Language Environment and Acquisition Dynamics of Arabic in Pesantren: Perspectives on Islamic Education and Learning Tradition

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Abstract
Language environment constitutes a fundamental pillar in second language acquisition, including learning Arabic within Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*). The variation of input, the intensity of interaction, and the consistency of practice collectively form the primary scaffolds for developing students' communicative competence. In the pesantren context, these elements are both pedagogical tools and part of a broader cultural and spiritual ecosystem that shapes language use in structured and spontaneous ways. When effectively designed and managed, this dual ecosystem has the potential to accelerate the process of Arabic acquisition significantly. This article examines the dynamics of the Arabic language environment in pesantren and its relationship with the core dimensions of input, interaction, and output. A qualitative case study design was employed, with participants selected purposively to capture diverse language learning experiences. Data collection involved observation, in-depth interviews, and document analysis, which were systematically analysed using Krippendorff's content analysis framework, covering data reduction, thematic classification, interpretation, and conclusion drawing. The findings point to two interrelated categories of the Arabic language environment. The first is the formal environment, encompassing structured classroom learning such as *maharat al-qirā'ah*, *al-kitābah*, *al-istimā'*, and *al-kalām*. This environment facilitates the acquisition of linguistic accuracy by aligning input and teacher–student interaction with grammatical and syntactical norms. The second is the informal environment, which emerges in daily activities such as *muḥādathah*, *ilqā' al-mufradāt*, *maḥkamat al-lughah*, and *muḥāḍarah*. Unlike the formal setting, the informal environment privileges fluency and spontaneity, enabling learners to transform theoretical knowledge into practical communicative competence. These findings underscore that the synergy between formal and informal environments is both complementary and transformative: it enriches input, strengthens interaction, and ensures that output is accurate and communicatively meaningful. The implication is clear: success in Arabic language learning within pesantren is primarily determined by how comprehensively the language environment is designed to integrate theoretical instruction with authentic communicative practice.
Keywords: Arabic Language; Language Acquisition; Language Environment; Pesantren;

Introduction

The linguistic environment constitutes a fundamental pillar in the study of language, including Arabic (Alghazali & Alzyoudi, 2025). For native speakers, it provides continuity and reinforcement, while for foreign learners, it establishes the necessary conditions to attain mastery (Almelhes, 2024). Sustained exposure, whether embedded in structured instruction or through natural interaction, consolidates linguistic competence and ensures the internalisation of skills. Conversely, the absence of an immersive environment undermines the very foundation required to achieve communicative proficiency (Shoman, 2021).

In language education, the concept of a linguistic environment is frequently examined through the distinction between learning and acquisition (Omar, 2017). Learning denotes a

conscious, deliberate process shaped by formal instruction, whereas acquisition develops organically through habitual use and continuous exposure. Despite their differences, both processes converge toward fostering effective communicative competence (H. D. Brown & Lee, 2025).

The Arabic linguistic environment is uniquely positioned to integrate these two trajectories. By aligning the structured framework of instruction with authentic communicative practices, it enables learners to develop a deeper, more sustainable proficiency (Murtadho et al., 2025). This dual orientation not only strengthens the outcomes of formal learning but also cultivates spontaneous communicative habits essential to real-world fluency (Ahsan, 2025).

The effectiveness of such an environment rests on three interdependent dimensions: input, interaction, and output (El-Sabagh, 2021). Input entails meaningful and comprehensible exposure to spoken or written language. Interaction emphasises active engagement and negotiation of meaning in communicative contexts. Output reflects the learner's productive capacity in both oral and written forms. These elements underpin the development of core language skills, listening, speaking, reading, and writing, while reinforcing key linguistic domains such as phonetics, morphology, grammar, and semantics. (Almelhes, 2024).

A growing body of scholarship highlights the strategic significance of the linguistic environment in Arabic education. For instance, Faisal Fikri (2022) Demonstrated that exposure to authentic communicative contexts strengthens linguistic competence and enhances learner motivation. Similarly, Muhammad Yusuf (2023) Identified a positive correlation between well-structured environments and measurable gains in Arabic proficiency. Mirwan Akhmad Taufiq (2020) further emphasised that active learning and sustained exposure beyond classroom settings foster natural skill development.

