it*" (P01).

This pattern was also reflected in the questionnaire responses. Among the 23 participants, 18 students reported a pesantren educational background before studying in Madinah. Their previous Arabic learning experiences, which mainly emphasized formal Arabic (*fuṣḥā*), influenced their preference and confidence in using *fuṣḥā* in academic and formal communication contexts. Meanwhile, P02 reported a different experience, where *ʿāmmiyyah* became more dominant due to

daily interaction with Arab communities: “Arabic ‘āmmiyyah is usually used when outside campus or when interacting with Arab communities around the residence” (P02).

Furthermore, P02 also explained why ‘āmmiyyah was easier to use in daily communication: “It is easier to use because there is less pressure to think about grammar and sentence structure” (P02). The participants also reported acquiring local Arabic expressions through direct interaction with Arabic speakers. P01 mentioned expressions commonly used in Saudi daily contexts, such as *abshir*, *ma’līsh*, and *bistannak*, while P02 reported learning everyday expressions such as *eish dhā* and *eish tibghā, jibni*. These expressions were not primarily learned through formal classroom instruction but through repeated participation in daily communication. This finding shows that interaction with Arabic speakers enabled learners to develop practical knowledge of Arabic varieties and adapt their language use according to different communicative contexts.

Authentic Interactional Experiences in Arabic Language Development

Arabic development within *bi’ah lughawiyyah* emerged as a gradual process shaped by students’ participation in authentic communicative activities. The integration of questionnaire and interview data indicated that students’ development was associated not merely with exposure to Arabic, but also with the need to communicate, interaction with diverse speakers, adaptation to local linguistic practices, repeated language use, and increasing confidence in communication. These interconnected patterns illustrate how students experienced Arabic language development within an Arabic-speaking environment. Based on the integrated findings, five recurring patterns were identified, ranging from communication necessity to language internalization. Table 4 summarizes these patterns, their supporting evidence, and their reported outcomes.

Table 4. *Emerging Patterns of Arabic Development within Bi’ah Lughawiyyah*

Stage	Supporting Evidence	Outcome
Communication Necessity	Arabic was required for academic, religious, and social participation	Continuous engagement with Arabic
Authentic Interaction	Frequent interaction with lecturers, native speakers, international peers, and local communities	Development of communicative competence
Language Adaptation	Adjustment to local Arabic practices and varieties (<i>fushā</i> and ‘āmmiyyah)	Increased contextual language use
Repeated Language Use	Continuous Arabic use across academic and social domains	Greater fluency and automaticity
Language Internalization	Arabic became integrated into everyday communication	Increased confidence and spontaneous use

Note. The stages represent an empirically derived process identified from questionnaire responses and interview data

As presented in Table 4, the five patterns describe how students’ experiences within *bi’ah lughawiyyah* were associated with the development of their Arabic communication. The process began with the practical necessity of using Arabic and continued through authentic interaction,

adaptation to different linguistic contexts, and repeated language use. These experiences were accompanied by greater familiarity with Arabic as a medium of everyday communication. Although the stages are presented sequentially for analytical clarity, they should not be interpreted as strictly linear or mutually exclusive. Rather, they represent interconnected patterns derived from participants' reported experiences.

The first recurring pattern was communication necessity. Students described Arabic as a practical requirement for participating in academic and social activities. P02 explained that daily communication encouraged him to use Arabic because interaction with local communities required direct communication: *"The language used most frequently, inevitably, was Arabic 'āmmiyyah because we interacted with native Arab communities outside campus"* (P02).

The second pattern was authentic interaction. Students associated their Arabic development with direct communication involving lecturers, international students, native speakers, and local communities. P01 emphasized that continuous participation in Arabic-speaking activities contributed to his development: *"All skills of Arabic language acquisition developed because the environment was entirely Arabic-speaking, so pronunciation, listening, and speaking also improved"* (P01).

