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A Community-Driven Model for Developing Arabic Communicative Competence in Salaf Pesantren

Faizal Habibie^{1*}, Wildana Wargadinata², Mamluatul Hasanah³, Ismail Ubaidillah

^{1,2,3,4} Universitas Islam Negeri Maulana Malik Ibrahim Malang, Indonesia

Correspondence: E-mail: 220104310026@student.uin-malang.ac.id

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to formulate a community-driven Arabic learning model that bridges grammatical mastery (*qawa'id*) and communicative competence in the context of *Salaf Pesantren* Sidogiri. Although traditional *pesantren* learning is commonly associated with grammar-oriented instruction and classical text comprehension, *Pesantren* Sidogiri has demonstrated strong achievement in Arabic communicative performance. This study employed a qualitative case study design using interviews, observations, and document analysis to explore how the *pesantren* community contributes to communicative competence. The findings reveal that learning success is shaped by a structured social ecosystem within the *bi'ah lughawiyah*. The mastery of *qawa'id* through Kitab al-Miftah functions as a cognitive foundation that is transformed into communicative competence through authentic interaction and peer-mediated language socialization. Senior students, alums, and *Rijalul Lughah* function as More Knowledgeable Others (MKO) who provide continuous scaffolding based on Vygotsky's sociocultural theory. Informal activities such as *takrir* and *halaqah muhawarah* create a low-anxiety environment that encourages speaking confidence, collaborative learning, and authentic language use. The study concludes that communicative competence can be effectively developed through the integration of grammatical knowledge, social interaction, and community-based language practices.

1. INTRODUCTION

Arabic occupies a central position in both global and domestic Islamic studies, recognized not only as the language of worship but also as the primary medium for the vast corpus of classical Islamic scholarship (*Kitab al-Turath*) (Al-Faruqi, 1992). In Indonesia, the *Pondok Pesantren* serves as the key institution sustaining this tradition (Bruinessen, 1990). Historically, Arabic instruction in many *salaf* (traditional) *pesantren* has emphasized linguistic competence, particularly the mastery of *qawa'id al-lughah* (grammar), with the primary goal of enabling students to read and comprehend classical texts (Habibie & Ibrahim, 2022). While this approach remains essential for preserving the integrity of the scholarly tradition, contemporary challenges demand a shift toward communicative competence and language performance—that is, the ability to use the language effectively in spoken and written forms within real-life contexts (Canale & Swain, 1980). Bridging the duality between grammar-oriented tradition and communication-oriented performance has therefore become a critical issue in the current Arabic Language Curriculum (Hanafi, 2021).

The success of language acquisition beyond formal instruction is strongly supported by the principles of Social Constructivism (Vygotskiĭ & Cole, 1978). This theory posits that learning is a collaborative process embedded within social and cultural interactions. Vygotsky introduced the concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), which suggests that learners can attain higher levels of performance through assistance and guidance from a More Knowledgeable Other (MKO). In the *pesantren* context, this principle is manifested in the *bi'ah lughawiyah* (linguistic environment), a socially constructed ecosystem designed to encourage the use of the target language beyond the classroom. Theoretically, an authentic and community-driven *bi'ah lughawiyah*—aligned with the principles of Community Language Learning (CLL)—holds significant potential to function as the scaffolding necessary for fostering productive language skills (Richards & Rodgers, 2015).

Salaf Pesantren is a traditional Islamic educational institution in Indonesia committed to preserving inherited teaching methods, curricula, and values, characterized by the instruction of classical Islamic texts (*kitab kuning*/ *Kitab al-Turath*) in Arabic through the *bandongan* (collective lecture) and *sorogan* (individual tutorial) systems, positioning the *Kiyai* (religious scholar) as the central authoritative figure, and emphasizing character formation (*akhlak al-karimah*) and social piety within the ascetic communal life of dormitories (*pondok*) (Zikriah & Mauludiyah, 2024). In its contemporary development, the term "*salaf*" here primarily refers to an older educational tradition. It is not automatically synonymous with puritanical Salafi Islamic movements, although in current dynamics these institutions must negotiate influences from modernity and transnational ideologies (Gazali & Budiana, 2023). Scholarly studies indicate that the essence of the *salaf pesantren* endures as a guardian of traditional religious authority, despite facing challenges of modernization and adaptation in the digital age, including efforts to revitalize the central role of the *kitab kuning* and negotiate religious authority (Widodo et al., 2023), while simultaneously playing a role in promoting social integration within Indonesia's multicultural society (Arif et al., 2025).