Despite these insights, research examining the organisation of linguistic environments in Islamic educational institutions remains limited. In particular, there is a lack of empirical analysis regarding the dynamics of input, interaction, and output in such settings. This study seeks to address this gap by exploring the construction of the Arabic linguistic environment at Pesantren Modern Al-Amanah Junwangi. It investigates how daily student activities provide opportunities for input, interaction, and output, and how the imbalance among these components may impede optimal acquisition.

Theoretically, this research aims to advance understanding of the integration between language learning and acquisition within modern Islamic boarding schools. Practically, it offers pedagogical implications for administrators and Arabic language educators in designing authentic, communicative, and sustainable environments. By fostering synergy across input, interaction, and output, such environments can enhance learners' communicative competence and equip them for broader engagement in Arabic-speaking contexts.

Literature review
Arabic Language Environment and Acquisition Dynamics in Pesantren

The relationship between the Arabic language environment and the dynamics of acquisition in *pesantren* has attracted sustained scholarly interest, particularly within the Indonesian context (Isbah, 2020). *Pesantren* are widely recognised as religious institutions and socio-cultural spaces that foster linguistic practices and identities (Rahman et al., 2025). Their unique educational ecology positions them as potential immersion sites, where Arabic

functions simultaneously as a medium of instruction, a religious symbol, and a cultural marker (Umam, 2021). This complexity provides fertile ground for examining how language environments shape acquisition processes.

The Arabic Language Environment in Pesantren

The notion of a linguistic environment (*bi'ah lughawiyyah*) has been consistently highlighted in second language acquisition literature as a decisive factor in shaping learning outcomes (Muttaqin et al., 2024). Brown (1954) notes that intensive exposure to the target language within community contexts accelerates natural acquisition. In *pesantren*, Arabic transcends classroom boundaries, extending into religious rituals, institutional regulations, and peer interactions. These practices resonate with Krashen's (1982) principles of immersion, where sustained and meaningful exposure enhances communicative competence. However, while immersion is widely praised for its effectiveness, questions remain regarding how consistently it is implemented and sustained across different *pesantren*, particularly given variations in student backgrounds and institutional resources (Schulz, 1991).

Dynamics of Arabic Language Acquisition

The acquisition process in *pesantren* reflects a dynamic interplay of internal and external factors. Learner motivation, interest, and cognitive readiness form critical internal drivers, while external influences include environmental exposure, pedagogical strategies, and the role of teachers (Sorace & Serratrice, 2009). Ellis (2005) argues that acquisition is powerfully shaped by the availability of meaningful input and opportunities for output, both evident in the *pesantren* model. However, the pedagogical landscape is far from uniform: while some institutions embrace communicative approaches, others rely heavily on traditional practices such as *taḥfīẓ* (memorisation) and *tarjamah* (translation). The coexistence of these approaches generates a hybrid pedagogy that is distinctive to *pesantren*. While this hybridity may enrich the learning experience, it also raises critical questions about the extent to which communicative competence is prioritised over textual mastery (Shahid et al., 2022).

Socio-Cultural Role of Pesantren

Equally important is the socio-cultural dimension of Arabic learning in pesantren. Abdullatif (2024) observes that Arabic functions not merely as a linguistic tool but as a religious identity and intellectual prestige marker. In this sense, the motivation to master Arabic is instrumental and symbolic: it grants access to Islamic knowledge and elevates one's status within the community. This socio-religious framing intensifies learners' engagement, yet it may also shape acquisition in ways that privilege textual comprehension over communicative use (Bhatt et al., 2025). Consequently, while Arabic competence is highly valued, the balance between functional fluency and symbolic mastery remains contested within the pesantren context.

Empirical studies present a nuanced picture. On the one hand, research by Mahbub (2023) affirms the effectiveness of *pesantren* in cultivating supportive *bi'ah 'arabiyyah*. On the other hand, persistent challenges are repeatedly documented. These include the heterogeneity of students' linguistic repertoires, the continued dominance of Indonesian and Javanese in daily interactions, and inconsistent enforcement of Arabic language policies. Such

realities point to a gap between institutional ideals and actual practice. While *pesantren* aspire to full immersion, the sociolinguistic ecology often limits opportunities for sustained communicative use. This tension highlights the importance of moving beyond celebratory narratives of *pesantren* as immersion spaces, toward more critical evaluations of how linguistic environments are negotiated and maintained in practice (Madkur, 2024).