The third pattern involved language adaptation. Students gradually adjusted their Arabic use according to different communicative contexts. This included adapting between *fuṣḥā* and *'āmmiyyah*, understanding local expressions, and responding to different interlocutors. P01 explained that some expressions used in daily communication could only be learned through direct interaction: *"For 'āmmiyyah, you have to ask directly the person who uses it, so you can use it too when you interact with local people frequently when you go to market, hospital etc"* (P01).

The fourth pattern was repeated language use across different domains. Arabic was practiced through lectures, religious activities, transportation, and everyday interactions. These repeated experiences allowed students to strengthen their communicative ability and become more confident in using Arabic spontaneously. Questionnaire results showed that students experienced positive development across four aspects of Arabic acquisition such as speaking ability, comprehension of Arabic conversations, confidence in using Arabic, and understanding of Arabic dialects (*'āmmiyyah*).

Most students reported that their speaking ability and confidence had increased, with several indicating a significant improvement. Similar patterns were found in listening comprehension, as students perceived greater ability to understand spoken Arabic through continuous exposure. Students also reported increased familiarity with Arabic dialects, although the level of improvement varied among participants.

The final pattern was language internalization, reflected in students' increasing confidence and familiarity with Arabic communication. Interview data supported this finding, as P01 reported improved *nuṭq*, *istimā'*, and *kalām* through continuous Arabic use, while P02 highlighted the development of practical communication skills through daily interactions. Through continuous participation, Arabic gradually became part of students' everyday practices rather than only a subject learned in academic settings.

Facilitating and Constraining Factors in Arabic Acquisition within Bi'ah Lughawiyyah

Arabic acquisition within *bi'ah lughawiyyah* was shaped by the interaction between environmental opportunities and learner-related conditions. The linguistic environment in Madinah provided students with multiple spaces for Arabic engagement, including academic activities, interaction with local communities, religious activities, and digital resources. These contexts functioned as interconnected sources of Arabic exposure and practice. Figure 1 presents the facilitating factors identified from the questionnaire responses and illustrates the range of opportunities that students associated with their Arabic language development.

