Enhancing Arabic Language Proficiency among Students:
A Case Study of Language Matriculation Strategies at Al-Hasyimiyah Darul Ulum Sipaho Islamic Boarding School

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Kata Kunci: Matrikulasi Bahasa, Kemampuan Berbahasa, Bahasa Arab, Santri, Pondok Pesantren.

Abstract: This research aims to unveil the strategies applied by Al-Hasyimiyah Darul Ulum Sipaho Islamic Boarding School in addressing the challenges of implementing the mandatory Arabic language policy, particularly in equalizing language proficiency between alumni and non-alumni students. A qualitative approach is employed in this study through a case study design. Data collection is conducted through interviews and observations, which are subsequently analyzed using deductive and descriptive methods. The research findings reveal that Al-Hasyimiyah Darul Ulum Sipaho Islamic Boarding School implements a series of strategies, beginning from the admission of new prospective students to learning evaluations. These steps are aimed at achieving a balance in Arabic language proficiency between alumni and non-alumni students. The strategies encompass the grouping of student dormitories, adjustment of teaching approaches, mentor placement, continuous evaluation implementation, as well as the application of distinct sanctions and guidance for alumni and non-alumni students. Overall, the research portrays that consistently implemented strategies reflect the principles of
second language learning theory. This indicates that the approach
eyespoused by the Islamic boarding school effectively nurtures an
evironment for language learning and encourages sustainable
development of Arabic language proficiency.

**Keywords:** Language Matriculation, Language Proficiency, Arabic Language, Santri, Islamic Boarding School.

**Introduction**

Pesantren, which are Islamic boarding schools, have played a vital role in the progress of Islamic education within the nation of Indonesia.¹ The mastery of the Arabic language holds a pivotal role in pesantren education, being a crucial key to unlock the understanding of Islamic scriptures and practices. In modern times, there has been an increasing focus on improving the administration of Arabic language initiatives within pesantren, aiming to enhance the overall caliber of Islamic education imparted. The teaching of Arabic language carries a deep-rooted legacy within pesantren, where pupils historically dedicated substantial time to delve into Arabic grammar, morphology, syntax, alongside the memorization of the Quran and other sacred Islamic writings.² However, there have been growing worries in recent times about the antiquated and inadequate state of Arabic education within specific pesantren, falling short in catering to the needs of contemporary learners. The inclusion of languages like Arabic in pesantren curriculum has initiated a transition towards a new era of modernization.

Al-Hasyimiah Darul Ulum Modern Islamic Boarding School is a modern educational institution located in Sipaho Village, North Padang Lawas Regency, North Sumatra Province. This Islamic boarding school has existed for approximately half a century since it was founded by Salman Paris in 1971. The educational model applied at this Islamic boarding school is inspired by Darussalam Gontor’s modern Islamic boarding school approach. Salman Paris, the founder of this Islamic boarding school, is an alumni of the Darussalam Gontor Islamic boarding school. Given this educational context, it is unsurprising that Al-Hasyimiah Darul Ulum Islamic Boarding School implements diverse regulations and guidelines aligning with an analogous methodology observed at Darussalam Islamic Boarding School Gontor. This Islamic boarding school has the main objective of providing comprehensive religious and Arabic language education.³ Through the educational program owned by this Islamic boarding school, it is hoped that students will be able to master Arabic language skills well, starting from speaking, listening, reading, to writing skills. Thus, students

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are not only able to understand religious texts in Arabic, but are also able to communicate fluently in that language.⁴

Arabic language instruction in this Islamic boarding school is implemented through two distinct systems, namely the classroom teaching approach and the extracurricular teaching approach.⁵ The in-class teaching approach adheres to the designated curriculum.⁶ Conversely, the extracurricular teaching approach follows guidelines set by the language division within the boarding school. This method encompasses a series of activities, such as morning vocabulary drills, daily conversations, contextual dialogues, evening vocabulary recitations, and various annual events related to Arabic language instruction. The combination of both approaches aims to provide comprehensive and holistic learning experiences for students in acquiring Arabic language proficiency.⁷