Taken together, existing literature underscores the pivotal role of the Arabic linguistic environment in shaping acquisition dynamics within *pesantren*. The interaction of input, interaction, and output, mediated by socio-cultural norms and institutional policies, creates a distinctive ecology for learning. However, despite its potential, the model remains constrained by structural limitations and cultural practices that hinder optimal communicative outcomes. Most studies have described the presence of *bi'ah lughawiyyah* in general terms, but fewer have examined how input, interaction, and output patterns are concretely constructed in daily *pesantren* life. This gap points to more nuanced, context-sensitive investigations that move beyond theoretical affirmation to practical analysis of how linguistic environments are organised, negotiated, and sustained.

Research method

This study employed a descriptive–analytical design with a qualitative orientation to investigate the application of the competency-based approach in Arabic language teaching within modern Islamic boarding schools. A qualitative framework was deemed appropriate as it enables language learning to be understood as a socially situated process, shaped by context, interaction, and meaning rather than merely quantifiable outcomes. The research site, Al-Amanah Modern Islamic Institute Junwangi, was purposefully selected for its bilingual curriculum (Arabic–English) and its deliberate integration of formal instruction with informal linguistic practices, thus providing a rich context for examining the dynamics of language acquisition.

Data were obtained through three complementary techniques to ensure depth and triangulation. (1) Observation: Classroom practices were observed to document how teachers presented input, scaffolded learning, and corrected errors. Beyond the classroom, extracurricular activities such as the Language Court and debate clubs were monitored to capture Arabic use in semi-formal contexts. Informal domains, such as dormitories, cafeterias, and communal spaces, were also observed to understand how Arabic was practised spontaneously in peer-to-peer interaction. These observations provided a comparative lens for distinguishing between structured, policy-driven environments and natural, learner-driven ones. (2) Interviews: Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 20 participants: six Arabic teachers, twelve students across different grade levels, and two administrators. The interviews explored perspectives on teaching strategies, challenges associated with enforcing Arabic-only policies, and participants' evaluations of the competency-based approach. This method facilitated access to institutional perspectives and lived learner experiences, thus enriching the contextual interpretation of observed practices. (3) Document Analysis: Supporting documents were reviewed, including syllabi, pesantren regulations, textbooks, workbooks, and records of extracurricular activities. These documents provided evidence of how policies were formalised and connected to daily practices(Fielding, 2012) .

Data analysis followed Krippendorff's (2022) content analysis framework, operationalized in four interrelated stages: (1) Data Reduction: Field notes, transcripts, and institutional documents were filtered to retain only data directly relevant to Arabic pedagogy and the competency-based approach; (2) Coding and Classification: Key codes such as "teacher scaffolding," "peer correction," and "Arabic-only rule" were identified and grouped into broader thematic categories of input, interaction, and output; (3) Interpretation: The coded data were analyzed to reveal patterns and linkages, for instance, how grammatical instruction in the classroom was later reflected in dormitory conversations or debate practices; and (4) Conclusion Drawing: Findings were synthesized to articulate how the competency-based approach shaped the broader linguistic environment, identifying both enabling factors (e.g., institutional support, *bi'ah 'arabiyyah*) and inhibiting factors (e.g., student resistance, inconsistency in Arabic-only enforcement).

The methodological design aimed to describe the operationalisation of the competency-based approach and critically interrogate how formal instruction and informal environments intersect to support or constrain acquisition. By situating classroom pedagogy within the broader ecology of *pesantren* life, the study seeks to illuminate the mechanisms through which communicative competence in Arabic is cultivated, negotiated, or undermined.

The study contributes to both theory and practice. Theoretically, it advances understanding of how competency-based approaches function in bilingual Islamic educational contexts, where language learning is embedded within religious and cultural frameworks. The findings provide actionable insights for teachers, administrators, and policymakers seeking to design communicative, context-sensitive, and sustainable Arabic learning environments.

