

Communicative Language Teaching in Arabic Instruction at a Pesantren: Practices, Conditions, and Constraints

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Article Info

Received: 12 June 2026

Revised: 31 June 2026

Accepted: 01 August 2026

Keywords:

Communicative Method; Arabic Language Proficiency; Mahārah al-Kalām; Islamic Boarding School

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ABSTRACT: Students' Arabic speaking proficiency (*mahārah al-kalām*) at the research site remains low, a condition closely linked to the still uneven implementation of communicative teaching methods. This study describes the implementation of the communicative method in Arabic language learning, the condition of students' *mahārah al-kalām*, and the supporting and hindering factors involved. A descriptive qualitative field study approach was employed, with data collected through observation, interviews, and documentation involving sixteen informants, comprising eight Arabic teachers and eight tenth-grade (*Ulya*) male and female students. Data were analyzed using the Miles and Huberman interactive model, comprising data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. Findings show that implementation of the communicative method remains partial: communicative elements such as question-and-answer sessions, vocabulary memorization, and encouragement to speak are already present, while more structured activities such as paired conversations, presentations, and role play have not been carried out consistently. Students' *mahārah al-kalām* is still constrained by limited vocabulary, difficulty constructing sentences, and low confidence in speaking. Supporting factors include a conducive boarding-school environment, students' religious motivation, enthusiasm toward communicative learning, the teacher's conceptual readiness, and the simplicity of required resources, while hindering factors include limited instructional time, variation in student ability, and insufficient supporting media. These findings indicate that the success of the communicative method in a pesantren setting depends more on the consistency of structured communicative activities than on teachers' conceptual understanding of the method alone

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INTRODUCTION

Education occupies a strategic position in shaping individuals who are knowledgeable, morally grounded, and able to participate actively in society [1]. At its core, education is a process that influences learners' physical and spiritual growth toward maturity, enabling them to live independently and responsibly [2], [3], [4]. The orientation of education has continued to shift from mere knowledge transfer toward character formation and the reinforcement of humane values, reflecting the demand that learners be equipped with critical thinking and social responsibility alongside intellectual capability [5], [6].

Education does not take place solely through formal schooling; it also unfolds through non-formal and informal channels that reinforce one another. Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*) integrate these three channels by combining religious instruction, moral guidance, and language development, including Arabic as both a means of

communication and a gateway to understanding Islamic teachings [7], [8], [9]. Arabic occupies a prominent place in religiously based education in Indonesia [10], [11]; it functions not only as a spoken language across much of the Middle East but also as the language of the Qur'an, the principal guide for Muslims, which explains why proficiency in it is prioritized across Islamic educational institutions. As one of Indonesia's oldest Islamic educational institutions, the *pesantren* functions as a center for transmitting Islamic knowledge and as a model of character education through moral guidance, discipline, and the cultivation of religious habits [12].

One persistent challenge in Arabic language learning is developing students' speaking ability, a skill that demands intensive practice and sound communicative competence [13], [14]. At the research site, students enter the same class from markedly different educational backgrounds — graduates of elementary school (SD), junior

high school (SMP), and Islamic junior secondary school (MTs). This mixture is not merely a matter of uneven proficiency level; it reflects a more fundamental difference in linguistic-knowledge structure, since MTs graduates typically bring prior grounding in Arabic morphology and syntax (*nahwu-sharaf*) and a broader stock of vocabulary (*mufradat*), whereas SD and SMP graduates generally do not. This disparity raises a question that has received limited attention in prior studies: how a method that privileges meaning over grammatical accuracy, such as the communicative method, operates across groups with such unequal grammatical foundations, and whether learners with stronger *nahwu-sharaf* preparation are in fact assisted or constrained by their heightened awareness of linguistic rules. This tension forms part of the empirical backdrop that the present study seeks to describe.

Against this backdrop, the present study examines the communicative method as an approach relevant to students' speaking-skill development. The communicative method emphasizes the active use of language through direct interaction between teacher and students, and among students themselves, extending learning beyond theoretical knowledge of the language into practice through conversation, discussion, question-and-answer sessions, and role-play. The relevance of this approach is reinforced by Law of the Republic of Indonesia No. 20 of 2003 on the National Education System, which underscores learning that responds to learners' needs and development [15]. Kanwit et al, asserts that communicative competence in language learning encompasses listening, speaking, reading, and writing, with priority given to communicative skill [16]. Within Arabic instruction, this principle directs students toward the ability to communicate in everyday situations, extending beyond grammar and vocabulary mastery alone. This orientation also resonates with Islamic teaching on the importance of speaking clearly and well, as reflected in a hadith narrated by Muslim [17], [18], [19].

The discussion above, however, risks treating the communicative method as an import with no domestic counterpart, an assumption this study does not accept. The Arabic-teaching tradition within the pesantren itself carries methodological resources directly relevant to the communicative orientation under discussion. *Thariqah mubasyarah* (the direct method) has long been practiced in numerous pesantren as a means of habituating students to spoken Arabic without heavy reliance on grammatical explanation. *Muhadatsah*, structured conversational practice, constitutes an established routine in many pesantren curricula and functions, in effect, as an indigenous forerunner of communicative practice [10], [20]. Ibn Khaldun, in the *Muqaddimah*, further proposes that linguistic competence (*malakah lisaniyyah*) is acquired through habituation and immersion in language use [21], [22] — a principle that closely parallels the immersion concept associated with contemporary communicative approaches. Positioning CLT alongside *thariqah mubasyarah* and *muhadatsah* therefore allows this study to identify points of convergence and divergence between the two traditions, and it is at this point of convergence that the present study locates its original contribution.

Theoretically, the communicative method, or Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), emerged in the 1970s as a response to the limitations of the Audio-Lingual Method, which relied on pattern drilling without equipping learners with genuine communicative ability [23], [24]. Its

theoretical foundation traces to the concept of communicative competence introduced by Dell Hymes in 1972 as a critique of Noam Chomsky's distinction between competence (knowledge of the language system) and performance (the actual use of language), a distinction that had not accounted for the social dimension of communication [23], [24]. Canale and Swain, in their original 1980 formulation, articulated communicative competence as comprising three components — grammatical, sociolinguistic, and strategic competence [25]; the fourth component, discourse competence, was subsequently added by Canale alone in 1983. These formulations, together with Halliday's functional linguistics, which treats language as a social semiotic system [26], [27], became key references in the development of CLT-based curricula.

It should be noted, however, that this theoretical foundation originated from debates on English as a second language in Western settings, oriented primarily toward practical, everyday communicative needs. Arabic instruction within the pesantren serves a purpose that only partly overlaps with that orientation: Arabic there is studied not only as a medium of daily communication but also as the language of the Qur'an, of the *turats*, and of the classical texts (*kitab kuning*) whose comprehension is central to the pesantren curriculum. CLT accommodates the communicative dimension of this purpose while leaving the textual and ritual dimension largely unaddressed. This study treats that tension as a contextual boundary condition for interpreting the communicative method's application at the research site, rather than as a problem to be resolved within the theoretical section alone.

This study addresses three questions: (1) how the communicative method is implemented in Arabic speaking instruction at the research site; (2) what the condition of students' *maharah al-kalam* is under that implementation; and (3) what factors support or hinder the method's implementation. Building on these questions, the study aims to describe the implementation of the communicative method at the research site, the resulting condition of students' *maharah al-kalam*, and the associated supporting and hindering factors. Theoretically, this study is expected to enrich references for designing Arabic learning approaches attentive to both communicative orientation and the pesantren's textual tradition; practically, it is expected to benefit teachers in reflecting on instructional practice, students in identifying obstacles to their own speaking development, and future researchers seeking a point of comparison.