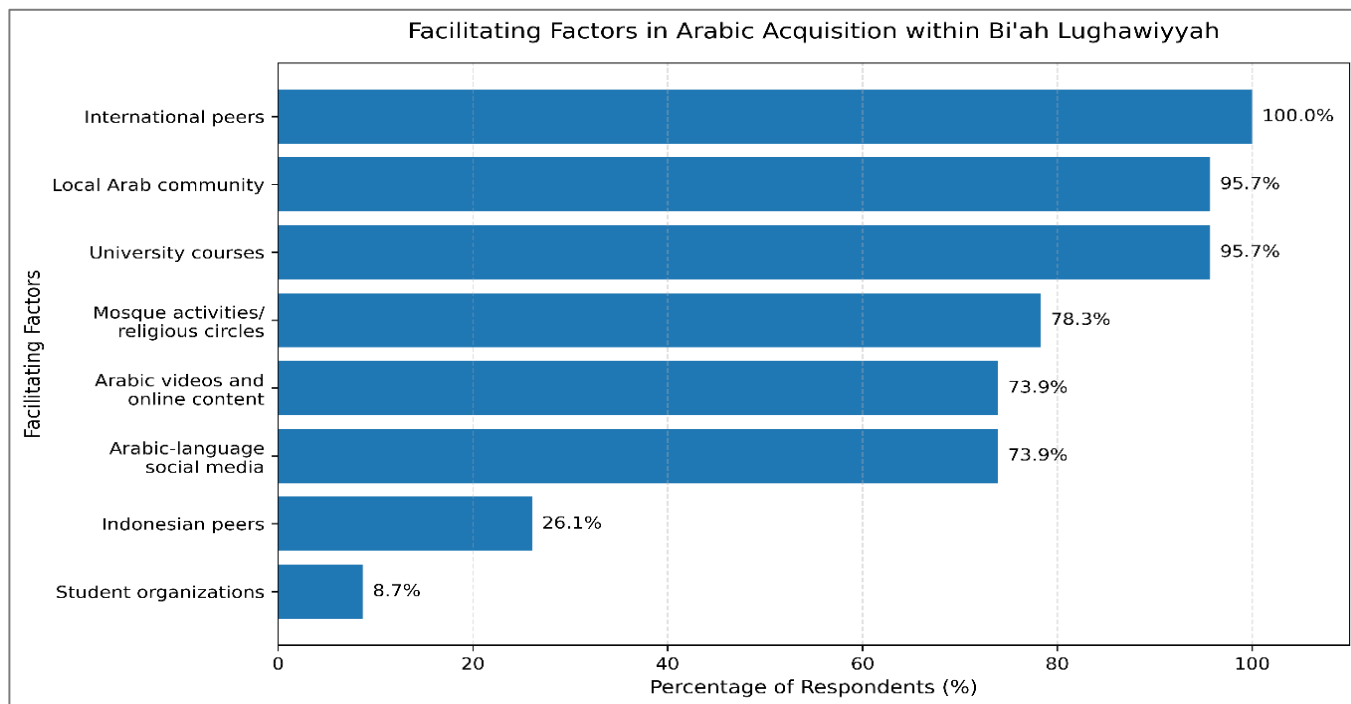


Figure 1. *Facilitating Factors in Arabic Acquisition within Bi'ah Lughawiyyah*

Note. Percentages were calculated based on $N = 23$. Participants could select multiple responses; therefore, percentages exceed 100%.

As illustrated in Figure 1, students identified multiple sources of support for Arabic acquisition within their linguistic environment. These sources encompassed opportunities for direct communication, academic interaction, participation in religious activities, and access to digital resources. The findings suggest that Arabic development was not dependent on a single learning context but was facilitated by students' engagement with different communicative and learning opportunities. To complement the patterns presented in Figure 1, the open-ended questionnaire responses provided further insight into how students perceived the contribution of these experiences to their Arabic development.

Open-ended segment of questionnaire responses further showed that students considered direct communication experiences as the most valuable sources of Arabic development. Participants highlighted interaction with non-Indonesian students, communication with lecturers, conversations

with local residents, and participation in religious activities as important experiences that improved vocabulary, pronunciation, confidence, and familiarity with contextual expressions. One participant also emphasized the institutional support provided through Arabic preparation programs, stating that *“the existence of Arabic preparation classes for those who have not mastered Arabic shows that the university strongly supports students’ Arabic development.”* Another participant described the challenge and benefit of interacting with local speakers who consistently used their dialects, noting that *“they will encourage us to understand what they say rather than gradually making us understand”* which pushed students to adapt and develop their oral communication skills.

Furthermore, other responses revealed that academic activities such as writing scientific works and completing course assignments in Arabic, also contributed to students’ language development by encouraging the use of more formal vocabulary and academic expressions. Experiences that required immediate Arabic use, such as handling administrative matters upon arrival, encouraged students to actively develop their communicative resources and apply previously learned Arabic in authentic contexts. Interview data supported these findings. P01 identified academic interaction, communication with lecturers, participation in *halaqah*, and engagement with local communities as important sources of Arabic development. Similarly, P02 emphasized that daily communication with Arabic speakers helped him develop practical communication skills needed for everyday situations such as negotiating taxi prices.

Despite these opportunities, students also encountered challenges in benefiting from the Arabic-speaking environment. The most frequently reported difficulties were understanding rapid native speech (69.6%) and adapting to Arabic dialect differences (65.2%). Other challenges included limited vocabulary and the influence of Indonesian language use (43.5% each), as well as fear of making mistakes, lack of confidence, and limited interaction with native speakers (34.8% each). Interview findings provided further insights into these challenges. P01 explained that early interaction with native speakers was difficult because of differences between previously learned Arabic and local speech patterns: *“The main difficulties were the dialect (lahjah) and the speed of native speakers’ speech. Saudi people generally speak very fast, especially when using ‘āmmiyyah.”* (P01).