Result

The Arabic Linguistic Environment: Formal and Informal Settings

The findings of this study indicate that the Arabic linguistic environment at Al-Amanah Modern Islamic Institute Junwangi is deliberately designed to operate within two complementary domains: formal and informal. Both spheres not only sustain teacher–student interaction but also serve as reinforcing pillars in the cultivation of communicative competence.

The formal environment is primarily constructed through classroom-based instruction. Within this space, language learning is approached with an emphasis on grammatical accuracy, structural mastery, and systematic reinforcement of the four fundamental skills: reading, writing, listening, and speaking. Teachers function as facilitators and evaluators, while textbooks, morphological drills, and structured exercises are the main instruments of knowledge transfer. Student workbooks (LKS) and targeted practice sessions further underscore this environment's prescriptive and standardized nature. This dimension ensures learners gain a solid linguistic foundation rooted in rule-based understanding and academic discipline.

In contrast, the informal environment emerges more organically, embedded within the rhythm of daily life in the pesantren. Here, learning is not confined to the classroom but is extended into lived experiences that stimulate authentic communication. Routine practices, such as vocabulary enrichment, conversational circles, Qur'an recitation sessions, and religious awareness programs, become channels through which students internalise language more spontaneously. Innovative initiatives, including the *Language Court* and other immersive

drills, further transform the environment into an interactive arena where students apply and negotiate meaning in real time.

Critically, these two domains are not isolated but rather interdependent. While the formal setting provides structure, discipline, and theoretical grounding, the informal dimension ensures that knowledge is contextualised and applied in authentic communicative situations. This interplay reflects a pedagogical balance that strengthens linguistic competence holistically. The formal environment guards against fragmentation of knowledge, whereas the informal setting mitigates the rigidity of rule-based learning by fostering creativity, fluency, and confidence.

The essential distinctions between these two environments are summarised in the following table:

Table 1. Characteristics of the Formal and Informal Arabic Linguistic Environments.

Characteristics	Formal Arabic Linguistic Environment	Informal Arabic Linguistic Environment
Form of environment	Artificial, classroom-based	Natural, outside the classroom
Curriculum model	Organized academic activities	Non-academic (natural) activities
Language focus	Arabic grammar and structure	Communicative use of Arabic
Role of teacher	Primary agent of instruction	Facilitator of interaction
Role of student	Recipient of knowledge	Active participant in communication
Language content	Materials: reading, writing, listening, and speaking skills	Activities: vocabulary delivery, conversation, lectures, *Language Court*, etc.

Integrating these two environments ultimately produces a holistic framework for Arabic language learning. On the one hand, the formal setting consolidates learners' knowledge of grammar, morphology, and syntactic structures, ensuring that linguistic competence is grounded in accuracy and systematic mastery. On the other hand, the informal setting nurtures communicative competence by offering students repeated exposure to authentic, real-life interactions that demand spontaneity, negotiation of meaning, and active participation. This complementary relationship reflects what Krashen (1982) has long emphasised that effective language acquisition is not the product of isolated instruction but of the synergy between structured input and natural communicative practice.

The Arabic Linguistic Environment: Formal and Informal Settings in the Intensive Program

Within the institute's intensive training program framework, the Arabic linguistic environment is systematically organised into formal and informal dimensions that collectively foster a comprehensive learning process. The formal environment is primarily represented by structured classroom instruction focusing on mastering the four core skills: reading, writing, listening, and speaking. Learning activities are supported by prescribed Arabic textbooks,

morphological examples, and student workbooks (LKS) as complementary tools to reinforce practice. The instructional process follows a fixed daily schedule consisting of two sessions: a morning session (07:00–12:15) and an afternoon session (14:00–15:00), both held in the primary classrooms. Regular written and oral assessments further ensure the continuous monitoring of students' linguistic development.

Beyond the classroom, the informal environment emerges through non-academic activities embedded within the institute's daily routines. These activities, which include vocabulary delivery, conversation practice, Qur'an recitation improvement, religious awareness programs, women's activities, sports, public lectures, Friday night gatherings, and the Language Court, are carried out under the supervision of dormitory management. These practices encourage spontaneous language use and strengthen learners' functional competence by offering students authentic communicative opportunities in various contexts.