METHOD

This study employed a descriptive qualitative field research design, in which the researcher engaged directly with the research setting to obtain data of an informative and descriptive nature [28]. As Creswell explains, the qualitative research process involves posing questions and applying specific data collection procedures with participants, analyzing data inductively from specific to general themes, and interpreting the meaning of the data [29].

Research Setting and Participants

The study was conducted at Pondok Pesantren Al-Amin. Participants comprised sixteen informants selected through purposive sampling: eight Arabic-language teachers

and eight tenth-grade (Ulya) students, the latter deliberately drawn from mixed prior-schooling backgrounds – elementary school (SD), junior high school (SMP), and Islamic junior secondary school (MTs) graduates – to capture variation in students' grammatical preparation as discussed in the Introduction. Teachers were included on the criterion of active involvement in Arabic speaking instruction during the research period, while student informants were included on the criterion of enrollment in the Ulya class under observation. To protect informant anonymity, teachers are identified as G1–G8 and students as S1–S8 throughout this article rather than by personal name. The object of the study was the implementation of the communicative method in Arabic speaking instruction, examined in terms of facilities and infrastructure, the learning process, teaching methods, and patterns of student communication, together with the associated supporting and hindering factors. Primary data were obtained through observation and in-depth interviews with the sixteen informants above; secondary data covered a general overview of the research site and the institution's profile.

Fieldwork Period

Data collection was conducted from January to May 2026, comprising twelve site visits, during which classroom sessions were observed and interviews were conducted with the sixteen informants listed above.

Data Collection Techniques

Data were collected through three techniques. First, direct observation of classroom instruction and informal language use within the pesantren environment, undertaken by the researcher across the twelve site visits to obtain an accurate picture of learning conditions [30]. Second, structured interviews with the eight teacher informants and eight student informants to gather their accounts of the teaching–learning process and the implementation of the communicative method [31]. Third, documentation, used to obtain records relevant to the profile and context of the research site [32].

Data Analysis

Data analysis followed the interactive model of Miles and Huberman, which treats data collection and data analysis as concurrent rather than sequential processes [33]. The stages comprised: data collection through observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation, with the researcher serving as the primary instrument; data reduction, involving the summarizing and focusing of key information to identify themes and patterns; data display, presented as concise narrative description to illustrate the findings comprehensively; and conclusion drawing, undertaken once the reduction and display stages had been completed [30], [34], [35].

Trustworthiness of the Data

To strengthen the credibility of the findings, data were triangulated across sources (teacher and student informants) and across techniques (observation, interview, and documentation), so that no single claim rests on one informant alone. Member checking was conducted with both teacher and student informants, in which interview summaries were returned to them for confirmation that their intended meaning had been accurately captured before the findings were finalized. Researcher reflexivity was

maintained by keeping the researcher's field notes analytically distinct from informants' statements throughout data reduction and display.

Research Ethics

Prior to data collection, informed consent was obtained from all sixteen informants, and informant identities were anonymized using the coding scheme described above (G1–G8 for teachers, S1–S8 for students) to protect their privacy, in accordance with standard qualitative research ethics.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Communicative Practices in Arabic Instruction: Between Classroom Interaction and Partial Implementation

The findings indicate that Arabic instruction at the pesantren had incorporated a communicative orientation, although this orientation had not yet developed into a systematic pattern of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). Classroom instruction followed a relatively structured sequence of opening activities, presentation of material, teacher modelling, practice, and assignment. Within this sequence, students were exposed to several forms of oral engagement, particularly question-and-answer exchanges, vocabulary (mufradat) learning, dialogue reading, and encouragement to speak despite incomplete mastery of grammatical rules. At the same time, grammar-translation practices remained part of instruction. More learner-directed communicative activities—including paired conversations, presentations, role-play, and sustained interaction in Arabic—were recognized as pedagogically relevant but were not consistently embedded in classroom routines.

This configuration is important because it does not support a simple distinction between communicative and non-communicative instruction. Rather, the observed instructional pattern occupied a continuum between controlled language practice and independent communicative use. Communicative elements were most visible where teachers could structure the linguistic input and regulate student responses; they became less evident as activities required students to initiate, sustain, and manage communication more independently.

From controlled oral interaction to communicative use

Question-and-answer interaction represented the clearest communicative element in existing classroom practice. Teachers used oral exchanges to elicit responses and encouraged students to speak without waiting for complete grammatical mastery. This orientation is particularly significant in a context where Arabic instruction has traditionally placed considerable value on grammatical knowledge. The emphasis on willingness to speak despite possible linguistic error indicates an emerging shift from treating accuracy as a prerequisite for oral production toward allowing communication itself to become part of the learning process.

Nevertheless, the communicative character of these exchanges remained bounded by their instructional structure. Question-and-answer activities provided opportunities for oral production, but communication was primarily organized around teacher initiation and student

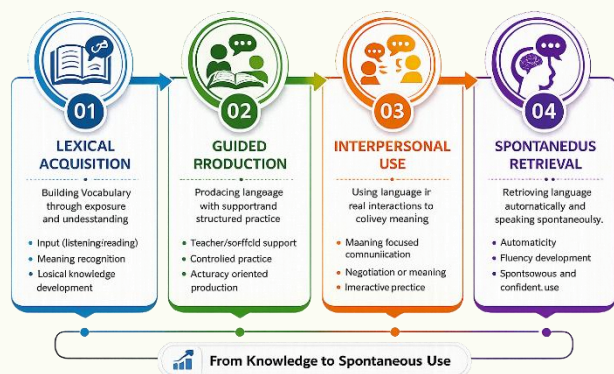
response. Such interaction differs from more autonomous communicative tasks in which learners determine what to say, respond to unpredictable contributions, and sustain an exchange beyond a predetermined answer.

This distinction is consistent with the broader CLT literature, which differentiates between oral practice and communicative language use [25]. An activity may involve speaking without necessarily requiring learners to negotiate meaning or exercise substantial communicative choice. Studies of classroom interaction have similarly shown that teacher-fronted questioning can provide valuable target-language exposure and elicit student production, while still restricting the duration, direction, and ownership of learner talk [36]. Viewed from this perspective, the question-and-answer practices identified at the pesantren constitute an important communicative entry point, but not yet the fullest realization of learner-centered communication.

Vocabulary learning occupied an equally prominent position. Students were expected to memorize at least three vocabulary items per day, and vocabulary acquisition functioned as one of the principal linguistic resources for subsequent speaking [37]. This practice reflects an understandable pedagogical logic: learners require sufficient lexical resources before they can express meanings orally. The importance attached to *mufradat* is also consistent with research demonstrating that lexical knowledge is strongly associated with oral performance because limited lexical availability constrains both message formulation and fluency [38].

The findings, however, point to an important distinction between possessing vocabulary and mobilizing vocabulary for communication. Vocabulary memorization was firmly established as an instructional routine, whereas systematic opportunities to reactivate newly learned words through extended interaction were less evident. Thus, the communicative value of *mufradat* depended not simply on how many words students memorized, but on whether those words subsequently entered their productive repertoire.

This distinction is particularly relevant to Arabic instruction in the pesantren context. Vocabulary memorization need not be positioned in opposition to CLT. It may instead function as a linguistic resource for communication when followed by contextualized production. The pedagogical issue therefore concerns the transition from:



Rather than a choice between vocabulary learning and communicative learning. Previous research distinguishing receptive from productive vocabulary similarly suggests that lexical recognition alone does not

ensure rapid retrieval during speaking; repeated contextual use is required before lexical knowledge becomes readily available for oral production [39].

The coexistence of vocabulary memorization, dialogue reading, question-and-answer activities, and grammar-translation techniques further demonstrates that classroom practice did not conform to a single methodological model. Instead, teachers appeared to draw on different instructional traditions according to immediate pedagogical needs. Such methodological hybridity has also been reported in studies of CLT implementation in foreign-language contexts, where communicative practices are frequently incorporated alongside established local teaching traditions rather than replacing them wholesale [40], [41].