Pondok Pesantren Sidogiri, as a firmly established *salaf* institution, presents a compelling and contrasting phenomenon. While it maintains a curriculum foundation rooted in *qawa'id* (grammar-based instruction) (Amirudin et al., 2020), *Pesantren* Sidogiri has demonstrably succeeded in shifting its orientation toward high-level language performance, particularly in speaking skills. Empirical evidence reinforces this claim: Sidogiri's delegations consistently achieve outstanding accomplishments, including the "Best Speaker" award and overall championship in the Arabic debate competitions at the GAZA event hosted by UIN Malang (Ulil Absor, 2023). Furthermore, observable data indicate that students' oral performance is significantly shaped by the influence of the alum ecosystem and linguistic role models embedded within the *pesantren* community (Bruinessen, 1990). This phenomenon suggests that *Pesantren* Sidogiri has developed a distinctive model for integrating traditional scholarly orientations with contemporary communicative demands—a mechanism driven largely by the strength of its community and alums networks rather than by the formal curricular structure alone (Dewi Masita & Unun Zumairoh ASR Himayah, 2023).

While the integration model of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) has been extensively studied (Madkur et al., 2024), a fundamental research gap remains. The academic literature has not specifically identified, analyzed, or theoretically modeled how a strongly tradition-based institution (focused on *qawa'id*) successfully develops high-level productive skills by leveraging a Community-Driven model predominantly influenced by alums and community dynamics outside the formal curricular structure (Ochs & Schieffelin, 2017). Therefore, this study aims to address this gap. The primary objective of this article is to formulate a Community-Driven Arabic Learning Model that functions as a successful bridge between tradition (grammar) and performance (communication) for enhancing students' productive language skills within the context of a *salaf Pesantren*. The findings of this research are expected to contribute to the development of language socialization theory and context-based curriculum design in Islamic educational institutions.

2. METHODS

Research design

This study employs a qualitative approach with an Intensive Case Study Design (In-Depth Case Study). The case study approach was selected because the primary objective is to deeply and holistically understand the contrasting phenomenon between a traditional curriculum and successful communicative performance at *Pondok Pesantren* Sidogiri, which serves as a single bounded context (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This design enables the researcher to identify and formulate a specific and unique Community-Driven learning model that promotes the development of productive language skills.

Research location and participants

The research location for this study is the "*Daerah Arab*" dormitory at *Pondok Pesantren* Sidogiri, Pasuruan, East Java. This site was selected as an information-rich case (Patton, 2023) that exhibits the unique phenomenon under study—exceptional linguistic performance within a strong *salaf* tradition.

The key participants in this study consisted of several individuals who play significant roles in the construction and implementation of Arabic language learning culture within the "*Daerah Arab*" dormitory. The first participant was the Curriculum Policy Maker, namely the Head of LPBAA (Institute for Arabic and Foreign Language Learning), who is responsible for designing and developing the Arabic language curriculum in the dormitory. This informant provided important information regarding the institutional vision, objectives, and strategies for integrating *qawa'id* (grammar instruction) with communicative language practices.

The second group of participants consisted of Arabic language instructors who directly implement the teaching methods both in formal classroom settings and in the dormitory environment. Their involvement was essential for understanding the practical application of teaching strategies, classroom interaction, and the integration between formal instruction and daily language use. In addition, the Dormitory Supervisor, commonly known as *Rijalul Lughah*, also became a key informant in this study. As supervisors and managers of the linguistic environment within the dormitory, they play a central role in monitoring students' language practices, enforcing language discipline, and facilitating the development of an Arabic-speaking atmosphere.