Similarly, P02 highlighted confidence as an initial barrier in communicating with native speakers: *“The greatest difficulty when I first interacted with native Arabic speakers was a lack of confidence.”* (P02). These findings indicate that while *bi’ah lughawiyyah* provided extensive opportunities for Arabic learning, students’ development was influenced by the frequency of interaction, ability to adapt to linguistic variation, and readiness to participate in authentic communication.

3.2 Discussion

Beyond Exposure toward Interactional Opportunities

This study provides a case-based understanding of *bi’ah lughawiyyah* by showing that an effective Arabic language environment is not determined only by the presence of Arabic, but by the availability of meaningful opportunities for learners to use Arabic in social interaction. Previous studies have often described *bi’ah lughawiyyah* as a structured educational environment involving planned activities such as vocabulary development, conversation practice, language programs, and

institutional support (Machmudah et al., 2026; Setiyadi et al., 2023). In contrast, the Madinah case illustrates an authentic linguistic environment in which Arabic functions as a medium of communication across academic, religious, social, and everyday domains.

This finding supports the ecological perspective of language learning, which views environments as sources of linguistic affordances that become meaningful through learners' engagement and participation (Lier, 2010). The present study shows that Arabic exposure in Madinah provided learners with opportunities to accomplish real communicative purposes, including academic participation, interaction with international peers, religious activities, and communication with local communities. Thus, the value of *bi'ah lughawiyyah* lies not simply in learners' physical proximity to Arabic, but in how learners access and utilize available interactional resources.

The findings also extend input-oriented perspectives in second language acquisition. While Krashen's Input Hypothesis (1985) emphasizes the importance of comprehensible input, the present case indicates that exposure alone does not fully explain learners' development of functional Arabic competence. Although participants shared the same Arabic-speaking environment, their language development differed according to their interactional opportunities, social networks, and patterns of participation. This suggests that input becomes more beneficial when learners actively engage in communication and use Arabic to negotiate meaning, solve problems, and participate in social activities.

The variation among participants further demonstrates that immersion does not automatically result in language acquisition. Living within an Arabic-speaking environment creates potential learning opportunities, but these opportunities become meaningful only when learners participate in Arabic-mediated activities. This interpretation is consistent with interaction-based perspectives in second language acquisition, particularly Long's Interaction Hypothesis, (1996) which emphasizes the role of interaction and negotiation of meaning in facilitating language development. In this case, interaction functioned as the mechanism through which environmental exposure was transformed into communicative practice.

Based on the patterns identified from this case, *bi'ah lughawiyyah* can therefore be understood as an authentic linguistic ecosystem in which language availability, social participation, and communicative necessity interact to support Arabic development. This interpretation does not suggest that immersion alone guarantees acquisition; rather, it highlights how authentic environments create conditions where learners repeatedly encounter situations requiring Arabic use. The findings provide contextual insights for Arabic language education, particularly in non-native contexts, by suggesting that effective learning environments should move beyond providing Arabic exposure toward creating sustained opportunities for meaningful interaction.

Arabic Variety Negotiation as Contextual Linguistic Competence in a Diglossic Environment

Arabic acquisition in an immersion context involves learning not only linguistic forms but also the social meanings attached to different varieties (Rakhlin et al., 2025). This study demonstrates that learners do not acquire Arabic as a single uniform system; rather, they gradually develop the ability to navigate between *fushā* and *'āmmiyyah* according to communicative purposes,

interlocutors, and social situations. Therefore, successful Arabic acquisition in authentic environments requires sociolinguistic competence in addition to grammatical and lexical knowledge. This finding contributes to discussions of Arabic diglossia, traditionally characterized by the coexistence of *fuṣḥā* as the high (H) variety for formal communication and spoken Arabic varieties as the low (L) varieties for everyday interaction (Ferguson, 1959; Hellmuth, 2022). However, learners' experiences in Madinah indicate that this distinction is not experienced as a rigid separation, but as a process of contextual negotiation in which different varieties become meaningful according to communicative needs.