In the present setting, however, this hybridity has a particularly important contextual dimension. Arabic in the pesantren is not taught exclusively for everyday interpersonal communication; it also provides access to the Qur'an, religious scholarship, and Arabic texts. Consequently, vocabulary learning, reading, and grammatical instruction retain functions that cannot be dismissed simply because they are less communicative. The relevant question is therefore not whether these practices should disappear, but whether they are sufficiently connected to opportunities for meaningful language use.

This point also places the findings in dialogue with established pedagogical practices within the pesantren tradition. *Muhadatsah* and *thariqah mubasyarah*, for example, share with CLT an emphasis on habitual oral use and direct engagement with the target language, although their pedagogical histories and theoretical foundations are distinct. The field data suggest that the communicative orientation observed at the research site should therefore not be understood solely as the adoption of an externally developed CLT model. It can also be read as a contemporary reconfiguration of practices already familiar within Arabic-language pedagogy in pesantren. Comparative studies of CLT, *muhadatsah*, and direct-method traditions would be particularly useful here to establish where these practices converge and where their instructional assumptions differ [42], [43].

Uneven movement toward learner-directed communication

The clearest limitation emerged in activities requiring greater student communicative independence. Paired conversations, presentations, storytelling, and everyday Arabic-language activities were identified by teachers as appropriate forms of communicative learning. Their identification demonstrates conceptual awareness of how speaking instruction could extend beyond teacher-fronted interaction. Yet these activities had not become consistently established classroom practices. Role-play and other forms of contextual interaction showed the same pattern: they were pedagogically conceivable but not routinely enacted.

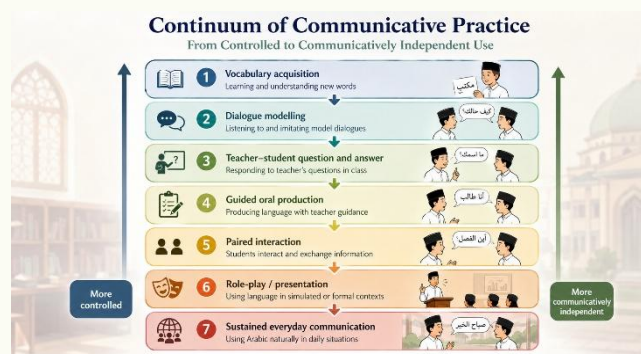
This produces a notable discrepancy between communicative awareness and communicative enactment. Teachers appeared to understand that speaking competence requires opportunities for students to interact, but classroom implementation remained concentrated on activities that were easier to organize and control. The finding suggests that conceptual familiarity with CLT does not necessarily translate into systematic communicative

practice. Table 1 summarizes this pattern according to the communicative demands placed on learners.

Table 1. Configuration of communicative practices in Arabic instruction

Practice identified in the field data	Primary instructional function	Degree of learner communicative agency	Status in existing instruction
Vocabulary (<i>mufradat</i>) memorization	Building lexical resources	Low	Established; minimum daily vocabulary target
Dialogue reading	Modelling oral language and familiar expressions	Low	Embedded in the learning sequence
Question-and-answer interaction	Eliciting oral responses and encouraging speaking	Low-moderate	Frequently used communicative element
Speaking despite incomplete grammatical mastery	Building willingness to communicate	Moderate	Explicitly encouraged
Paired conversation	Sustaining peer-to-peer interaction	Moderate-high	Recognized but not consistently implemented
Storytelling/presentation	Producing extended oral discourse	High	Identified as appropriate but not routine
Role-play	Using Arabic within contextualized interaction	High	Not consistently implemented
Everyday Arabic interaction	Extending language use beyond instructional exchanges	Very high	Potential recognized; systematic practice remains limited

The pattern can be represented as a progression in communicative demand:



What is analytically significant is that the strength of implementation appears to decline as communicative independence increases. Practices located toward the controlled end of the continuum were already embedded in instruction, whereas practices requiring learners to generate longer, less predictable, and more autonomous discourse remained underdeveloped. This provides a more precise characterization of "partial implementation" than simply stating that some CLT techniques were used and others were not.

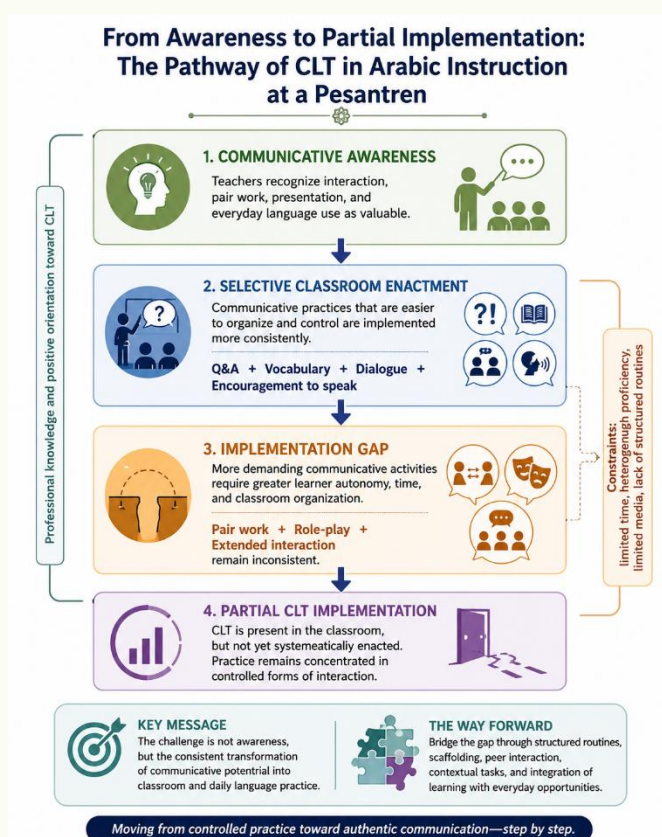
Similar patterns have been identified in studies examining CLT in contexts where teacher-centered instructional traditions remain influential. Such studies suggest that CLT is often appropriated selectively: teachers

adopt manageable components such as oral questioning, dialogue, or communicative exercises while activities involving greater learner autonomy are implemented less consistently [44], [45]. Other research has shown that contextualized CLT frequently takes hybrid forms because teachers must reconcile communicative goals with curricular requirements, learner proficiency, institutional expectations, and established pedagogical practices [46], [47].

The pesantren findings extend this discussion in a distinctive direction. The institution already possesses an ecological advantage for language learning: students live, study, worship, and interact within the same social environment. Teachers themselves recognized that this setting creates opportunities for everyday Arabic use and that communicative instruction does not necessarily require sophisticated facilities; textbooks, a whiteboard, simple vocabulary cards, and an interaction-friendly classroom were considered sufficient. The central issue, therefore, appears less concerned with the availability of communicative possibilities than with their systematic pedagogical activation.

This distinction has direct implications for interpreting the implementation of CLT at the research site. The evidence does not justify describing instruction as non-communicative, because oral interaction, vocabulary-based production, and encouragement to speak were clearly present. Nor does it support describing the program as fully communicative, because learner-to-learner interaction and sustained language use had not become routine. A more accurate characterization is therefore partial communicative implementation, marked by a transition from teacher-mediated oral practice toward, but not yet consistently reaching, autonomous communicative use.

The relationship can be conceptualized as follows:



The significance of this finding lies in locating the implementation gap not primarily at the level of teachers' conceptual understanding, but between knowing what communicative instruction entails and embedding such instruction as a recurrent classroom practice. In this respect, the findings support studies arguing that successful CLT implementation depends not merely on teachers' positive attitudes toward communication but on how classroom participation is organized and how consistently learners are given opportunities to use the target language for meaningful purposes.