Furthermore, students residing in the "*Daerah Arab*" dormitory were selected as participants, particularly those who had achieved success in Arabic language competitions. These students represented the direct outcomes of the learning model implemented in the dormitory. They provided valuable insights into their learning experiences, language practices, and personal strategies in developing Arabic proficiency. The study also involved competent alums who continue to actively participate in the *pesantren's* linguistic community even after graduation. These alumni function as agents of the Community-Driven learning model and serve as More Knowledgeable Others (MKO) in accordance with Lev Vygotsky's sociocultural theory (Vygotskiï & Cole, 1978).

The participants were selected through a combination of purposive sampling and snowball sampling techniques. Purposive sampling was employed to identify individuals who possessed specific knowledge, experiences, and responsibilities related to Arabic language learning in the dormitory context (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Meanwhile, snowball sampling was utilized to reach high-performing students and alums who were considered less accessible but highly relevant to the objectives of the study. Dormitory Supervisor (*Rijalul Lughah*): The manager or supervisor who oversees and manages the language learning processes within the "*Daerah Arab*" dormitory.

individuals with specific knowledge and roles) and snowball sampling techniques (to reach high-performing students and alums who may be less accessible)(Creswell & Poth, 2018)

Data collection techniques

To achieve data richness and ensure the validity of the findings, this study employs Method and Source Triangulation (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018):

Table 1. Data Collection Techniques, Focus of Data, and Primary Data Sources

Data Collection Technique	Focus of Data	Primary Data Sources
In-Depth Interviews	Understanding the philosophy, strategies, motivations, and role of the community/alums in language learning.	Policymakers (LPBAA Head), Instructors, Students In “ <i>Daerah Arab</i> ” Dormitory, Competent Alumni.
Non-Participant Observation	Observing formal learning processes in the classroom (<i>qawa'id</i>) and informal activities within the language environment (<i>bi'ah lughawiyah</i>), such as debates, discussions, or daily student/alum interactions.	Formal classrooms, the <i>bi'ah lughawiyah</i> (language environment), and extracurricular activities.
Document and Artifact Analysis	Obtaining authentic evidence from the Arabic curriculum, syllabi, language use regulations, and records of Arabic competition achievements (certificates/reports from events like GAZA).	Curriculum documents, achievement reports, <i>Pesantren</i> regulatory documents.

Data analysis technique

Data analysis in this study was conducted inductively and iteratively throughout the entire research process by adopting the qualitative data analysis model proposed by Matthew B. Miles, A. Michael Huberman, and Johnny Saldaña (Miles et al., 2019). The analysis process consisted of three interconnected stages, namely data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing or verification. These stages were continuously carried out to ensure that the findings accurately reflected the realities of Arabic language learning culture within the “*Daerah Arab*” dormitory.

The first stage was data reduction, which involved summarizing, selecting, focusing, and simplifying the raw data obtained from interviews, observations, and documentation. During this process, the researcher systematically coded and categorized the data in order to identify initial themes, recurring patterns, and significant issues related to the research questions. Through data reduction, large amounts of field data were organized into more manageable and meaningful units without losing the essential context of the participants’ experiences.

The second stage was data display, in which the reduced data were organized and presented in structured forms such as matrices, flowcharts, tables, and descriptive narratives. This process enabled the researcher to visualize relationships among categories and better understand complex social interactions within the *pesantren* environment. For example, the researcher developed analytical matrices to map the specific roles of *Rijalul Lughah* in

supporting the improvement of students' Arabic speaking skills. Such displays facilitated deeper interpretation and helped identify connections between learning practices, social interaction, and language performance.

The final stage was conclusion drawing and verification. At this stage, the researcher formulated interpretations, identified overarching patterns, and synthesized emerging themes from the data. The process was conducted continuously and iteratively by repeatedly comparing interpretations with the original field data to ensure credibility and validity. Through this constant verification process, the study ultimately produced a comprehensive formulation of the *pesantren* Sidogiri Community-Driven Arabic Learning Model as the primary conclusion of the research.