The synergy between these two environments is reinforced by the commitment of teachers and dormitory supervisors to creating a holistic, engaging, and sustainable program. This integration reflects a deliberate effort to balance accuracy, achieved through structured grammar-based instruction, with fluency, cultivated through real-life communicative practice. Moreover, the program's design bridges the home, school, and community triad, situating Arabic as an academic subject and a lived linguistic experience.

From a critical perspective, the intensive program effectively addresses a challenge often faced by traditional schools: the lack of adequate exposure to the target language. By providing structured input alongside immersive interaction, the institute cultivates an academically rigorous and socially meaningful learning environment. Ultimately, this hybrid model demonstrates how formal and informal linguistic environments can be harmonised to produce measurable gains in proficiency, while also making acquiring Arabic more enjoyable, purposeful, and rewarding for students.

Language Acquisition Based on Input, Interaction, and Output

Research findings demonstrate that Arabic language acquisition at Al-Amanah Modern Islamic Institute Junwangi does not result from isolated teaching practices but emerges from the synergistic interplay of input, interaction, and output, which nurture students' communicative competence. This framework resonates with Krashen's (1982) argument that comprehensible input constitutes the foundation of second language acquisition when combined with motivation and meaningful interaction.

Input is delivered through complementary channels. Within the formal classroom, structured exposure occurs via dialogues, vocabulary drills, text reading, and grammar instruction, where teachers scaffold learning progressively from simple to complex forms. Meanwhile, the informal environment provides authentic exposure in daily routines such as post-prayer guidance, casual dormitory conversations, religious activities, and communal programs. Integrating these two sources ensures a balance between systematic instruction and practical communicative immersion.

Interaction manifests in both structured and spontaneous settings. In the classroom, interaction is facilitated through teacher–student exchanges, group discussions, and peer-based vocabulary presentations. Beyond the classroom, students communicate spontaneously during shared meals, evening guidance sessions, or simulated court proceedings in the Language

Court. These interactions are frequent and purposeful, reinforcing language as a tool of authentic communication rather than a mere academic subject.

Output reflects the culmination of input and interaction, materialising through repetition, oral practice, and spontaneous responses. Observations indicate that many students initially undergo a "silent period" before gradually gaining confidence to speak, mirroring Krashen's $i+1$ principle, where exposure slightly beyond the learner's current capacity stimulates progress. Over time, students move from passive reception to active production, demonstrating measurable gains in fluency and accuracy.

Qualitative insights from student interviews further highlight the program's effectiveness. Learners described the process as "enjoyable, engaging, inspiring, and fulfilling," underscoring that Arabic was experienced not merely as an academic requirement but as a meaningful journey of self-development. Aspirations voiced by students included:

"I seek genuine education, the Arabic language, and knowledge that helps me improve myself. I wish to learn Arabic, develop good character, and practice discipline as implemented at Al-Amanah Modern Islamic Institute, Junwangi."

Another student reflected:

"In terms of language skills, I learned Arabic alongside etiquette in dealing with teachers, self-discipline, vocabulary study, reading practice, and Arabic lessons."

These responses affirm the value of integrating formal academic structures with informal dormitory supervision, as both contexts converge to create a linguistically rich and socially meaningful environment. Observational data further corroborate these accounts, showing that the quality of input, the intensity of interaction, and the effectiveness of output jointly determine the success of language acquisition (Bilal et al., 2024).

From a critical standpoint, the program exemplifies how institutional design can overcome the limitations often faced in conventional schooling, where exposure to the target language is fragmented and insufficient. By embedding Arabic into academic and daily communal practices, Al-Amanah cultivates an ecosystem where language learning is not peripheral but central to students' lived experience.

Table 2. Input, Interaction, and Output in Arabic Language Acquisition.