At the same time, the findings caution against evaluating CLT in a pesantren solely against an idealized model developed in other second- or foreign-language settings. The coexistence of reading, vocabulary memorization, grammatical instruction, and emerging communicative practices reflects the multiple functions of Arabic within the institution. The relevant developmental trajectory is therefore not necessarily the replacement of established Arabic pedagogical traditions by CLT. Rather, it is the movement from communicative elements embedded within existing instruction toward a more systematic integration of communicative practice.

Taken together, the data reveal that the communicative orientation at the research site is already recognizable but remains structurally incomplete. Students are encouraged to speak, oral question-and-answer interaction is practiced, vocabulary provides linguistic resources, and teachers recognize the value of paired and contextual communication. What remains limited is the systematic progression from these controlled practices toward sustained student-to-student language use. Thus, the principal finding of this section is not the absence of communication, but a gap between communicative potential and communicative enactment: the foundations for CLT are present, while the instructional routines required to transform those foundations into sustained communicative practice remain only partially developed.

Students' Mahārah al-Kalām: The Gap Between Linguistic Knowledge and Communicative Performance

The second major finding concerns a persistent gap between students' linguistic knowledge and their ability to mobilize that knowledge in spoken communication. Field data indicate that students' Arabic competence was uneven across language skills: their ability to read religious texts and comprehend written material was comparatively more developed, whereas speaking (*mahārah al-kalām*) remained considerably less secure. Students themselves identified speaking as particularly difficult, with limited vocabulary, difficulty constructing sentences, and low confidence emerging as recurrent obstacles. These findings suggest that the central problem was not simply the absence of Arabic knowledge, but the difficulty of converting available linguistic resources into spontaneous communicative performance.

This distinction is particularly important in the pesantren context. Students encounter Arabic through vocabulary learning, reading, religious texts, grammatical instruction, and other formal learning activities. Such exposure may develop knowledge of lexical items, sentence structures, and textual forms without necessarily producing

an equivalent capacity for real-time oral communication. Speaking imposes a different demand: learners must retrieve lexical items, organize them into intelligible utterances, and deliver those utterances while simultaneously responding to an interlocutor. The field data suggest that this transition from knowing Arabic to using Arabic constituted one of the principal difficulties experienced by the students.

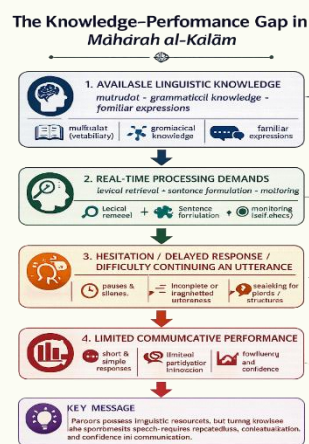
Linguistic knowledge did not automatically translate into spoken performance

Vocabulary limitation was one of the most visible manifestations of this gap. Students reported difficulty finding appropriate words when attempting to speak, despite vocabulary memorization being an established part of instruction. As shown in the preceding section, students were expected to memorize a minimum number of *mufradat* items, yet opportunities to reactivate these items through sustained oral interaction were less systematic. Consequently, vocabulary that was available for recognition or recall in instructional contexts was not necessarily available with sufficient speed during spontaneous communication.

This distinction corresponds to the difference between lexical knowledge and lexical accessibility. Research on second- and foreign-language speaking has consistently shown that knowing the meaning of a word does not necessarily mean that learners can retrieve it efficiently under the temporal pressure of oral communication [48]. Productive vocabulary requires not only lexical storage but repeated retrieval and contextual use, particularly when learners must formulate meaning without preparation. From this perspective, the students' difficulty should not be interpreted solely as a quantitative shortage of vocabulary. The problem also concerned the degree to which existing vocabulary had become functionally available for speaking.

A related difficulty was sentence construction. Students reported that even when individual words were known, combining them into appropriate Arabic sentences remained challenging. This indicates that oral difficulty occurred at more than one level. At the lexical level, students needed to retrieve words; at the syntactic level, they needed to organize those words; and at the communicative level, both processes had to occur rapidly enough for interaction to continue.

The relationship can be represented as follows:



The significance of this sequence is that students' speaking difficulties cannot be adequately explained by a single deficit. Limited *mufradat* was important, but the findings point to a broader problem of linguistic mobilization under communicative conditions. Students had to transform discrete knowledge into speech while managing the cognitive and social demands of interaction.

This interpretation is consistent with research distinguishing linguistic competence from actual language performance [49], [50]. Studies of L2 oral production have shown that learners may demonstrate knowledge of grammatical forms in controlled tasks yet fail to access those forms efficiently during spontaneous speech [51]. The present findings suggest a comparable pattern in Arabic learning: knowledge developed through reading, vocabulary memorization, and grammatical instruction was not always readily transferable to real-time oral use.

Grammatical knowledge: a resource, but not sufficient for communication

The heterogeneous educational backgrounds of the students add an important dimension to this finding. As established in the research design, the Grade X Ulya cohort included students from SD, SMP, and MTs backgrounds. The significance of this variation lies in the unequal linguistic preparation students bring into the same classroom. In particular, students with previous MTs education may have encountered more Arabic vocabulary and grammatical instruction, including *nahwu* and *sharaf*, whereas students from general educational backgrounds may enter with more limited formal preparation.

The available field data, however, do not establish a systematic relationship between prior-school background and speaking performance. It would therefore be premature to claim that MTs graduates were consistently stronger speakers than SD or SMP graduates, or conversely that stronger grammatical knowledge inhibited their speaking. What the data do establish is that students entered instruction with varying levels of prior knowledge and that speaking remained problematic at the group level.

This distinction matters theoretically. Grammatical competence constitutes an important component of communicative competence, but grammatical knowledge alone does not guarantee the ability to participate effectively in communication. Research has shown that explicit knowledge of linguistic rules and procedural ability to use those rules during spontaneous interaction are related but not identical dimensions of language proficiency [52]. Thus, *nahwu-sharaf* can provide an important structural resource for Arabic production without being sufficient, by itself, to produce oral fluency.

For the present study, the relevant empirical tension is therefore not grammar versus communication, but the relationship between them. The findings suggest that students require linguistic resources—including vocabulary and grammatical knowledge—but those resources must become accessible through repeated communicative use. This is particularly pertinent in a pesantren, where grammatical knowledge has substantial value for reading and interpreting Arabic texts. CLT need not displace this knowledge; rather, the challenge is to enable learners to mobilize it beyond textual analysis and controlled exercises.

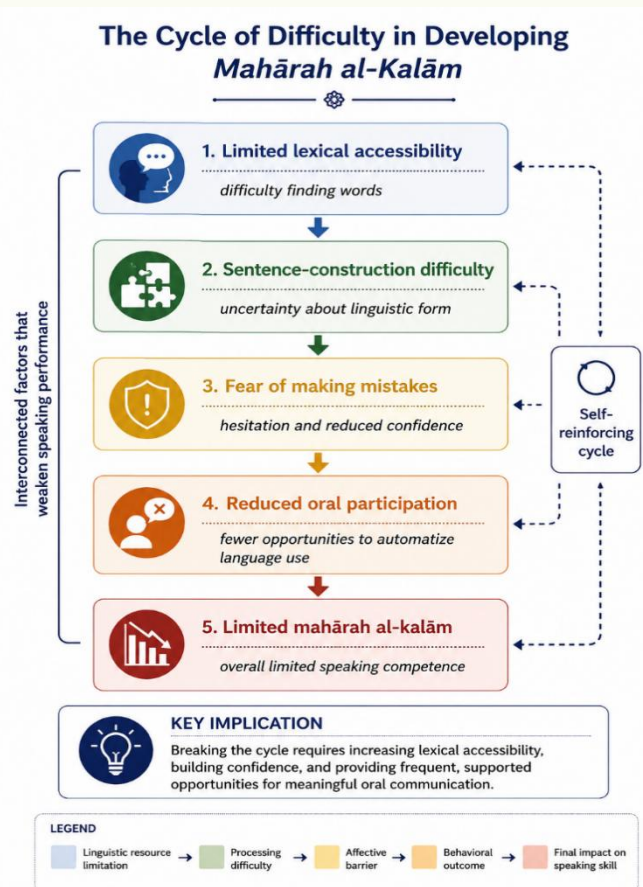
Fear of error widened the knowledge–performance gap

The linguistic difficulties described above interacted closely with an affective constraint: low confidence in speaking. Students identified fear of making mistakes as one of the reasons speaking was particularly difficult. This means that oral performance was constrained not only by what students knew, but also by whether they were willing to use incomplete knowledge publicly.