Data validity

To ensure the validity, credibility, and rigor of the research findings, this study employed several established techniques commonly used in qualitative research, namely source triangulation, method triangulation, and member checking. These strategies were applied throughout the research process to strengthen the trustworthiness of the data and to minimize potential bias in interpretation.

The first technique was source triangulation, which involved cross-verifying information obtained from multiple participants and sources. Data collected from Arabic language instructors, students, alumni, dormitory supervisors, and institutional documents were continuously compared to identify consistent patterns, recurring themes, and complementary perspectives regarding the Arabic learning culture within the "*Daerah Arab*" dormitory. Through this process, the researcher was able to confirm the reliability of the findings by examining whether similar information emerged across different informants and contexts.

The second technique was method triangulation, which aimed to corroborate research findings by utilizing different methods of data collection. The researcher compared and integrated evidence derived from interviews, observations, and document analysis in order to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon under study. For example, statements obtained from interviews were validated through direct observation of language activities and supported by institutional documents related to language policies and learning programs. This combination of methods enhanced the depth and consistency of the analysis.

In addition, this study also applied member checking, also known as respondent validation. In this process, preliminary interpretations, summaries, and selected findings were returned to key informants for verification. The participants were given the opportunity to confirm, clarify, or revise the researcher's interpretations to ensure that the data accurately represented their perspectives, experiences, and intended meanings (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This procedure was essential in maintaining the authenticity and credibility of the findings, while also ensuring that the final interpretation faithfully reflected the realities experienced by the participants.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Results

Three-stage transformative Arabic learning model (formal quality-based curriculum)

The findings reveal that *Pondok Pesantren* Sidogiri, through the Institute for Arabic and Foreign Language Teaching (LPBAA), implements a progressive Quality-Based Curriculum (*Kurikulum Berbasis Mutu/KBM*) designed to support the development of productive Arabic skills.

According to Mr. Hasbi (LPBAA teacher and curriculum staff), Arabic learning in the formal classroom is divided into three compulsory levels (*Mustawa*): *Mustawa 1* (Beginner), *Mustawa 2* (Intermediate), and *Mustawa 3* (Advanced), each lasting six months. Before entering the “*Daerah Arab*” dormitory, students are required to study *nahwu* and *sharaf* through *Kitab Al-Miftah lil Ulum* for approximately two years.

The curriculum at the advanced level integrates productive language components such as *Insya’* (Arabic composition) and Journalism. In addition, students may continue to Special Classes (*Mustawa Khos*), including *Kuliyatul Syi’ir* and *Kuliyatul Tarjamah*. These programs expose students to authentic Arabic materials derived from modern media platforms such as Al-Jazeera, Arabic YouTube channels, and Arabic films.

Table 2. Structure of the Arabic Learning Curriculum at “*Daerah Arab*” Dormitory

Learning Stage	Duration	Main Focus	Learning Output
<i>Mustawa 1</i>	6 months	Basic Arabic structures and vocabulary	Basic speaking ability
<i>Mustawa 2</i>	6 months	Intermediate grammar and communication	Functional communication
<i>Mustawa 3</i>	6 months	<i>Insya’</i> , journalism, advanced speaking	Productive language performance
<i>Mustawa Khos</i>	Flexible	Poetry and translation	Specialized Arabic competence

The findings indicate that the curriculum gradually shifts students from grammatical understanding toward productive language use.

The *bi’ah lughawiyah* as the core of the community-driven learning ecosystem

Field observations indicate that the primary factor influencing students’ Arabic performance is not limited to formal classroom instruction but strongly connected to the social ecosystem of the “*Daerah Arab*” dormitory.

The role of *rijalul lughah*, alums, and visiting lecturers

The findings show that each student room is supervised by two members of *Rijalul Lughah* who function as language mentors and communication partners. Their responsibilities include assisting new students in adapting to the Arabic-speaking environment and encouraging daily language use.

