



Curriculum Enhancement and Language Assessment in Pesantren: Examining Arabic Oral and Written Tests at Pondok Modern Darussalam Gontor Putri Campus 1

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Abstract:

This study examines the implementation of Arabic oral and written examinations and their contribution to curriculum enhancement at Pondok Modern Darussalam Gontor Putri Kampus 1. Using a qualitative case study approach, data were collected through observations, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis involving Arabic teachers, curriculum coordinators, language supervisors, and students. The findings reveal that oral and written assessments function not only as evaluative instruments but also as strategic mechanisms for strengthening communicative competence, academic literacy, language discipline, and institutional language culture. Oral examinations reinforce students' speaking fluency, confidence, and spontaneous communication skills through authentic interaction, while written examinations develop grammatical mastery, reading comprehension, analytical thinking, and academic writing proficiency. Furthermore, assessment outcomes are systematically utilized as feedback for curriculum refinement, instructional improvement, vocabulary reinforcement, and extracurricular language programs. The study demonstrates that Arabic language assessment in pesantren education reflects a holistic and competency-based curriculum model integrating cognitive, communicative, and behavioral dimensions of language learning. This research contributes theoretically to the discourse of Arabic language assessment and practically offers implications for developing authentic, integrative, and sustainable assessment systems in Islamic educational institutions.

INTRODUCTION

Arabic language learning in Islamic boarding schools (pesantren) occupies a strategic position not only as a linguistic competence but also as a medium for understanding Islamic sciences and constructing students' intellectual identity. In modern pesantren education, Arabic is no longer taught merely as a religious language; rather, it has become an instrument of communication, academic interaction, and institutional culture. Consequently, curriculum development in Arabic language education requires comprehensive assessment practices capable of measuring students' linguistic achievement holistically, both in

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receptive and productive skills. Recent studies indicate that Arabic language curriculum transformation in pesantren has shifted toward integrative and competency-based approaches that combine Islamic values, communicative competence, and contemporary educational standards (Hanifa & Ali, 2025).

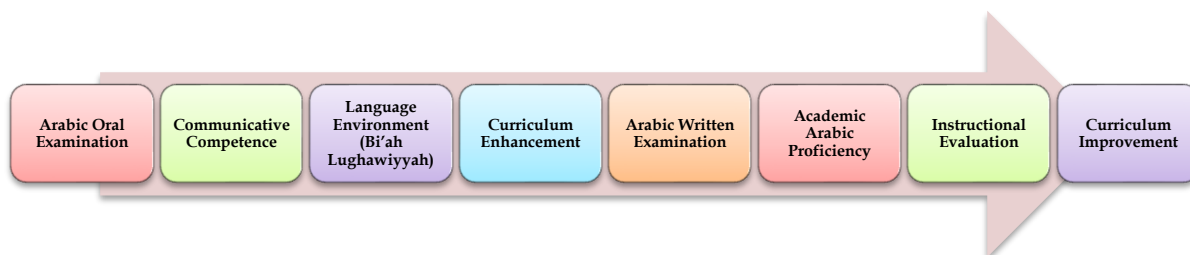
Assessment constitutes one of the central components in curriculum development because it functions not merely as a tool for measuring learning outcomes but also as an instrument for improving instructional quality and educational policy. In language education, assessment practices significantly influence curriculum orientation, teaching strategies, classroom interaction, and students' language performance. Fernández-Ruiz, Panadero, and García-Pérez (2021) emphasize that assessment should be integrated into the instructional process to support meaningful learning and curriculum refinement. Similarly, Rao and Banerjee (2023) argue that contemporary assessment systems must encourage higher-order thinking skills, communicative competence, and authentic performance evaluation. Within Arabic language education, recent scholarship has highlighted the urgency of developing assessment systems aligned with international frameworks such as CEFR and ACTFL to strengthen linguistic proficiency and curriculum effectiveness (Mahmudi et al., 2024).

In the context of pesantren, oral and written examinations represent two dominant forms of Arabic language assessment. Oral examinations (*ikhtibār syafahī*) are generally designed to evaluate pronunciation, fluency, vocabulary mastery, grammatical accuracy, and communicative interaction, while written examinations (*ikhtibār tahrīrī*) assess reading comprehension, writing ability, grammatical understanding, and analytical thinking. Several recent studies demonstrate that balanced integration between oral and written assessments contributes significantly to students' Arabic proficiency and supports the creation of a sustainable language environment (*bi'ah lughawiyah*). Research on Arabic assessment practices also reveals that pesantren institutions increasingly adopt innovative and standardized testing models to improve learning quality and curriculum relevance (Pangestika et al., 2024; Haq & Anwar, 2024).