This distinction is important because a learner may possess sufficient linguistic resources to attempt an utterance yet refrain from speaking when accuracy is uncertain. Under such conditions, the gap between competence and performance is partly mediated by self-monitoring and fear of error. The learner does not necessarily remain silent because nothing is known; silence may also occur because the learner is uncertain whether what is known can be expressed correctly.

Previous research on foreign-language speaking has identified anxiety, fear of negative evaluation, and low self-confidence as factors that can reduce learners' willingness to communicate [53]. Other studies have found that excessive concern with grammatical accuracy may increase hesitation when learners attempt spontaneous oral production, particularly in instructional cultures where correctness carries substantial academic weight [54]. These findings provide a useful interpretive lens for the present data, where students' difficulty constructing sentences was accompanied by reluctance to risk incorrect production.

The relationship among the principal constraints identified in the field can therefore be understood as interconnected rather than additive:



This relationship also suggests a potentially self-reinforcing cycle. Students require speaking practice to make vocabulary retrieval and sentence construction more automatic, yet uncertainty about vocabulary and sentence structure can make them reluctant to participate in the very practice required for improvement. When classroom opportunities for sustained communication are themselves limited, as identified in the preceding section, this cycle becomes more difficult to interrupt.

Table 2. Dimensions of the knowledge–performance gap in students' maharah al-kalam

Dimension	Linguistic resources available	Difficulty evident in speaking	Communicative consequence
Vocabulary	Students learn and memorize <i>mufradat</i>	Words are not always readily retrievable during speech	Pauses, inability to express intended meanings
Sentence construction	Students encounter Arabic structures through instruction	Difficulty combining known words into spontaneous sentences	Short or incomplete oral production
Grammatical knowledge	Students possess varying degrees of prior grammatical preparation	Knowledge of rules does not automatically become real-time language use	Uneven transition from formal knowledge to oral performance
Written/textual competence	Reading and written comprehension are comparatively stronger	Linguistic knowledge remains more accessible in text-based than spontaneous contexts	Receptive/textual competence exceeds speaking ability
Confidence	Students understand the importance of Arabic and have motivation to learn	Fear of making errors inhibits attempts to speak	Hesitation and reduced participation
Communicative experience	Students receive some oral practice in class	Sustained communicative use is not yet routine	Limited automatization and spontaneous production

Note. The table synthesizes qualitative patterns identified in the field data. It does not imply standardized measurement of proficiency or causal differences among prior-schooling groups.

The table highlights that students' difficulties were not simply located in “speaking” as an isolated skill. Rather, speaking exposed the degree to which different forms of linguistic knowledge had—or had not—become available for immediate communicative use.

A mismatch between textual competence and communicative readiness

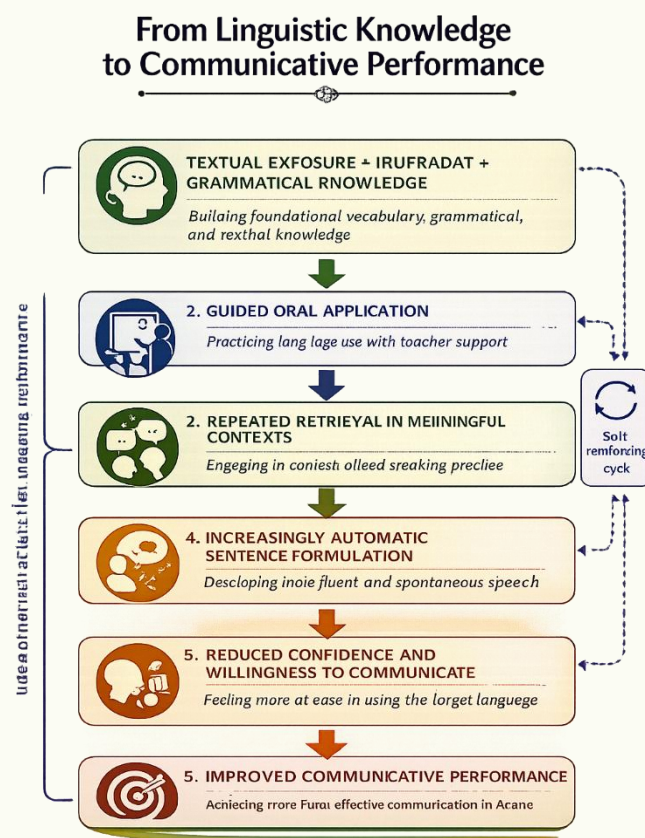
One of the more contextually significant findings is the relative strength of students' reading and textual comprehension compared with their speaking ability. This pattern should not be interpreted merely as an instructional weakness. It reflects, at least partly, the institutional function of Arabic within pesantren education, where engagement with religious texts constitutes a central academic activity. Arabic is therefore encountered not only as a language for interpersonal communication but as a medium of religious knowledge.

This institutional orientation helps explain why linguistic knowledge may develop unevenly across modalities. Frequent engagement with texts can strengthen recognition of vocabulary, grammatical analysis, and comprehension without providing equivalent pressure for rapid oral retrieval. Previous studies in foreign-language education have similarly shown that proficiency can develop asymmetrically when instructional exposure and task demands privilege particular skills [55]. Research specifically examining Arabic in Islamic educational settings would be particularly important here, as the textual and religious functions of Arabic distinguish this context from settings in which communicative competence is the dominant instructional endpoint [56].

This finding also speaks directly to the theoretical boundary raised in the Introduction. CLT emerged from a tradition that places substantial emphasis on functional language use, whereas Arabic education in pesantren simultaneously pursues textual, religious, and communicative purposes. The present data suggest that these purposes need not be treated as mutually exclusive. The problem is not that students have developed textual knowledge; rather, textual and linguistic knowledge has not yet been accompanied by an equally developed capacity to mobilize Arabic in oral interaction.

The pedagogical implication is therefore integration rather than substitution. Reading, *mufradat*, *nahwu-sharaf*, and communicative practice should not be conceptualized as competing instructional priorities. The empirical challenge is to construct pathways through which knowledge acquired through textual and formal study becomes a resource for speaking.