This perspective extends the understanding of Arabic diglossia by emphasizing language use in social contexts rather than linguistic structure alone. Although *fuṣḥā* remains central in formal domains, learners develop competence through recognizing which variety is appropriate in particular situations (Hellmuth, 2022; Othman, 2024). In this sense, Arabic acquisition involves learning the social rules of language choice, including when formal and spoken varieties are expected, preferred, or more effective. Such competence reflects broader sociolinguistic principles that language choice is shaped by social experience, interactional relationships, and communicative purposes rather than linguistic knowledge alone (Alshehri & AlShabeb, 2023; Hammer, 2017). Thus, authentic immersion enables learners to understand Arabic variation as a functional communicative resource rather than merely as a challenge created by diglossia (Alhamami, 2025).

The development of this contextual competence also highlights the role of interaction in overcoming the gap between classroom Arabic and everyday Arabic. Previous studies have noted that differences in pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammatical patterns between Modern Standard Arabic and spoken varieties may create difficulties for learners communicating with native speakers (Asli-Badarneh & Asadi, 2023). However, the present study shows that such differences can become opportunities for expanding learners' communicative repertoires when they are encountered through meaningful interaction. The acquisition of expressions such as *abshir*, *ma'lish*, and *eish tibghā* illustrates that dialectal knowledge develops through participation in social practices where language is connected to immediate communicative purposes and relationships. This finding supports the view that interaction and negotiation of meaning play an important role in transforming exposure into functional competence (Long, 1996).

Furthermore, this study extends Schumann's Acculturation Theory, (1986) by showing that social integration contributes to language development when it creates opportunities for meaningful communication, repeated language use, and adaptation. Social proximity alone does not automatically lead to acquisition; rather, its contribution depends on whether learners actively participate in the linguistic practices available within the community. Therefore, *bi'ah lughawiyyah* should be understood not merely as a source of Arabic exposure but as a space where learners develop the ability to manage linguistic variation. The ultimate outcome of immersion is not only increased Arabic proficiency, but the development of contextual sociolinguistic competence that enables learners to participate appropriately across diverse Arabic-speaking communities.

Interaction-Driven Arabic Language Acquisition

A central empirical contribution of this study is the identification of a process through which Arabic acquisition develops within an authentic *bi'ah lughawiyyah*. While previous studies have emphasized immersion and language exposure as important conditions for second language development, less attention has been given to how environmental exposure is transformed into communicative competence. Through iterative analysis of questionnaire responses and interview data, this study identified an emerging conceptual model represented as *Interaction-Driven Arabic Language Acquisition*. The model illustrates that Arabic development within an authentic environment occurs through interconnected processes of communication necessity, authentic interaction, Arabic variety negotiation, language adaptation, repeated language use, and language internalization as shown in Figure 2.