In the implementation of the policy mandating the use of Arabic and English as compulsory languages within the premises of Al-Hasyimiyyah Darul Ulum Sipaho Islamic Boarding School, several challenges emerge concerning foreign language instruction. One significant challenge pertains to the disparity in language proficiency between alumni and non-alumni students at the Aliyah level. This disparity indicates that alumni who have undergone a three-year education at the Tsanawiyah level in this institution have attained a fluent Arabic language proficiency, whereas newly enrolled students coming from a general education background encounter difficulties in this regard. The variance in language proficiency stems from differing educational backgrounds, wherein alumni students are accustomed to an educational environment more focused on Arabic language development, while non-alumni students require adjustment.⁸ This kind of challenge is a common phenomenon faced by many Islamic boarding schools.⁹ However, the Al-Hasyimiyyah Darul Ulum Sipaho Islamic Boarding School has taken anticipatory measures by designing a series of strategies to equalize Arabic language proficiency between alumni and non-alumni students at the Aliyah level.

Several previous studies have conducted research similar to the current research. In 2020, Afaria conducted research using a quantitative approach to identify the effect of the Arabic matriculation program on students and its impact on basic Arabic language skills.¹⁰ The

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⁸ Moh Sultan Dama, “STRATEGI PEMBELAJARAN BAHASA ARAB MELALUI KEGIATAN BI’AH LUGHAWIYYAH SEBAGAI PENINGKATAN MAHARAH AL-KALAM SISWA DI MADRASAH ALIYAH AL-FALAH GARONTLO” (UNIVERSITAS ISLAM NEGERI SUNAN KALIJAGA YOGYAKARTA, 2019).


results of this study indicate that the matriculation program has an effect of 50.6% on students' ability in Arabic. In 2022, Jundi will also conduct similar research using a qualitative approach, focusing on aspects of managing the matriculation program. This research reveals that there is good cooperation between study programs and student associations in the implementation of the matriculation program. In 2023, Wahyudi will conduct research using a quantitative approach and a survey research design. The purpose of this study was to evaluate the response of the matriculation program participants. The results show that the participants gave a positive response to this matriculation program, acknowledging its contribution in helping those who have limited basic knowledge of Arabic.

The series of studies above as a whole provide valuable insights in understanding the effectiveness and impact of the Arabic matriculation program on students' basic mastery of Arabic. However, the approach used in this study is different, namely a qualitative approach, which focuses on an analysis of the strategies implemented by Islamic boarding schools in an effort to foster new non-alumni students. The main focus of this research is to see how these strategies contribute to equalizing Arabic language skills among these new students.

Method
This research employs a qualitative descriptive approach, which aims to describe and analyze the Arabic language matriculation program's classroom learning process from both the tutor's and student's perspectives. This approach is aptly aligned with this research, as it facilitates a holistic comprehension of the learning process and the strategies employed by the Islamic boarding school management to standardize the Arabic language proficiency among new students.

The data collection methods used in this research are observation and interview. The initial data collection process was carried out through interview techniques with two ustadzahs (teachers) and students who were part of the language activator of the Al-Hasyimah Darul Ulum Modern Islamic Boarding School, which would then be recorded as statements that substantively supported and strengthened the aspects studied. Furthermore, the observation technique is carried out by directly observing the activities at the related Islamic Boarding Schools, especially in the implementation of ongoing language programs. By combining data from interviews and observations, it is hoped that the data collected will have greater accuracy and depth, as well as provide a comprehensive picture of the strategy for imparting language skills implemented by the school.

The data collected from observations will be analyzed using deductive and descriptive methods. On the other hand, the data gathered from recorded interviews will be transcribed initially. Subsequently, the data will be streamlined by eliminating irrelevant information not

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13 Sugiyono Sugiyono, Metode Penelitian Pendidikan; Pendekatan Kuantitatif, Kualitatif, dan R&D, Cet. 23 (Bandung: Alfabeta, 2016).

pertinent to the research focus. The simplified data will then be summarized and analyzed. Furthermore, data from both methods will be juxtaposed, and a narrative will be constructed to draw conclusions.

