



## Instructional Dynamics of *Muḥādaṣah*: Evaluating Pedagogical Methods and Institutional Barriers in an Indonesian *Pesantren*

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### ABSTRACT

**Purpose** – This study investigates the implementation of *muḥādaṣah* (Arabic conversation) instruction at Al-Muhsin Islamic Secondary School, Metro, Indonesia.

**Design/methods/approach** – Using a descriptive qualitative approach, data were collected through participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and documentation. The study aims to evaluate the effectiveness of the curriculum, instructional methods, and the role of teaching staff.

**Findings** – The results indicate that while the school adopts a modern *pesantren* curriculum, the pedagogical implementation remains traditional, relying heavily on the "Drill" (Mim-Mem) method and rote memorization.

**Research implications** – A significant institutional barrier was identified in the form of limited technological access for female students, as the language laboratory is located on the male campus. Furthermore, the instructors—mostly recent graduates in their service year—lack formal pedagogical training. These findings imply a need for professionalizing teacher recruitment and ensuring gender equity in facility access. The study is limited by its focus on a single institutional case. It is recommended that future research explore the integration of mobile ICT tools and the implementation of teacher training programs to transition from teacher-centered to student-centered communicative learning.

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## Introduction

Language serves as the fundamental instrument of human communication, enabling the expression of complex ideas and facilitating social integration within global communities (Mailani et al., 2022). For the Muslim world, Arabic holds a uniquely significant position, not only as the primary liturgical language of the Holy Qur'an but also as a bridge for international diplomacy and spiritual identity (Salida & Zulpina, 2023). In Indonesia, the integration of Arabic into the national curriculum underscores its societal and academic importance. Mastering Arabic is essential for accessing classical Islamic knowledge and fostering cross-cultural understanding. However, the true value of language lies in its function as a communicative tool—a system of audible symbols that must be actively spoken and heard to be fully realized.

Existing scholarship emphasizes that comprehensive linguistic proficiency requires the mastery of four integrated skills: listening (*istima'*), speaking (*kalam*), reading (*qira'ah*), and writing (*kitabah*) (Maksudin & Hania, 2024). Previous research has established that evaluating an individual's linguistic competence must go beyond theoretical grammar (*nahwu* and *sharf*) to observe practical communicative application (Fathoni, 2021). In the Indonesian educational landscape, *pesantrens* (Islamic boarding schools) have historically been recognized as more effective environments



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for language immersion compared to general schools, due to their extensive time allocation and mandatory bilingual policies.

Despite the theoretical importance of all four skills, a significant gap remains in the actual implementation of Arabic instruction in many Indonesian schools. Current pedagogical practices often exhibit a heavy bias toward literacy-based skills—specifically reading and writing—while neglecting the auditory and oral components. Many institutions fail to transform students' theoretical knowledge into practical speaking proficiency (*muḥādaṣah*). This stagnation is frequently caused by a lack of teacher competence, limited instructional time, and a failure to adapt teaching methods to students' communicative needs. While *pesantrens* offer a more immersive model, there is still limited empirical focus on how integrated schools—which combine general secondary education with *pesantren* traditions—manage the instructional dynamics of *muḥādaṣah* effectively.

This study aims to address this gap by investigating the instructional processes of *muḥādaṣah* (conversation) at Al-Muhsin Islamic Secondary School in Purwasari, Metro. As an institution that integrates both Arabic and English into daily communication, Al-Muhsin provides a unique case for analyzing how a structured curriculum—encompassing *muḥādaṣah*, *mahfudzat*, and grammar—can be delivered within a limited weekly schedule. By examining the instructional methods and outcomes at this school, this research intends to provide new insights into enhancing oral proficiency in Islamic educational settings and contribute to the development of more balanced Arabic language pedagogy in Indonesia.

## Methods

This study employs a descriptive qualitative methodology, characterized by a "natural setting" approach that seeks to interpret phenomena as they exist in their original environment (Sugiyono, 2019). Rather than utilizing experimental manipulation, this research focuses on describing the real-time implementation of the *muḥādaṣah* (Arabic conversation) instructional process at Al-Muhsin Islamic Secondary School, Metro. This design allows for a holistic understanding of the interactions between teachers and students within their specific socio-cultural context.

The study was conducted through a systematic sequence of steps to ensure a thorough investigation: (1) Preliminary Stage: Gathering literature and references concerning *muḥādaṣah* pedagogy and its common challenges. (2) Fieldwork Stage: Conducting onsite research at Al-Muhsin Islamic Secondary School to observe the instructional environment. (3) Evaluative Stage: Analyzing the compatibility of the teaching methods used and identifying specific barriers encountered during the learning process. (4) Reporting Stage: Synthesizing the gathered information into a narrative representation of the actual classroom dynamics.

Data were captured using traditional and digital tools to maintain accuracy. Recording devices were utilized during interviews and focus groups to facilitate verbatim transcription. For documentation purposes, the researcher accessed the school's archival records, including historical profiles, teacher and student databases, and existing curriculum regulations to provide a contextual foundation for the field data.