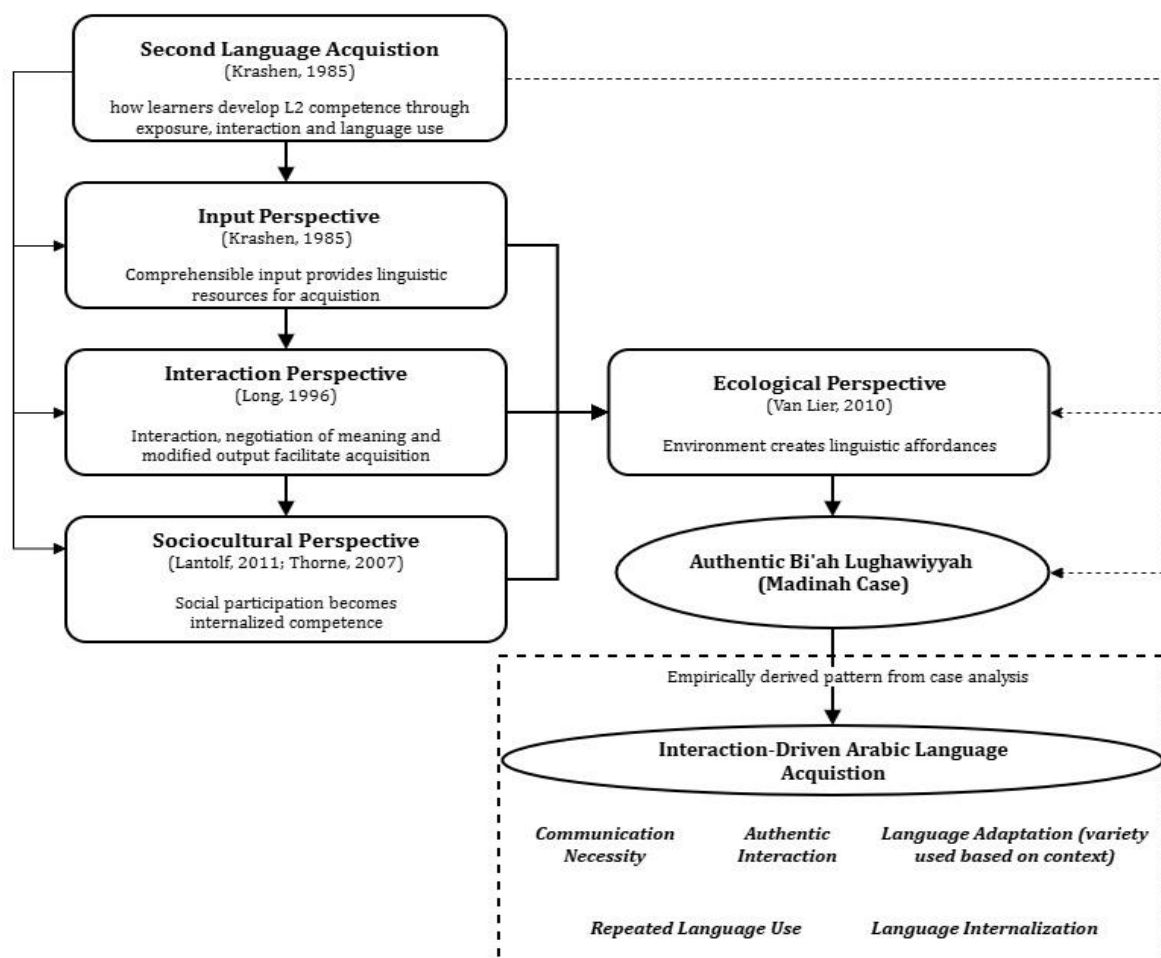


Figure 2. Conceptual Model of Interaction-Driven Arabic Language Acquisition in an Authentic *Bi'ah Lughawiyyah*

Figure 2 illustrates the relationship between established theoretical perspectives in second language acquisition and the emerging pattern identified from this case study. The model integrates the Input Perspective (Krashen, 1985), Interaction Perspective (Long, 1996), Sociocultural Perspective (Lantolf, 2011; Thorne, 2007), and Ecological Perspective (Lier, 2010) to explain how Arabic learning occurs within an authentic *bi'ah lughawiyyah*. From an ecological perspective, the Arabic-speaking environment provides linguistic affordances through academic, religious, and social activities. However, these affordances become meaningful learning opportunities only when learners actively participate in interaction. In this sense, the model aligns with SLA perspectives by showing that exposure provides linguistic resources, interaction facilitates negotiation and language development, and social participation supports the internalization of communicative abilities.