This point can be represented as a transition from knowledge accumulation to communicative automatization:

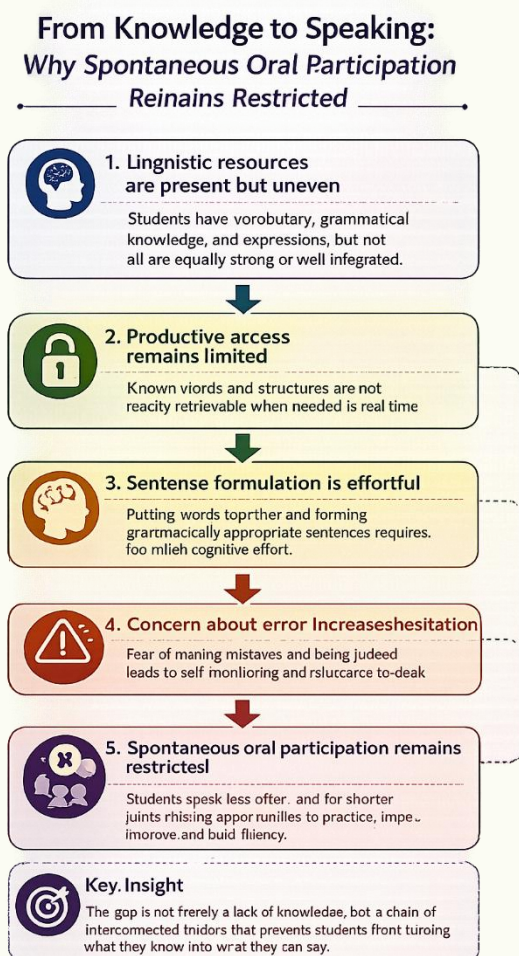


Such a progression resonates with the pesantren concept of linguistic habituation. The relevance of *muhadatsah* and the broader notion of repeated language use is particularly evident here: knowledge becomes communicatively functional when learners repeatedly mobilize it in interaction. This principle also parallels the emphasis in CLT on learning language through meaningful use [20], [57]. The convergence is analytically important because it suggests that improving *maharah al-kalam* need not require abandoning established pesantren traditions; communicative practice can instead provide a bridge between formal linguistic knowledge and functional language use.

From a deficit account to a knowledge–performance account

Taken together, the findings suggest that describing students' *maharah al-kalam* simply as “low” would obscure the structure of the problem. Students were not linguistically empty beginners. They possessed varying amounts of vocabulary, grammatical knowledge, familiarity with Arabic expressions, and experience with written or textual Arabic. What remained underdeveloped was the ability to coordinate these resources rapidly and confidently during communication.

Accordingly, the empirical pattern is better represented as:



This interpretation also connects the present section with the preceding finding on partial CLT implementation. If communicative classroom practice remains concentrated on vocabulary learning, teacher-

directed questions, and controlled oral responses, students may accumulate linguistic resources without receiving sufficient opportunities to automatize their use in longer and less predictable interaction. The condition of students' *maharah al-kalam* therefore cannot be separated entirely from the configuration of classroom practice.

The findings are consistent with previous research demonstrating that communicative performance depends on more than declarative linguistic knowledge [58], [59], while extending that argument into a pesantren setting where Arabic carries simultaneously textual, grammatical, religious, and communicative functions. The distinctive issue in this context is not whether formal linguistic knowledge should be replaced by communication, but how existing knowledge can be transformed into communicative capability.

The principal finding of this section can therefore be formulated as a knowledge–performance gap: students possessed linguistic resources relevant to Arabic proficiency, but those resources were not yet sufficiently accessible, automatic, or confidently deployed during spontaneous speech. Limited vocabulary, sentence-construction difficulty, and low confidence were not separate problems; together, they constituted different manifestations of the same transition difficulty—from knowing linguistic forms to using them as communicative resources.

Communicative Potential and Practical Constraints in the Pesantren Context

The third major finding reveals a notable tension between the communicative potential of the pesantren environment and the practical conditions under which that potential is activated. The field data indicate that the institutional context provides several favorable conditions for communicative Arabic learning: students live and learn within a shared social environment, Arabic carries strong religious significance, students show interest in more interactive learning, teachers recognize the pedagogical value of communication, and many communicative activities can be conducted without sophisticated facilities. Yet these favorable conditions coexist with limited instructional time, heterogeneous student proficiency, insufficient supporting media, and the absence of consistently structured communicative routines. The central issue, therefore, is not a lack of conditions favorable to CLT, but a gap between communicative potential and its systematic pedagogical realization.

The pesantren as a potentially rich communicative ecology

Among the most distinctive supporting conditions is the residential character of pesantren education. Unlike conventional schools, where language learning is largely confined to scheduled classroom periods, pesantren students live, study, worship, and interact with peers within the same institutional environment. This creates an extended social space in which Arabic could potentially move beyond being a classroom subject and become part of everyday interaction.

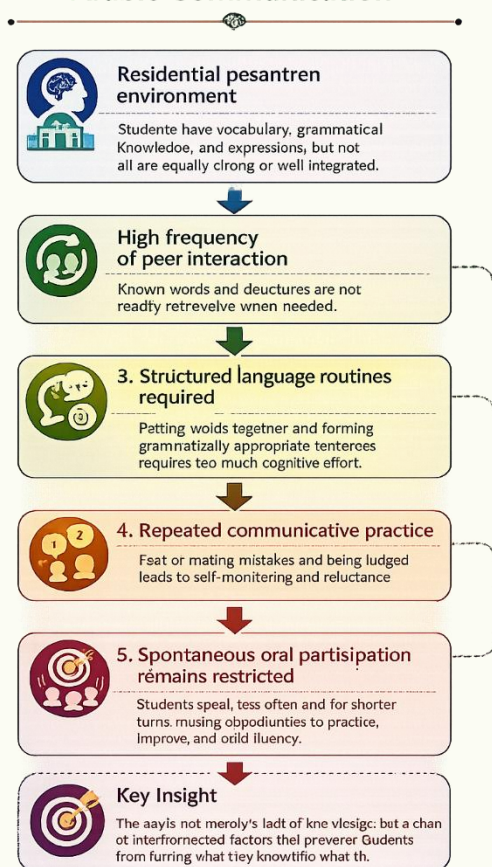
This contextual characteristic is particularly important for communicative language development because oral competence requires repeated opportunities to retrieve and use linguistic resources. Research on language-learning environments has emphasized that opportunities

for meaningful interaction beyond formal lessons can strengthen language development by increasing exposure, repetition, and functional use [60], [61]. Studies of residential or immersion-oriented language environments similarly suggest that the value of such settings lies not merely in the amount of time learners spend together, but in whether the target language becomes embedded in recurrent social practices [62], [63].

The present findings support this distinction. The pesantren offers extensive communicative space, but physical proximity among learners does not automatically create a target-language environment. Students may interact throughout the day while continuing to use Indonesian or other familiar languages. Thus, the communicative advantage of the residential setting remains potential unless particular times, situations, routines, or activities are deliberately organized around Arabic use.

This distinction can be represented as follows:

Mobilizing Pesantren Ecology for Arabic Communication



The critical transition occurs between opportunity and actual language use. The pesantren already provides the social infrastructure for frequent interaction; what remains necessary is the pedagogical organization that converts ordinary interaction into recurring opportunities for Arabic communication.

This finding resonates with the concept of language habituation long associated with Arabic learning in pesantren. Practices such as *muhadatsah* and the creation of a *bi'ah lughawiyyah* rest on the premise that linguistic ability develops through repeated use within an environment that encourages the target language [20]. From this perspective, CLT does not necessarily require the

creation of an entirely new communicative ecology. Rather, it can build upon an institutional ecology that already possesses the social conditions for habitual language use.

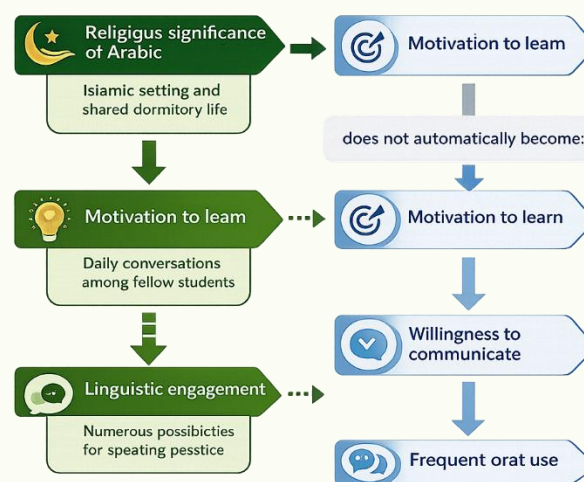
Religious motivation as a contextual resource

A second source of communicative potential lies in students' motivation to learn Arabic. In the pesantren context, Arabic is closely associated with access to the Qur'an, Hadith, religious scholarship, and classical Islamic texts. The field data identify this religious orientation as an important source of motivation among students.