Data collection was facilitated through three primary methods: passive participant observation, semi-structured interviews, and documentation. In the observation phase, the researcher monitored the *muḥādaṣah* process to record verbal and non-verbal behaviors without interfering with classroom activities. Interviews were conducted with the principal, Arabic teachers, and eighth-grade students to construct a shared understanding of the instructional experience (Moeloeng, 2012).

The analysis followed an inductive framework, consisting of three concurrent flows: Data Reduction, where raw field notes were summarized and focused; Data Display, where information was organized into narrative forms to identify patterns; and Conclusion Drawing/Verification, where emerging themes were tested for validity against the broader data set.

To ensure the reliability and validity of the findings, this study utilized triangulation techniques. Triangulation was achieved by combining multiple data collection methods (observation, interview, and documentation) and cross-referencing information from diverse data sources (students, teachers, and administrators). This approach mitigates researcher bias and ensures that the resulting description of the *muḥādaṣah* instructional process is both rigorous and reflective of the actual educational reality.

## Results

This section describes the findings obtained from field observations, interviews, and documentation regarding the Arabic conversation (*muḥādaṣah*) instructional process at Al-Muhsin Islamic Secondary School. The data are presented systematically based on the core components of the instructional system identified during the research.

### 3.1 Curriculum Orientation and Institutional Framework

The instructional framework for *muḥādaṣah* at Al-Muhsin Islamic Secondary School is fundamentally shaped by its institutional identity as a modern *pesantren*.

The school adopts a specialized curriculum derived from the boarding school's internal system, which prioritizes functional linguistic mastery for daily communication over the standard national curriculum. In the eighth-grade female class, this subject is formally integrated into the weekly schedule with an allocation of two credit hours. The primary source of material is the second volume of the *Al-Arabiyyah lin Nasyi'in* series, which serves as the foundational guide for all conversational activities and structured dialogues within the classroom.

### 3.2. Pedagogical Implementation and Methodological Approaches

In practice, the instructor utilizes a combination of traditional and communicative methods, with a heavy emphasis on the "Drill" or mim-mem (mimicry-memorization) technique.

The process begins with the teacher modeling the correct pronunciation of phrases, followed by repetitive imitation by the students in unison. Observations indicate that this repetitive drilling is effective for memorizing sentence structures, although the students' phonetic accents remain predominantly influenced by their native Indonesian intonation. To support these oral exercises, the teacher also employs the reading method and translation techniques. Translation is used strategically to ensure that students comprehend the semantic meaning of every new word before they are required to memorize and perform the dialogues in pairs.

### 3.3. Availability and Utilization of Instructional Media

The findings regarding instructional media reveal a significant reliance on conventional printed materials.

Despite the potential for digital integration, the classroom observations showed that the textbook remains the sole medium used during the teaching process. No electronic tools, such as LCD projectors, computers, or audio-visual recordings, were observed in use. A logistical constraint was identified through interviews, which revealed that the institution's language laboratory is located exclusively on the male campus. This physical separation prevents female students from accessing integrated

audio-visual facilities, thereby limiting their exposure to native Arabic speakers and modern communicative technology.

### 3.4. Systematic Steps in the Instructional Sequence

The *muḥādaṣah* sessions follow a consistent and rigid operational sequence in every meeting.

The teacher initiates the class with formal greetings and a brief explanation of the day's topic, followed by a collaborative reading of the text. After the teacher explains and translates the new vocabulary, students are given a specific timeframe to memorize the dialogue with their respective partners. The session reaches its peak when students perform these dialogues in front of their peers, followed by a short vocabulary examination administered by the teacher. This seven-step procedure is repeated across different topics, maintaining a predictable routine for the students throughout the semester.

### 3.5. Teacher Qualifications and Professional Background

The profile of the teaching staff reflects the institution's internal recruitment tradition, which prioritizes communal service.

The instructor for the eighth-grade female class is a recent graduate of the Al-Muhsin Senior High School who is currently fulfilling her annual service obligation. Data from interviews with the school principal indicate that teacher selection is based primarily on the linguistic recommendations of senior faculty members rather than formal degrees in pedagogy or Arabic education. While the instructor demonstrates proficient speaking skills, the findings highlight a lack of specialized training in instructional design or classroom management, which contributes to the traditional and teacher-centered nature of the learning process.

**Table 1.** Summary of *muḥādaṣah* Instructional Components at Al-Muhsin Islamic Secondary School

No	Instructional Component	Research Findings & Key Observations
1	Curriculum	Integration of modern <i>pesantren</i> curriculum; focusing on daily communication ( <i>Al-Arabiyah lin Nasyi'in</i> Vol. II).
2	Pedagogical Methods	Predominant use of Drill (Mim-Mem), Reading, and Translation methods; focus on imitation and memorization.
3	Instructional Media	Relying solely on printed textbooks; no integration of ICT (LCD, computers, or audio) due to gender-segregated facility access.
4	Instructional Sequence	A consistent 7-step routine: Greeting, Topic Introduction, Modeling, Translation, Pairwise Memorization, Performance, and Examination.
5	Teacher Profile	Non-pedagogical background; recent graduates in their service year recruited based on linguistic proficiency rather than formal teaching degrees.