**Result and Discussion**

The concept of equalization discussed in this research is none other than matriculation, a practice commonly undertaken by other educational institutions. The term "matriculation," as defined by the KBBI (Indonesian Dictionary), refers to the equalization of knowledge intended for students deemed to have insufficient foundational knowledge to engage in higher education coursework. Matriculation is an educational program aimed at new students with the objective of equalizing their competence levels, regardless of their diverse educational backgrounds. The aim is to equip students with uniform knowledge and skills so that they are better prepared for future lectures. Meanwhile, as a means of communication, language and its relation to thought are two things that cannot be separated. Therefore, it can be concluded that matriculation is an instructional or training program designed for new students with diverse educational backgrounds, aimed at equating their foundational competencies in a particular field of study, in this case being proficiency in the Arabic language.

There is no specific program name designated for the implementation of matriculation for new non-alumni students at Al-Hasyimah Islamic Boarding School. However, the approach taken by the school's management in striving for Arabic language proficiency equality among students involves a series of steps initiated from the admission phase of prospective students to the daily learning execution. This sequence of procedures will be comprehensively elucidated in the ensuing discourse.

**New Student Admission**

The registration process for prospective new students at Islamic Boarding Schools can be done both offline and online. The policy for accepting new students at this educational institution is not bound by a certain quota, both for graduates of Islamic boarding schools and non-Islamic boarding schools. The selection tests are: reading the Qur'an and several special subjects, namely: mathematics, Natural Sciences, Social Sciences, as well as Islamic Religion subjects which involve the fields of Aqidah Akhlak, Al-Qur'an Hadith, Islamic Cultural History, and Fiqh.

This Islamic boarding school applies an objective and thorough approach in evaluating the qualifications of prospective students, without any limit on the number of admissions.

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15 KBBI Daring, KBBI Daring | Kementerian Pendidikan, Kebudayaan, Riset, dan Teknologi Republik Indonesia, 2021.
The management of the school emphasizes the quality and potential of prospective students who are tested through relevant exams. This approach provides a comprehensive picture of attracting new prospective students who have the ability and commitment to study Islamic studies at the Islamic boarding school. However, it should be noted that even so, the scheme for the selection process for accepting new students does not require certain Arabic and English language skills as a requirement to become a santri at the Islamic boarding school.

**Categorization of Student Dormitories**

All students, both alumni and non-alumni, will be classified into classes based on the results of the tests they have done before. Even so, there is no class separation between students who are alumni and those who are not alumni. This states that each student can be classified based on certain criteria, such as academic ability, skills, or previous achievements. The classification of students into classes using the benchmark of the provided test is one of the student classification methods aimed at providing optimal developmental opportunities. In this case, each student who has taken the previous test will be placed in appropriate classes based on their test results, without distinguishing between alumni and non-alumni as both exhibit equivalent potential in terms of test outcomes. Students are grouped according to their abilities, resulting in relatively homogenous classes. This is intended to ensure that there are no excessively advanced learners and rapid learners, nor students who are left behind.

Thus, it emphasizes the importance of providing equal opportunities for all individuals, regardless of whether they are alumni or non-alumni. In this context, the act of not discriminating between classes can be interpreted as a step to maintain equal opportunity among fellow students. Classification based on test results is carried out in order to assist teachers in developing a more appropriate and effective learning approach for each class.

However, in the dormitory arrangement, a separation is maintained between alumni and non-alumni students. This grouping is conducted with a specific objective to accommodate the fundamental distinctions between these two groups. Furthermore, it also responds to the needs of non-alumni students who must adapt to the routines and the new boarding school environment. This measure aids in providing more directed guidance for non-alumni students, enabling them to acclimate faster to the norms and regulations of the boarding school life. Considering that the boarding school life is heavily characterized by disciplined activities and regulations, this step becomes pivotal in facilitating a more directed approach towards non-alumni student mentorship.