This motivation differs in important respects from instrumental motivations commonly discussed in foreign-language learning, such as employment, international mobility, or academic advancement. For pesantren students, Arabic possesses intellectual and religious value within the institution itself. Such value can provide a strong motivational foundation because the language is connected to learning goals that students perceive as meaningful.

Previous studies of Arabic education in Islamic institutions have similarly identified religious orientation as an important motivational factor [64], [65]. Research on language motivation more broadly also suggests that sustained engagement is more likely when learners associate a language with personally or socially significant goals [66], [67]. However, the present findings introduce an important qualification: motivation to learn Arabic is not necessarily equivalent to motivation to speak Arabic.

Students may be highly motivated to understand religious texts while remaining reluctant to participate in oral communication. The distinction reflects the multiple functions of Arabic in the pesantren. Religious motivation can sustain language learning, but it must be connected pedagogically to speaking if it is to contribute directly to *maharah al-kalam*. In other words:



The transition requires learning activities that position speaking not as separate from religious Arabic learning but as another means of strengthening learners' relationship with the language. This distinction helps explain why strong motivation toward Arabic can coexist with limited communicative performance.

Pedagogical readiness without resource intensity

The field data also suggest that the expansion of communicative instruction is not fundamentally dependent on sophisticated technological resources. Teachers

considered basic facilities—textbooks, a whiteboard, vocabulary cards, and an interaction-friendly classroom arrangement—sufficient for many communicative activities. Pair conversations, question-and-answer tasks, information exchange, simple role-play, storytelling, and short presentations can all be organized with relatively modest material requirements.

This represents an important enabling condition. Studies of CLT implementation in resource-constrained educational settings have sometimes identified inadequate materials and technology as barriers to communicative teaching [68]. Yet other research has emphasized that the central resource in communicative instruction is interaction itself: meaningful tasks can be created through peer exchange, locally available objects, familiar situations, and teacher-designed prompts without requiring extensive technological infrastructure.

The present findings align more closely with the latter position. Although limited media were identified as a constraint, they did not appear to make communicative instruction impossible. Instead, the available evidence suggests that the larger challenge concerned the organization and continuity of communicative activity. This is analytically important because it shifts attention from what the institution lacks materially toward how existing human and social resources are mobilized.

Teacher readiness reinforces this potential. The field data indicate that teachers recognized the importance of communication and could identify activities such as pair work, presentation, storytelling, and everyday Arabic use as desirable practices. As shown in the first findings section, the difficulty was less a complete absence of communicative awareness than the inconsistent translation of that awareness into classroom routines.

Accordingly, the relationship between enabling and constraining conditions is not symmetrical. Some constraints concern resources, but the more fundamental issue appears to lie at the point where available conditions must be transformed into sustained pedagogical practice.

Practical Constraints: Time, Heterogeneity, And Supporting Media

Despite these favorable conditions, teachers encountered several practical limitations. The first was instructional time. Communicative activities require time not only for teachers to introduce language but also for students to produce it. Pair work, presentations, role-play, and extended interaction can be difficult to accommodate when teachers must simultaneously cover curricular content and respond to differences in students' proficiency.

This problem is not unique to the present setting. Previous CLT research has frequently identified limited classroom time and curriculum coverage as factors encouraging teachers to retain more controlled forms of instruction [69]. Teacher explanation, vocabulary presentation, or whole-class questioning can often be completed within predictable periods, whereas learner-centered interaction is less temporally controllable. The findings of this study help explain why the more controlled practices identified in the first section were more firmly established than activities involving sustained student communication.

A second constraint was heterogeneity in student ability. The student cohort included learners with different educational backgrounds and levels of prior preparation.

Such variation means that a single communicative task may impose very different demands on different students. Learners with greater vocabulary or grammatical preparation may respond more readily, whereas those with weaker foundations may require additional modelling, lexical support, or preparation time.

Previous studies have identified mixed proficiency as a significant challenge for communicative classrooms because interaction can become uneven when stronger learners dominate while less proficient learners participate minimally [70]. At the same time, heterogeneous classrooms can support peer learning when grouping and scaffolding are deliberately organized [71]. Thus, heterogeneity should not be treated solely as an obstacle. Its effect depends on instructional design.

This distinction is particularly relevant to the present study. The existence of different educational backgrounds—SD, SMP, and MTs—does not by itself establish predictable differences in speaking competence. The available data do not support a claim that one educational-background group systematically outperformed another. What the evidence supports is a broader conclusion: variation in prior linguistic preparation complicates the organization of common communicative activities. This requires differentiated support rather than assumptions about ability based solely on previous schooling.

The third constraint concerned limited supporting media. Audio, audiovisual materials, and other sources of spoken Arabic could potentially provide students with richer models of pronunciation, rhythm, conversational expressions, and variation in language use. Their limited availability reduces the diversity of input students encounter.

Nevertheless, the role of media should not be overstated. The same field data show that many communicative activities are feasible with basic resources. Limited media therefore function as a supporting constraint rather than a sufficient explanation for partial CLT implementation. Additional technology could enrich exposure, but it would not by itself produce communicative learning unless students were required to interact with and through the language.

Table 3. Communicative Affordances and Constraints in the Pesantren Context

Contextual dimension	Communicative affordance	Practical constraint	Analytical implication
Residential environment	Extended peer contact creates opportunities for language use beyond lessons	Daily interaction does not automatically occur in Arabic	Social proximity requires structured language routines
Religious orientation	Arabic has strong intellectual and religious significance	Motivation to understand Arabic may not automatically become willingness to speak	Religious motivation needs to be connected to communicative purposes
Student engagement	Interactive activities can generate interest and participation	Confidence and proficiency vary across learners	Activities require gradual scaffolding and differentiated participation
Teacher readiness	Teachers recognize the value of communicative activities	Communicative awareness is not consistently translated into	Implementation depends on pedagogical organization

		routine practice	
Basic facilities	Pair work, dialogue, and role-play require relatively modest resources	Rich audiovisual input remains limited	Media can enrich CLT but are not its primary precondition
Instructional time	Classroom periods provide a formal space for guided practice	Extended student interaction competes with curriculum coverage	Communicative practice requires protected and recurrent time
Learner heterogeneity	Differences can support peer-assisted learning	Uneven prior preparation can produce unequal participation	Pairing, scaffolding, and task differentiation become important
Institutional life	Pesantren potentially links classroom learning with everyday language use	Classroom and daily language practices are not yet systematically integrated	The key challenge is converting institutional potential into habitual use

Note. "Affordance" refers to a contextual condition that creates an opportunity for communicative learning; it does not imply that the opportunity is automatically realized.