The empirical analysis further revealed that interaction functioned as the central mechanism connecting environmental opportunities with Arabic development. The experiences of P01 and P02 showed that academic discussions, communication with lecturers, *halaqah* participation, interactions with local communities, and everyday transactions created opportunities to develop listening, speaking, pronunciation, and comprehension abilities. These findings revealed that Arabic development occurred not only through exposure to language forms but through participation in meaningful communicative activities. Therefore, the findings extend input-oriented perspectives by showing that comprehensible input becomes more effective when learners actively engage with interactional opportunities (Patrick, 2019). Repeated participation across different domains strengthened language use and supported the gradual development of more automatic communication practices, consistent with perspectives on habit formation in language learning (Gardner et al., 2020). The final process, language internalization, reflects the transformation of socially mediated language practices into individual competence, where Arabic gradually becomes part of learners' communicative repertoire rather than only an external requirement (Lantolf, 2011).

Based on this process, the study identifies *Interaction-Driven Arabic Language Acquisition* as an emerging conceptual model derived from the data analysis. The model does not propose a new interaction theory, rather, it contextualizes established interaction principles within an authentic *bi'ah lughawiyyah* experienced by non-native Arabic learners. It explains that Arabic acquisition develops through interconnected processes of communication necessity, authentic interaction, language adaptation including negotiation between *fushā* and *'āmmiyyah*, repeated language use, and language internalization. Therefore, the contribution of this model lies in explaining how interaction operates within an authentic Arabic-speaking environment and how environmental exposure is transformed into communicative competence. An effective *bi'ah lughawiyyah* is thus not merely a place where Arabic is available, but an interaction-rich ecosystem that enables learners to use, adapt, practice, and internalize Arabic as a functional language.

Environmental Affordances and Learner Readiness in Arabic Development

The present study demonstrates that the effectiveness of *bi'ah lughawiyyah* depends on the interaction between environmental affordances and learners' readiness to participate. Although authentic immersion provides extensive opportunities for Arabic exposure, these opportunities do not automatically develop into competence. From an ecological perspective, language environments

function not as passive sources of input but as networks of affordances that become meaningful through learner engagement (Lier, 2010; Loewen & Sato, 2018). In the context of Madinah, Arabic acquisition was supported by interconnected spaces, including interactions with international peers, university courses, and local Arab communities. These spaces provided different forms of support: peer interactions encouraged spontaneous communication, academic settings provided structured language knowledge, and local communities offered access to naturally occurring expressions and dialectal practices. As P01 explained, “*Bi’ah lughawiyyah is very influential, but its influence depends on the characteristics of the environment and the type of interaction that occurs.*” This indicates that the presence of Arabic alone is insufficient; learners need meaningful interaction within the environment to transform exposure into language development.

This interpretation is consistent with research showing that communicative competence develops through the relationship between linguistic knowledge and community participation (Alkathiri et al., 2025). Furthermore, Habibie et al., (2026) found that Arabic competence in *pesantren* developed through a community-driven *bi’ah lughawiyyah*, where grammatical knowledge (*qawa’id*) was transformed into communicative ability through authentic interaction and peer language socialization. The present study extends this perspective by showing that an international immersion context such as Madinah also provides social spaces that transform Arabic exposure into practical communication. Community interactions do not merely provide opportunities for practice but also enable feedback, negotiation of meaning, and confidence development.

The Madinah context also highlights the role of religious and digital environments as additional linguistic affordances. Religious activities, including mosque programs and study circles, provided opportunities for Arabic communication connected with social and spiritual participation. Likewise, Arabic social media and online content expanded learners’ exposure to vocabulary, pronunciation, and expressions beyond geographical boundaries. However, these resources mainly functioned as complementary input, while direct interaction remained essential for negotiation of meaning, feedback, and language adaptation. The challenges experienced by learners, particularly difficulties with rapid speech, dialectal variation, limited vocabulary, and communication barriers, further demonstrate that immersion involves a gradual process of linguistic adjustment rather than immediate mastery.