As summarized in Table 1, the instructional process of *muḥādaṣah* at Al-Muhsin Islamic Secondary School is characterized by a strong reliance on traditional drilling methods and printed media, managed by instructors within their service year

## Discussion

This study set out to evaluate the instructional dynamics of *muḥādaṣah* (Arabic conversation) at Al-Muhsin Islamic Secondary School, specifically focusing on how curriculum, methods, and teacher qualifications influence students' speaking proficiency. Effective language instruction, particularly in a second language context, requires a balance between pedagogical theory and practical implementation (Adi, 2020). Literature suggests that for a communicative skill like *muḥādaṣah*, the environment must provide rich auditory input and interactive opportunities (Saleh et al., 2025). This study addresses the gap between the ideal communicative approach and the reality of instruction in an integrated *pesantren* setting.

The findings reveal a highly structured, yet traditional, instructional ecosystem. A key finding is the consistent use of the 7-step instructional sequence which prioritizes memorization over spontaneous communication. Interestingly, while the institution identifies as a "modern" *pesantren*, the instructional tools remain traditional, relying exclusively on textbooks (Afriansyah, 2018). The most unexpected finding was the logistical barrier to technology; although a language laboratory exists, gender-segregated campus policies inadvertently limit female students' access to modern audio-visual tools, creating a "digital divide" within the same institution.

The reliance on the Drill (Mim-Mem) method found in this study supports the classical behaviorist theory of language learning, which posits that language is a habit formed through repetition (Rohmah & Zainullah, 2024). This aligns with findings in many Indonesian *pesantrens* where rote memorization is the pedagogical cornerstone (Fuad et al., 2023). However, these results contradict the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach widely advocated in modern linguistics, which emphasizes authentic interaction over structural drills (Abdullah Syukur, 2021). While previous studies suggest that immersive environments in *pesantrens* compensate for traditional methods, our findings indicate that without native auditory input—due to the lack of media—the students' phonetic development remains heavily accented by their mother tongue, echoing the limitations identified in earlier research on non-native environments.

The traditional nature of the instruction can be explained by the Teacher Profile identified in the results. Since instructors are recruited from recent graduates without formal pedagogical training, they tend to teach as they were taught, perpetuating a cycle of teacher-centered instruction. The significance of this finding lies in the realization that linguistic proficiency alone does not equate to teaching competence (Nasrulloh, 2025). However, interpretations should be cautious; while the methods are traditional, the high frequency of interaction within the *pesantren* environment may still yield higher vocabulary retention than general schools, even if spontaneous fluency is limited.

The findings have profound implications for the management of Islamic educational institutions. First, there is an urgent need for pedagogical professionalization; *pesantrens* should provide basic teaching certification or workshops for "service-year" teachers to move beyond simple drilling. Second, the inaccessibility of language laboratories for female students suggests that institutional policies must evolve to ensure gender equity in facility usage, perhaps through scheduled access or the provision of mobile listening units. Finally, integrating simple ICT tools (like audio players) is no longer an option but a necessity to provide students with the native phonetic models required to achieve true communicative competence in a globalized era.

## Conclusion

This study aimed to investigate the instructional dynamics of *muḥādaṣah* (Arabic conversation) at Al-Muhsin Islamic Secondary School, Metro. Specifically, it sought to evaluate the alignment between the modern *pesantren* curriculum, the pedagogical methods employed, and the institutional factors that influence oral linguistic outcomes. The research identifies a traditional instructional ecosystem characterized by a consistent seven-step pedagogical routine. The findings reveal a heavy reliance on the "Drill" (Mim-Mem) and translation methods, emphasizing rote memorization over spontaneous communication. Furthermore, the study highlights a significant technological gap; while the institution possesses a language laboratory, it remains

inaccessible to female students due to gender-segregated campus policies. Additionally, the instruction is managed by "service-year" teachers who, despite having linguistic proficiency, lack formal pedagogical training, resulting in a teacher-centered classroom environment. These findings imply that linguistic proficiency in Islamic institutions is often hindered by "pedagogical stagnation," where traditional methods are perpetuated across generations. This study contributes to the field of Arabic pedagogy by demonstrating that an immersive environment alone is insufficient without native auditory input and professionalized teaching standards. It underscores the necessity for *pesantrens* to evolve from traditional "memorization-based" models to "communicative-based" models to meet modern global standards. This study is limited by its qualitative scope and its focus on a single grade (eighth-grade female students) in one specific institution. Consequently, the findings regarding gender-based facility access and teacher qualifications may vary across different *pesantrens* or regions with different institutional policies. It is recommended that Al-Muhsin Islamic Secondary School provides pedagogical training for its service-year instructors and ensures equitable access to language facilities for female students. Future research should involve a comparative analysis between male and female instructional outcomes and explore the impact of integrating digital mobile-learning tools to compensate for the lack of laboratory access.

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