As for foreign language learning at Islamic boarding schools, this grouping allows for more intensive monitoring and guidance for non-alumni students who are studying foreign

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23 Afaria, “Pengaruh Program Matrikulasi terhadap Kemampuan Berbahasa Arab Mahasiswa Baru Pendidikan Bahasa Arab.”
languages. Intensive guidance is conducted with the aim of facilitating rapid and efficient adaptation of new non-alumni students in the context of foreign language proficiency, particularly Arabic language. With this intensive mentoring, it is expected that the new non-alumni students will soon be able to equalize their abilities with other students.

From a sociolinguistic perspective, this entails the examination of the relationship between language and social factors such as groups, culture, and identity. Separation of new non-alumni students from old alumni students in foreign language learning, especially Arabic aims to maintain the integrity of the language environment that has been formed among old students and prevent influence from new students which illustrates efforts to maintain the dynamics of language communication in that environment. Through this approach, it is hoped that the Arabic language environment among alumni and non-alumni students can be maintained properly.

In the context of second language or foreign language acquisition, this matter is closely tied to the concept of "comprehensible input," which pertains to language that can be understood by learners. In this regard, the practice of grouping new non-alumni students into clusters with intensive guidance serves a fundamental purpose of providing language input tailored to their comprehension levels. By ensuring that the language input offered aligns with their abilities, the primary objective is to facilitate swift and efficient adaptation of new students to the acquired foreign language.

Adapted Instruction.

The implementation of Arabic language instruction for both alumni and non-alumni students follows a similar approach. Both groups engage in morning mufradat activities, daily muhadatsah sessions, receive uslub instruction, and undertake Arabic language murajaah in the evening. However, at the outset of the first semester, the learning process for non-alumni students commences with an introduction to fundamental mufradat related to school supplies such as pen, book, and desk. Teaching foreign language vocabulary may appear trivial, yet an instructor/teacher must adhere to specific principles to ensure the effectiveness and efficiency of their instruction.

There are important principles for selecting vocabulary when teaching Arabic vocabulary to speakers of other languages. These principles include: a) Frequency: It is preferable to choose words that are commonly used, as long as they fit the intended meaning. b) Distribution or Reach: It is better to choose words that are used in more than one Arab

29 Asih Riyanti, Teori belajar bahasa (Fidar Media, 2020).
country rather than being limited to one country only. c) Availability: It is recommended to choose words that are easy for individuals to find when needed, and provide specific meanings. d) Familiarity: It is better to choose words that are known by the individual than words that are rarely used. e) Inclusiveness: It is better to choose words that cover various fields at once rather than serving only certain fields. For example, it is more correct to use the word "home" than the word "place to live," although there are subtle differences between the two. f) Relevance: It is recommended to choose words that suit individual learning needs, not just general words that may not be needed or only needed in certain contexts. g) Arabic: It is better to choose words in Arabic than using words from other languages.

Alumni students will engage in *mufradat* or conversational exercises in Arabic simultaneously. Meanwhile, non-alumni students will initially focus on *mufradat* or vocabulary learning after the Fajr prayer. This initiative aims to facilitate a more comprehensive orientation and foundational introduction of basic vocabularies to new students. Proficiency in vocabulary acquisition plays a pivotal role in the Arabic language instructional process, where adaptability in mastering vocabulary serves as a fundamental cornerstone for effective Arabic language learning. A broad vocabulary mastery combined with a sound understanding of Arabic grammatical principles significantly aids Arabic language learners in articulating ideas accurately. Furthermore, an extensive vocabulary proficiency substantially contributes to reading and writing Arabic texts, which frequently comprise fundamental terms. Nevertheless, when several students encounter challenges in Arabic language learning, particularly in comprehending vocabulary, this may pose an impediment to both text comprehension and communicative competence. After this intensive training for three months, non-alumni students will participate in *mufradat* activities every morning after the morning prayer with other students.