Data from interviews also indicate that visiting lecturers from Al-Azhar University regularly conduct seminars, public lectures, and discussion sessions within the *pesantren*. During these activities, students from *Mustawa Khos* often serve as translators for native Arabic speakers. Furthermore, students acknowledged that successful alums with strong Arabic competence become important motivational figures and linguistic role models within the *pesantren* community.

Table 3. Community Actors in the Arabic Learning Ecosystem

Community Actor	Primary Role	Contribution to Language Learning
<i>Rijalul Lughah</i>	Peer mentors	Daily guidance and speaking practice
Alums	Role models	Motivation and language socialization
Visiting lecturers	Native speaker exposure	Authentic interaction and translation practice
Senior students	Discussion facilitators	Debate training and communicative confidence

***Takrir* and *muhawarah* as daily communicative practices**

The findings demonstrate that *Takrir* and *Muhawarah* activities function as the primary communicative training spaces in the dormitory environment. *Takrir* sessions are conducted between *Asr* and *Maghrib* and focus on speaking and writing practice. During these sessions, students receive direct corrections related to grammar, sentence structure, vocabulary selection, and contextual expression.

Muhawarah activities are held at night in a more relaxed setting. Students discuss freely selected themes such as politics, sports, and viral social issues under the guidance of senior students. Observations show that these activities frequently develop into debate simulations and spontaneous dialogues. Students reported that the informal atmosphere, combined with peer support, increases their confidence to speak Arabic without fear of making mistakes.

Table 4. Communicative Activities within the *bi'ah lughawiyah*

Activity	Schedule	Main Focus	Learning Function
<i>Takrir</i>	After <i>Asr</i>	Grammar correction and speaking practice	Controlled communicative practice
<i>Muhawarah</i>	Night sessions	Free discussion and debate	Spontaneous communication
Debate simulations	Weekly	Argumentation and fluency	Public speaking competence
Translation practice	Special sessions	Interpreting Arabic discourse	Authentic language exposure

Bridging *qawa'id* and communicative performance

The findings indicate that students' communicative competence is built upon a strong grammatical foundation. Intensive mastery of *nahwu* and *sharaf* through Kitab Al-Miftah lil Ulum provides students with structural understanding before they actively engage in communicative activities. Interviews with teachers and students reveal that grammatical mastery facilitates oral fluency, vocabulary selection, and sentence production during debates and discussions. The transition from grammatical competence to communicative competence occurs gradually through continuous participation in structured language activities within the dormitory environment.

Table 5. Supporting Factors of the Community-Driven Learning Model

Supporting Factor	Description	Impact
Language regulation	Mandatory Arabic use	Consistent language exposure
Educational sanctions	Vocabulary memorization and speeches	Positive discipline
Weekly competitions	Debate and drama activities	Increased motivation
Alums influence	Successful linguistic role models	Strong intrinsic motivation
Religious orientation	Arabic as language of Islam	Emotional attachment to learning

3.2 Discussion

The findings of this study demonstrate that the success of Arabic language learning at *Pondok Pesantren* Sidogiri cannot be explained solely through formal curriculum design. Instead, the findings confirm the importance of socially mediated language acquisition as emphasized in Vygotsky's Social Constructivist Theory.

The role of Rijalul Lughah, alums, and senior students clearly reflects the concept of More Knowledgeable Others (MKO), where learners develop communicative competence through continuous interaction and scaffolding within authentic social environments. This finding supports previous studies emphasizing that productive language acquisition is strongly influenced by social participation and peer-mediated interaction rather than teacher-centered instruction alone (Vygotskiĭ & Cole, 1978).

Moreover, the *bi'ah lughawiyah* established in the "*Daerah Arab*" dormitory functions as an immersive language socialization environment. This finding aligns with Community Language Learning and sociocultural perspectives that view language learning as participation in a community of practice. Similar findings were reported by Erlam and Tolosa (2022), who argued that immersive collaborative environments significantly enhance communicative competence.