Components of Language Acquisition	Formal Arabic Learning Environment	Informal Arabic Learning Environment
Sources of Input	Dialogues and linguistic drills provided by the teacher	Natural language from teachers, peers, or books
Characteristics of Input	Structured with grammatical complexity	Unstructured, but simplified by the teacher to ensure comprehensibility
Language Interaction	Individual and group interaction; the teacher with groups of students	Individual interaction: teacher with individual students
Class/Activity Structure	Group interaction between the teacher and students	Informal activities such as break time, post-'Asr guidance, and Qur'an recitation after Maghrib
Language Output	In formal activities: morning vocabulary presentation, midday vocabulary presentation, language encouragement, *Language Court*, and morning conversation practice	Learners progress toward second language proficiency, then to the *i+1* level

Pressure to Speak	All Arabic lessons are directed toward achieving second language proficiency	Output is not a major concern; it occurs naturally
Error Correction	Structured repetition and feedback on grammatical structures	A natural "silent period" is expected

Discussion

The Language Environment and Arabic Language Acquisition

Arabic language learning cannot be detached from the influence of the language environment, which constitutes both the immediate setting in which learners interact and the broader sociocultural context that provides opportunities for linguistic exposure (Alshehri & AlShabeb, 2023). Ellis (2021) underscores that the environment serves as a primary condition for acquisition because it provides comprehensible input across various communicative situations, from structured classroom exchanges to spontaneous conversations in everyday life. Linguistic development risks stagnation. Without such sustained input, learners are deprived of opportunities to internalise form and meaning simultaneously.

Larsen-Freeman and Long (2023) refine this perspective by mapping the environment into multiple exposure layers: structured domains (classrooms, textbooks, digital platforms) and unstructured domains (peer interactions, casual cafeteria conversations, engagement with media, or interpreting public signage). This layered view highlights that language acquisition is not confined to academic instruction but is instead a social process embedded in real-life practices (Sato et al., 2025). In contexts like pesantren, this becomes particularly visible: Arabic learning is reinforced not only in lessons but also in prayers, sermons, and dormitory routines, which provide a living laboratory for language use (Murtadho et al., 2025).

This dynamic resonates with Krashen's (1982) classic distinction between formal and informal environments. The formal environment provides planned instruction, explicit grammar teaching, and academically oriented exercises. In contrast, the informal environment offers authentic, unregulated opportunities for spontaneous practice. When combined, these dimensions create the optimal condition for acquisition: formal instruction builds the structural foundation of grammar and vocabulary, while informal usage enables automatization, fluency, and pragmatic competence. Chaer (2009) makes this distinction even sharper, noting that formal environments prioritize accuracy and rule-governed learning, whereas informal settings emphasize fluency and communicative effectiveness. Neither dimension can operate in isolation, grammar without practice remains inert, while practice without structural awareness risks fossilization of errors (Estremera, 2025).
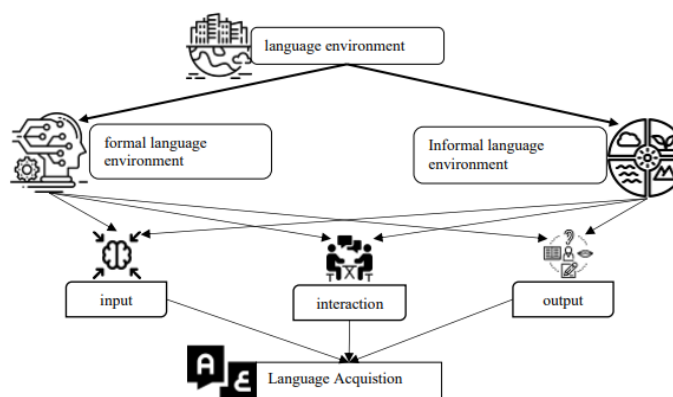
Figure 1. The Language Environment and Language Acquisition

Recent scholarship deepens this synthesis by emphasizing the affective and institutional dimensions of the environment. Muhammad Thohir et al. (2025) stress that effective environments must be not only accessible but also psychologically supportive, fostering motivation and reducing anxiety so that learners willingly engage in practice. Similarly, Nasaruddin (2025) frames the educational environment as a strategic institutional resource, where teachers function as architects who design linguistically rich, pedagogically structured, and socially inclusive milieus. Within this view, the teacher's role transcends knowledge transmission: cultivating spaces where language is lived, not merely taught.

The implication is that the language environment should be approached as a holistic ecosystem in which formal and informal dimensions are deliberately integrated. For Arabic learning in pesantren, this means ensuring that classroom instruction is consistently reinforced through dormitory routines, religious practices, and peer interactions. More importantly, such an ecosystem not only develops grammatical competence but also nurtures communicative confidence, intercultural sensitivity, and lifelong learning strategies. This holistic orientation positions the language environment as not a passive backdrop but an active, dynamic force in shaping language acquisition outcomes.