As one of the leading modern pesantren institutions in Indonesia, Pondok Modern Darussalam Gontor Putri Kampus 1 implements a structured Arabic language curriculum supported by intensive oral and written examination systems. These assessments are not solely intended to determine students' academic achievement but also to reinforce daily language discipline, strengthen communicative competence, and maintain the institutional language culture. The integration of language assessment into curricular and extracurricular activities reflects the pesantren's commitment to creating an immersive Arabic learning ecosystem. However, despite the centrality of assessment in pesantren education, studies specifically examining how oral and written Arabic tests contribute to curriculum enhancement within modern pesantren contexts remain limited. Most previous studies focus either on classroom instruction, textbook analysis, or isolated language testing techniques rather than exploring the broader relationship between assessment systems and curriculum development.

Therefore, this study seeks to examine the implementation of Arabic oral and written examinations at Pondok Modern Darussalam Gontor Putri Kampus 1 and analyze their contribution to curriculum enhancement and students' language proficiency development. This research is expected to contribute theoretically to the discourse of Arabic language assessment in Islamic educational institutions and practically to the development of assessment-based curriculum models in pesantren education. Furthermore, the findings may provide insights for Arabic language educators and curriculum developers in designing more integrative, communicative, and competency-oriented assessment systems.

Figure 1. Research Framework of Arabic Assessment and Curriculum Enhancement



RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a qualitative case study design to explore the implementation of Arabic oral and written examinations and their contribution to curriculum enhancement at Pondok Modern Darussalam Gontor Putri Campus 1. A qualitative approach was chosen because this research aimed to understand educational practices, assessment processes, institutional culture, and participants' experiences within their natural setting. According to Creswell and Poth (2024), qualitative case studies are appropriate for investigating complex educational phenomena through in-depth exploration of bounded systems and contextual interpretation. Similarly, Yin (2023) argues that case study research is particularly relevant when researchers seek to analyze contemporary educational practices embedded within real-life institutional contexts.

The research site was selected purposively because PMDG Putri Campus 1 is recognized as one of the prominent modern Islamic boarding schools in Indonesia that consistently implements Arabic language policies through structured oral (*ikhtibār syafahī*) and written (*ikhtibār tahīrī*) examination systems. The participants of this study consisted of Arabic language teachers, curriculum coordinators, language supervisors, and selected students involved in the assessment process. Participant selection employed purposive sampling to ensure that the informants possessed direct experience and comprehensive understanding regarding Arabic language assessment practices. Campbell et al. (2020) explain that purposive sampling enables researchers to obtain rich and relevant information aligned with the objectives of qualitative inquiry.

Data were collected through classroom and examination observations, semi-structured interviews, and documentation analysis. Observation techniques were used to examine the implementation of oral and written examinations, classroom interactions, students' participation, and language discipline during assessment activities. Semi-structured interviews allowed participants to explain their perspectives concerning the objectives, procedures, challenges, and impacts of the assessment system on Arabic language learning and curriculum development. Meanwhile, documentation analysis involved curriculum documents, examination guidelines, students' assessment records, language regulations, and institutional reports related to Arabic language programs. The use of multiple data collection techniques aimed to strengthen data credibility through methodological triangulation (Merriam & Tisdell, 2021).

Table 1. Research Participants and Their Roles

No.	Participants	Number of Participants	Roles in the Study	Participant Codes
1	Arabic Language Teachers	4	Implementing oral and written Arabic assessments, providing information regarding teaching strategies and evaluation practices	T1-T4
2	Curriculum Coordinators	2	Explaining curriculum planning, assessment integration, and curriculum enhancement policies	C1-C2

3	Language Supervisors	2	Monitoring language discipline, supervising bi'ah lughawiyah, and coordinating language programs	L1-L2
4	Students (Santriwati)	6	Participating in oral and written examinations and sharing learning experiences	S1-S6
5	Dormitory Language Administrators	2	Supporting extracurricular language activities and daily Arabic communication programs	D1-D2

*Source: Research Data Processed by Author (2024).

The collected data were analyzed using the interactive model proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2020), which consists of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing or verification. In the first stage, the researcher organized and reduced the data by selecting relevant information related to Arabic assessment practices and curriculum enhancement. In the second stage, the data were systematically displayed in the form of thematic categories and descriptive narratives to facilitate interpretation. Finally, conclusions were drawn continuously throughout the research process by identifying patterns, relationships, and meanings emerging from the data. This analytical model enabled the researcher to interpret how oral and written examinations contribute to strengthening Arabic language competence and curriculum implementation in pesantren education.