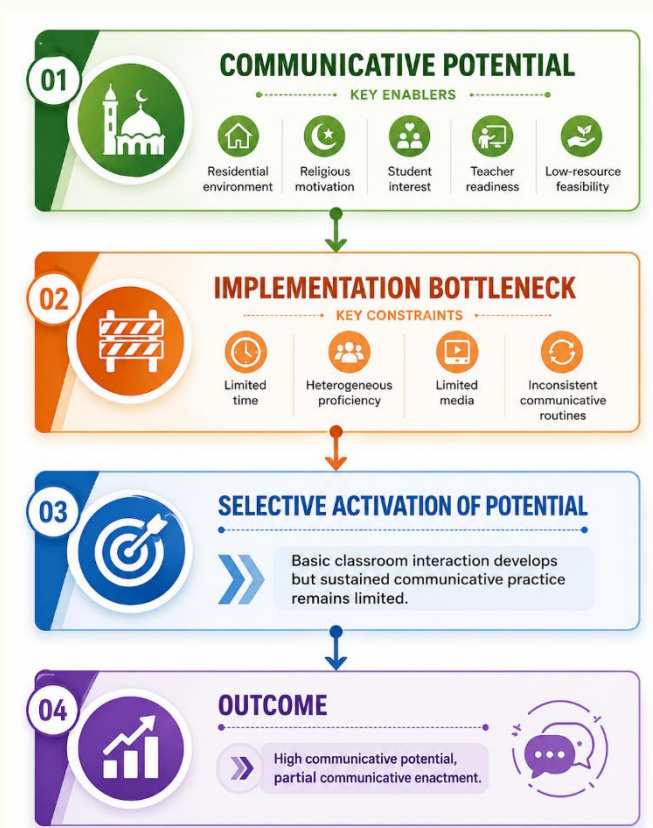
Table 3 demonstrates that supporting and constraining factors are not independent lists. In several cases, the same contextual characteristic contains both possibility and limitation. Residential life provides abundant interaction but not necessarily Arabic interaction. Student diversity complicates instruction but can also support peer learning. Simple facilities limit access to rich multimedia input but do not prevent interpersonal communication. Religious motivation provides a strong reason to learn Arabic but does not automatically generate oral participation.

This relational interpretation provides a more accurate account of the pesantren context than a conventional division between "supporting factors" and "hindering factors."

The implementation bottleneck: from favorable conditions to structured practice

Across these findings, one constraint appears to connect the others: the absence of sufficiently consistent and structured communicative routines. Limited time matters because communicative practice does not have a protected and recurrent place in every lesson. Heterogeneity becomes more problematic when activities lack scaffolding that allows students at different levels to participate. Limited media become more consequential when learners have few alternative sources of sustained Arabic input. Even the residential environment remains underused when Arabic interaction is not organized beyond the classroom.

This suggests that the relationship among contextual factors is better understood as a system:



This model integrates the three major findings of the study. The first section demonstrated that communicative practices were present but concentrated toward controlled forms of interaction. The second showed that students possessed linguistic resources but struggled to mobilize them spontaneously. The present section explains the contextual conditions within which both patterns coexist. The pesantren possesses considerable communicative potential, but that potential is only selectively activated through existing instructional routines.

This finding both converges with and extends previous research on CLT implementation. It converges with studies showing that contextual constraints—time, learner proficiency, resources, and established instructional practices—shape how CLT is enacted in foreign-language classrooms [72]. However, it extends this discussion by showing that contextual conditions should not be understood only as barriers. In the pesantren examined here, the same context that constrains implementation also contains resources that could support it.

This is particularly important when considering the transferability of CLT to pesantren education. An uncritical implementation model might begin by asking which resources or institutional characteristics are missing when compared with an ideal communicative classroom. The present findings suggest a different question: which resources already embedded in pesantren life can be pedagogically reorganized to support communication? The residential environment, peer networks, religious motivation, existing traditions of *muhadatsah*, and teachers' conceptual readiness all provide starting points.

From this perspective, the challenge is not simply to import additional communicative techniques. It is to connect classroom instruction with the communicative possibilities already embedded in institutional life. A short but recurrent pair-conversation routine, structured Arabic-

use periods, contextual role-play based on pesantren activities, peer-supported interaction, and deliberate recycling of classroom *mufradat* in daily contexts could theoretically bridge this divide. These possibilities follow from the pattern identified in the data; their effectiveness, however, would require further empirical evaluation rather than being assumed from the present study.

Overall, the findings reveal a contextual paradox. The pesantren provides many of the conditions that should make communicative Arabic learning feasible; learners share an intensive social environment, Arabic carries substantial religious meaning, teachers recognize the value of communication, and many communicative activities require only modest material resources. Yet these advantages have not been fully converted into sustained communicative practice.

The central constraint is therefore not best understood as a simple shortage of time, media, or student ability. These factors matter, but their effects converge at a more fundamental level: the absence of systematic mechanisms that transform communicative opportunity into communicative routine. In this sense, the major unrealized resource is not technological but organizational.

The third finding can consequently be summarized as a tension between communicative affordance and communicative enactment. The pesantren already contains substantial ecological and motivational resources for Arabic communication; what remains limited is their systematic integration into classroom and everyday language practices. This explains how a context with considerable potential for language habituation can simultaneously display partial CLT implementation and limited spontaneous *mahārah al-kalām*.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in Arabic instruction at the pesantren is best characterized as partial and emerging rather than absent or fully established. Communicative elements were already visible through question-and-answer exchanges, vocabulary-based oral production, dialogue, and teachers' encouragement for students to speak despite incomplete grammatical mastery. However, these practices remained predominantly controlled and teacher-mediated. As communicative demands increased—from guided responses toward pair interaction, role-play, presentations, and sustained spontaneous communication—the consistency of implementation declined. Thus, the principal issue was not the absence of communicative activity, but the limited progression from controlled oral practice to sustained learner-directed communication.

This instructional pattern was reflected in students' *mahārah al-kalām*. Their speaking difficulties were not adequately explained by a simple lack of Arabic knowledge. Students possessed varying linguistic resources acquired through vocabulary learning, grammatical instruction, reading, and engagement with Arabic texts, yet these resources were not always readily accessible during spontaneous communication. Limited lexical retrieval, difficulty constructing sentences, and low confidence interacted to produce hesitation and restricted oral participation. The findings therefore reveal a knowledge-performance gap in which linguistic knowledge is present

but has not yet become sufficiently automatic and accessible for communicative use.

At the same time, the pesantren provides substantial potential for addressing this gap. Its residential environment creates extensive opportunities for peer interaction; Arabic carries strong religious and intellectual significance; teachers recognize the importance of communicative learning; and many interactive activities can be implemented with relatively simple resources. Nevertheless, these affordances have not yet been systematically transformed into communicative routines. Limited instructional time, heterogeneous learner proficiency, and restricted supporting media contribute to this condition, but the findings suggest that the more fundamental challenge is organizational: communicative opportunities exist, yet mechanisms for converting them into recurrent language use remain insufficiently structured.

Taken together, the three findings point to a central conclusion: the development of communicative Arabic competence in the pesantren depends less on replacing existing pedagogical traditions with CLT than on connecting existing linguistic knowledge, classroom interaction, and the communicative ecology of pesantren life. Vocabulary learning, grammatical knowledge, textual engagement, and communicative practice need not be treated as competing orientations. In a context where Arabic serves both communicative and religious-textual functions, the more relevant pedagogical direction is to create systematic pathways through which knowledge developed through *mufradat*, *nahwu-sharaf*, reading, and other established practices can be repeatedly mobilized in meaningful oral interaction.

The study therefore contributes to discussions of CLT by showing that its implementation in pesantren should be understood as a process of contextual integration rather than methodological substitution. The residential and religious character of pesantren provides resources that differ from those of conventional foreign-language classrooms and may support locally grounded forms of communicative learning. Strengthening *mahārah al-kalām* consequently requires not only additional speaking activities, but greater continuity between classroom learning and everyday language use—for example, through recurrent pair interaction, contextual speaking tasks, structured opportunities for Arabic use, and systematic recycling of learned vocabulary in communicative situations.

These conclusions should be interpreted within the scope of a qualitative field study conducted in a single pesantren and focused on Grade X Ulya students and their Arabic teachers. The findings illuminate patterns and mechanisms rather than establish causal relationships or broad generalizations across pesantren. Further research across institutions with different language programs and pedagogical traditions could examine how communicative practices vary across pesantren contexts. Longitudinal and intervention-based studies would also be valuable for determining whether structured communicative routines can reduce the knowledge-performance gap and transform the communicative potential of the pesantren environment into sustained development of *mahārah al-kalām*.

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