These findings contribute to the broader discussion of second language acquisition (SLA) by demonstrating that language development within an authentic *bi’ah lughawiyyah* is not determined by exposure alone, but by the extent to which learners engage with Arabic as a medium of real communication. The findings suggest that the value of a language environment lies not merely in increasing the quantity of input, but in creating opportunities for learners to negotiate meaning, adapt to linguistic variation, and develop the confidence required to participate in authentic interactions (Teimouri et al., 2019). This interpretation aligns with SLA perspectives emphasizing the central roles of interaction, learner engagement, and willingness to communicate in language development (Sadoughi & Hejazi, 2024; Wei & Xu, 2022).

Therefore, effective Arabic learning environments, particularly in non-native contexts, should move beyond providing greater exposure and instead facilitate meaningful participation in diverse communicative settings. Language educators should design interaction-based activities that require learners to use Arabic for genuine purposes through discussions, collaborative tasks, and contextual communication. Educational institutions should strengthen *bi'ah lughawiyyah* by integrating classroom instruction with social and cultural practices, recognizing that learners develop not only linguistic competence but also contextual awareness through engagement with different speakers and varieties of Arabic. Furthermore, curriculum designers should incorporate both *fushḥā* and *‘āmmiyyah* as complementary resources, enabling learners to connect formal linguistic knowledge with practical communication demands. Such an approach positions *bi'ah lughawiyyah* not simply as a place where Arabic is encountered, but as an active learning ecosystem in which linguistic knowledge, social interaction, and communicative identity develop simultaneously.

4. CONCLUSION

This study improves the understanding of *bi'ah lughawiyyah* by viewing it as an authentic linguistic ecosystem rather than only a place where learners receive Arabic exposure. The findings show that Arabic acquisition in Madinah developed through the relationship between the learning environment, social interaction, and learners' active participation. Students developed their Arabic not only through continuous exposure but also through meaningful communication in academic, religious, and social contexts. The study also shows that learners developed sociolinguistic competence by using and adjusting between *fushḥā* and *‘āmmiyyah* based on different situations. *Fushḥā* was mainly used in formal and academic contexts, while *‘āmmiyyah* supported daily communication with local communities. This ability to select appropriate Arabic varieties reflects learners' adaptation to the diglossic nature of Arabic.

The main contribution of this study is emerging the development of Interaction-Driven Arabic Language Acquisition as a conceptual model explaining how Arabic competence develops in an authentic immersion environment. The model does not introduce a new interaction theory but explains how established SLA principles operate within an authentic *bi'ah lughawiyyah* among non-native Arabic learners. The model shows that Arabic development involves communication necessity, authentic interaction, language adaptation, repeated language use, and internalization. These findings suggest that Arabic programs should not only provide Arabic exposure but also create interaction-rich environments that support meaningful communication, learner confidence, and continuous language use. This study is limited by its focus on Indonesian students in Madinah and the small number of interview participants. Future research may examine the model in other Arabic-speaking contexts and with different learner backgrounds.

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DECLARATION OF AI-ASSISTED TECHNOLOGIES

The authors used ChatGPT (GPT-5.6, OpenAI) for language refinement, and manuscript organization, during the preparation of this manuscript. The authors remain fully responsible for the content, interpretation of data, and final version of the manuscript.

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AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS STATEMENT

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Nissa Media Utami	✓	✓			✓				✓	✓		✓		
Ade Nandang Slamet						✓	✓	✓		✓				
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C : Conceptualization	I : Investigation					Vi : Visualization								
M : Methodology	R : Resources					Su : Supervision								
So: Software	D : Data Curation					P : Project administration								
Va: Validation	O : Writing - Original Draft					Fu: Funding acquisition								
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CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

Authors state no conflict of interest

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