In imparting vocabulary to non-alumni students, a method of variation is employed, including the incorporation of songs to facilitate memorization. The utilization of songs in teaching vocabulary, this may pose an impediment to both text comprehension and communicative competence.


teaching vocabulary has indeed proven to be effective and engaging for the students. There are songs that are changed to suit, and there are also songs that use rhythms that students are familiar with, such as children's songs. However, even so, the approach of using songs in learning has limitations. This is caused by not always matching all the vocabulary that students want or need to learn to be integrated into the existing song lyrics. At the Al-Hasyimiah Islamic boarding school itself, this approach is carried out once a week as a variation in learning.

Every vocabulary that has been taught to non-alumni students is expected to be applied in Arabic when communicating with their friends. The students are encouraged to continuously apply the Arabic language they have learned in their daily life at the dormitory. The objective of this is to enhance the Arabic language proficiency of the students. Through the utilization of the Arabic language in communication, it is anticipated that the Arabic linguistic environment can be effectively preserved. A peer-guidance approach is also implemented, for instance, in aiding and reminding peers facing challenges in applying the taught vocabulary. To facilitate this, collaborative learning models are also recommended for implementation.

**Mentor/Musyrif Placement**

In addition to curriculum adjustments, the placement of mentors for both alumni and non-alumni students involves distinct approaches at the al-Hasyimiah Darul Ulum Islamic Boarding School. The selection of mentors is carried out by considering criteria whereby a mentor must possess the ability to guide new non-alumni students. In the process of teaching, a teacher should at the very least possess an understanding and capability to apply fundamental classroom teaching skills. For non-alumni students, direct supervision is conducted by the boarding school's language division. The purpose is to reinforce the strategies of the language division, aiming to align the Arabic language proficiency of alumni and non-alumni students. On the other hand, for alumni students, supervision is undertaken by a senior student who also holds a position within the school's organizational structure.

The differing approaches for alumni and non-alumni students reflect the concept of differentiated learning theory. This theory emphasizes the significance of tailoring teaching

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methods, materials, and supervisory approaches according to the needs and characteristics of individual learners. In this case, alumni and non-alumni students have different needs and levels of ability in understanding Arabic. Therefore, different approaches are used to ensure that they receive appropriate support for the development of their language skills.

Direct supervision by the language division of the dormitory and the application of strategies from the language division reflect the principles of social learning theory. In the context of musyrif placement for alumni and non-alumni students, social learning theory can play a role in explaining why different approaches are used. Non-alumni students can learn through observing and interacting with their musyrifah, who helps them acquire Arabic skills by watching and following examples. This direct interaction allows for the effective transfer of knowledge and language skills. Based on the statement above, it is clear that the Al-Hasyimiah Darul Ulum Modern Islamic Boarding School strives to create a learning environment that supports the academic and social growth of students through adjusting learning strategies and supervision according to the characteristics and ability levels of individual students.

**Rigorous Evaluation**

The language division has set a goal to facilitate non-alumni students in achieving proficiency in Arabic within a three-month timeframe. To attain this objective, the language division will conduct monthly evaluations by administering mufradat tests. Students who attain the highest scores will be recognized and awarded by the language division.

When viewed from the perspective of learning theories, this corresponds to the Outcome-Based Learning Theory, which emphasizes the significance of setting specific and measurable learning objectives, along with assessing the attainment of outcomes based on predetermined criteria. In the context of the aforementioned statement, the language division of the Islamic Boarding School has a distinct objective, which is to enable non-alumni students to attain proficiency in the Arabic language within a three-month period. Additionally, the significance lies in assessing the achievement outcomes based on predetermined criteria. Hence, it can be comprehended that the monthly evaluations conducted through mufradat tests serve as criteria employed to gauge the extent of students' progress in mastering the Arabic language. Subsequently, the recognition accorded to students attaining the highest scores in these assessments reflects an acknowledgment of

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42 Afaria, “Pengaruh Program Matrikulasi terhadap Kemampuan Berbahasa Arab Mahasiswa Baru Pendidikan Bahasa Arab.”