Language Acquisition through Input, Interaction, and Output

The findings of this study further demonstrate that Arabic language acquisition in intensive training programs is most effectively achieved through a balanced integration of input, interaction, and output, three interdependent dimensions that together form the core cycle of communicative competence. This triadic model provides a theoretical framework and a practical lens through which the dynamics of Arabic learning in pesantren environments can be understood.

Krashen's Input Hypothesis (1992) emphasizes that comprehensible input slightly above the learner's current level (i+1) is essential for progress. In formal environments, input is carefully structured through grammar lessons, text reading, listening comprehension, and dialogic practice. This systematic exposure builds a cognitive and linguistic foundation upon which further learning can be scaffolded. In contrast, informal environments, daily conversations, religious gatherings, and dormitory programs deliver contextualised and emotionally engaging input, enabling learners to internalise Arabic more implicitly and naturally, free from the rigid constraints of formal instruction. This duality ensures that input is not only cognitively accessible but also affectively meaningful (Syahrin & Akmal, 2024).

Interaction, as articulated in Long's Interaction hypothesis (1996), represents the mechanism through which input is made salient and personalised. Negotiation of meaning, clarification requests, and feedback allow learners to fine-tune their linguistic awareness and gain sensitivity to pragmatic cues. Field observations reveal that peer conversations, Language Court activities, and spontaneous debates create spaces for both collaborative learning and autonomous practice. These settings embody a dynamic feedback loop: learners test their understanding, adjust their performance, and consolidate knowledge through authentic communication. Thus, interaction functions not merely as practice but as a transformative process that bridges input and output (AlAfnan, 2025).

Output, following Swain's Output Hypothesis (1993), completes the acquisition cycle by compelling learners to transform passive knowledge into active linguistic production. Structured activities such as oral presentations, role-plays, and debates demand precision and accuracy, while informal chats allow learners to explore fluency and spontaneity without fear of excessive correction. Importantly, the coexistence of formal correction and tolerance for a natural "silent period" creates a balanced developmental path, one that respects cognitive readiness while still promoting communicative risk-taking (Lizardo, 2021). In this sense, output is not merely the end product of learning but a critical driver of deeper internalisation.

Integrating input, interaction, and output fosters a comprehensive model of communicative competence encompassing grammatical accuracy, sociolinguistic appropriateness, and strategic flexibility. This model acquires an even broader significance in the context of language institutes and Islamic boarding schools. Arabic learning extends beyond technical mastery, including affective engagement, spiritual motivation, and communal identity formation. Language becomes both a cognitive skill and a lived practice, reinforcing cultural belonging, intercultural dialogue, and the holistic aims of Islamic education.

Conclusion

This study reaffirms that the language environment, both formal and informal, constitutes a decisive factor in Arabic language acquisition. Formal settings provide a structured framework where learners acquire the grammatical, syntactic, and lexical foundations necessary for accuracy, while informal environments extend these competencies into real-life communicative practice. The synergy of these two dimensions produces a holistic pedagogical ecosystem, resonating with Krashen and Ellis's arguments that optimal learning occurs when theoretical mastery and practical usage are mutually reinforcing.

Empirical findings further demonstrate that integrating input, interaction, and output is the operational mechanism driving acquisition within the intensive program. Comprehensible and meaningful input supplies the raw material of learning; interaction enables negotiation of meaning and collaborative construction of knowledge; and output transforms passive competence into active production, strengthening fluency and accuracy. Together, these dimensions generate a balanced cycle of communicative competence, fostering cognitive mastery, learner confidence, motivation, and engagement with Arabic as a lived language.

The broader implication is that strategic management of the language environment, guided by the input–interaction–output framework, should be prioritised as a best practice in Islamic boarding schools and similar language institutes. This model bridges theoretical insights with authentic communicative practice, offering a replicable approach for accelerating second language acquisition. Beyond linguistic outcomes, it also contributes to cultivating discipline, intercultural awareness, and the holistic educational goals central to pesantren-based learning.

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