Another important contribution of this study lies in its rejection of the traditional dichotomy between grammar-oriented learning and communicative approaches. The findings indicate that mastery of *qawa'id* does not hinder communicative competence; instead, it serves as a cognitive foundation for language production. This supports Skill Acquisition Theory (Richards & Rodgers, 2015), which explains that declarative grammatical knowledge can gradually transform into procedural communicative ability through repeated practice and

interaction (DeKeyser, 2020; VanPatten et al., 2020).

This finding also differs from several previous studies that positioned grammar-oriented *pesantren* education as less communicative. In the context of Sidogiri, grammatical mastery becomes an enabling factor for spontaneous communication because students continuously proceduralize their linguistic knowledge through authentic interaction (Jameel Aburizaizah, 2021).

The *Takrir* and *Muhawarah* activities also demonstrate the importance of low-anxiety communicative settings (Erlam & Tolosa, 2022). The relaxed atmosphere, peer collaboration, and tolerance toward errors reduce students' affective filters and encourage spontaneous language production (Phuoc & Barrot, 2022). This finding strengthens Krashen's Input Hypothesis and contemporary sociocultural approaches emphasizing collaborative languaging processes (Li&Qu, 2024).

In addition, the study highlights how institutional culture contributes significantly to sustaining language acquisition (Faruq et al., 2023). Competitive activities, educational regulations, alum influence, and collective identity create what may be categorized as a high-context language learning culture (Scotland, 2022). This cultural dimension becomes a major factor in maintaining students' motivation and long-term engagement with Arabic learning.

The findings also reinforce Self-Determination Theory proposed by Ryan and Deci (Ryan & Deci, 2020). Students' motivation emerges not merely from external punishment or institutional obligations but from internal aspirations, emotional attachment to Arabic, and identification with successful alum figures.

Theoretically, this study contributes to the development of a Community-Driven Arabic Learning Model within the context of *salaf pesantren*. The model demonstrates that traditional Islamic educational institutions can integrate deep grammatical traditions with modern communicative practices through community-based language socialization mechanisms.

Compared with previous studies on Communicative Language Teaching in Islamic boarding schools, this study offers a more contextual explanation of how productive language skills are socially constructed through dormitory culture, peer mentorship, and alums involvement. Therefore, this model may serve as an alternative framework for Arabic language education in other *pesantren* contexts seeking to balance grammatical mastery with communicative performance.

4. CONCLUSION

This research successfully formulates a Community-Based Arabic Learning Model at the "Daerah Arab" dormitory in *Pondok Pesantren* Sidogiri. This model bridges the tradition of mastering grammatical rules (*qawa'id*) with high-level communicative performance. The key findings reveal that Sidogiri's success lies in the unique synthesis of a strong traditional foundation with a structured, community-driven social ecosystem.

The model resolves the traditional dichotomy between grammar and communication by making deep mastery of *nahwu-sharaf* a mandatory two-year prerequisite. This grammatical foundation then serves as a springboard for developing productive skills through a

progressive three-tiered curriculum, culminating in journalism, translation, and Arabic poetry. This transformation from linguistic to communicative competence demonstrates that mastery of tradition actually serves as a lever for achieving practical proficiency.

The main pillar of this model is the community-based learning ecosystem that operates outside formal classrooms. The “*Daerah Arab*” dormitory functions as an authentic language environment (*bi’ah lughawiyah*), driven by the roles of peer mentors (*rijalul lughah*), alums, and visiting instructors. Through structured activities such as *takrir* (repetition sessions) and relaxed night discussions (*halaqah muhawaroh*), students gain a safe space to practice without excessive pressure. This approach effectively cultivates communication courage while maintaining linguistic accuracy.

An educative regulatory system and strong community appeal support the sustainability of this model. The mandatory Arabic language rule is enforced with educational sanctions, while various weekly competitive events foster pride and a sense of belonging among students. Intrinsic motivation derived from alum role models, aspirations for further study, and religious spirit further strengthens this learning ecosystem.

Overall, Sidogiri's learning model represents a unique form of contextual language socialization. It demonstrates how traditional educational institutions can integrate the strength of their intellectual heritage with modern community-centered learning approaches, offering valuable insights for the broader development of Arabic language education in *pesantren* environments.

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