44 Astuti, Setyawan, dan Aji, “Penerapan Biah Lughawiyah dalam Pembiasaan Maharah Kalam di Pondok Pesantren Ibnul Qayyim Putra Yogyakarta.”


desired outcomes achieved. These accolades further function as additional motivation to enhance students' learning endeavors.

Moreover, continuous monitoring and surveillance constitute a form of assessment. The perpetual monitoring and oversight of students carried out by the language Division of the institution exemplify an effort to maintain control over students' conduct. Any student found in breach of regulations is directed to the mahkamah (a group of offending students), subsequently overseen by the language Division for guidance, encompassing counsel, motivation, and other punitive measures. This underscores the significance of imposing sanctions as responses to rule violations. This assertion portrays that in cases of rule transgressions, students are placed within the mahkamah, indicating measures of social control aimed at amending their behaviors. Equally pivotal, guidance and counsel constitute strategies to steer individuals back to desired norms.

The dormitory head also plays a role in reporting students who often violate language to the language division. For students who often commit violations, the language division will provide guidance in the form of advice, motivation and other sanctions. The sanctions applied depend on the status of the students, whether they are alumni or non-alumni. During the first three months, sanctions in the form of reprimands and assignments to memorize mufradat were only imposed on new non-alumni students because they were still in the equalization stage. For example, if a non-alumni santri violates the language rules, they will be asked to find and memorize 20 new mufradat. However, after three months, the same sanctions will apply to all students, both alumni and non-alumni.

The adjustment of sanctions for alumni and non-alumni students is one of the equalization strategies applied to support varying approaches based on the students' status and learning stages. This reflects the notion that learning tailors responses to the students' abilities and learning phases. When applying sanctions, it is essential to consider the severity of the violation and the circumstances of the violator, where alumni offenders and non-alumni offenders within the matriculation phase should receive distinct penalties.

Conclusion

Based on the results of the research presented by the researchers, it shows that the Al-Hasyimiyyah Darul Ulum Sipaho Islamic Boarding School applies a variety of strategies starting from the stage of accepting new prospective students to evaluating learning in an effort to equalize Arabic language skills between old alumni students and new non-alumni.

51 Karmilawati Karmilawati, “PENERAPAN METODE PEMBELAJARAN REWARD AND PUNISHMENT DALAM KETERAMPILAN BERBICARA BAHASA JERMAN SISWA KELAS XII SMA NEGERI 11 MAKASSAR” (Universitas Negeri Makassar, 2020).
52 Iskandar, Khusniyah, dan Anam, “Relevansi Reward dan Punishment dalam Proses Pembelajaran.”
54 Dama, “STRATEGI PEMBELAJARAN BAHASA ARAB MELALUI KEGIATAN BI’AH LUGHAWIYYAH SEBAGAI PENINGKATAN MAHARAH ALKALAM SISWA DI MADRASAH ALIYAH AL-FALAH GORONTALO.”
students. This strategy involves grouping students, applying continuous evaluation, and giving different sanctions and guidance to alumni and non-alumni students.

In the initial stages, grouping students becomes an important tool to facilitate learning that is appropriate to the level of ability and experience of each group. This approach allows for more precise language input and intensive monitoring, which supports the efficient adaptation of new students. The application of monthly evaluations and mufradat tests provides an objective measure of the student’s learning progress, as well as provides a basis for the introduction of sanctions and guidance. Then, the different approaches in providing sanctions and mentoring between alumni and non-alumni students show a deep understanding of the different characteristics and learning needs of the two groups. Giving sanctions of reprimand and the task of memorizing mufradat to new non-alumni students aims to form a strong basis for understanding Arabic. Meanwhile, giving supervisory responsibility to senior santri for alumni students shows a social learning approach that can motivate and set a positive example for them.

Overall, the results of the study illustrate that the strategies applied at Al-Hasyimiyah Darul Ulum Sipaho Islamic Boarding School are compatible with the theory of second language learning, socialization, and social control. This indicates that the approach adopted by this Islamic boarding school has succeeded in forming an effective learning environment, supporting the academic and social growth of students, and encouraging the development of sustainable Arabic language skills.

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