To ensure the trustworthiness of the study, the researcher applied credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability procedures as suggested by Lincoln, Lynham, and Guba (2021). Credibility was maintained through triangulation of data sources and techniques, prolonged engagement in the field, and member checking with selected participants. Transferability was achieved by providing detailed contextual descriptions of the research setting and participants. Dependability and confirmability were strengthened through audit trails, documentation of research procedures, and reflective field notes throughout the investigation process.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

RESULTS

Integration of Oral and Written Assessments into the Arabic Language Curriculum

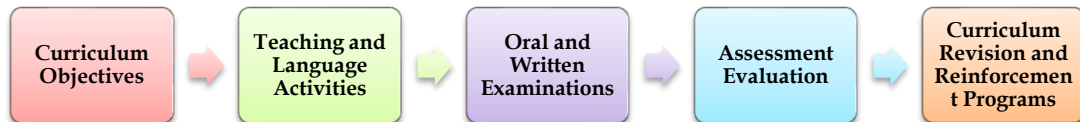
The findings reveal that Arabic oral and written examinations at Pondok Modern Darussalam Gontor Putri Campus 1 are systematically integrated into the institutional curriculum framework. The assessment system does not merely function as a mechanism for measuring students' achievement but also serves as a strategic instrument for strengthening language discipline, communicative competence, and curriculum implementation. Oral examinations (ikhtibār syafahī) primarily evaluate students' speaking fluency, pronunciation accuracy, vocabulary mastery, and spontaneous communicative responses, while written examinations (ikhtibār tahrīrī) focus on grammatical understanding, reading comprehension, writing proficiency, and analytical reasoning.

Based on classroom observations and curriculum document analysis, both assessment forms are conducted periodically and are embedded within academic and extracurricular language activities. Arabic is positioned not only as a subject of instruction but also as an institutional language culture maintained through continuous assessment practices. This finding indicates that assessment in pesantren operates simultaneously as evaluation, reinforcement, and habituation. Such integration reflects the transformation of Arabic curriculum models in Indonesian pesantren toward competency-based and communicative approaches

(Hanifa & Ali, 2025).

Interviews with curriculum coordinators further demonstrate that oral and written examinations are intentionally designed to maintain consistency between curricular objectives and students' daily language practices. One language supervisor explained that the assessment system aims to ensure that students are able to use Arabic actively within both formal learning contexts and informal dormitory interactions. This finding supports previous studies emphasizing that language immersion and continuous language exposure significantly contribute to productive Arabic skills development in pesantren environments (Fauzah et al., 2025).

Figure 2. Implementation Process of Arabic Assessment in PMDG Putri Campus



Oral Examinations as Reinforcement of Communicative Competence

The study found that oral examinations play a dominant role in reinforcing students' communicative competence and language confidence. During oral tests, students were required to answer questions directly in Arabic, perform dialogues, explain specific topics, and respond spontaneously to examiners' instructions. These activities encourage students to develop fluency, listening comprehension, articulation, and interactional competence simultaneously.





Observation data indicate that oral examinations create an immersive linguistic environment where students are compelled to think and communicate in Arabic rather than relying on translation-based responses. This assessment model strengthens active language acquisition through repetitive exposure and immediate interaction. Several students stated during interviews that oral examinations motivated them to intensify vocabulary memorization and daily Arabic conversations because speaking performance directly affected their academic evaluation.

The findings align with recent research demonstrating that communicative and immersion-based Arabic learning environments positively influence speaking proficiency and language acquisition among pesantren students (Hamid et al., 2024). Furthermore, the integration of oral performance assessment reflects current trends in Arabic language education emphasizing authentic assessment and communicative-oriented pedagogy rather than solely grammar-centered evaluation (Iqbal et al., 2024).

Another important finding is that oral examinations contribute to the formation of students' language discipline and psychological readiness to use Arabic publicly. Teachers reported that students gradually developed greater confidence and spontaneity in communication due to regular oral assessment practices. This suggests that assessment functions not only cognitively but also affectively in shaping students' linguistic identity within the pesantren ecosystem.

Table 2. Components of Arabic Oral and Written Examinations

Assessment Type	Main Objectives	Skills Assessed	Assessment Components	Assessment Activities	Expected Learning Outcomes
Oral Examination (Ikhtibār Syafahī)	Strengthening communicative competence and active language use	Speaking, listening, pronunciation, fluency, vocabulary mastery	Pronunciation accuracy, spontaneous response, dialogue performance, speaking confidence	Direct questioning, conversation practice, dialogue performance, oral presentation	Students are able to communicate actively and confidently in Arabic within academic and daily

Written Examination (Ikhtibār Tahīrī)	Developing academic Arabic proficiency and analytical understanding	Grammar, reading comprehension, writing, text analysis, translation	Nahwu and sharaf mastery, sentence construction, essay writing, text interpretation	Written tests, essay composition, grammatical exercises, reading analysis, translation tasks	contexts Students demonstrate accurate grammatical understanding, academic literacy, and analytical language skills
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*Source: Research Data Processed by Author (2026)

Written Examinations and the Development of Academic Arabic Proficiency

In addition to oral assessment, written examinations were found to play a crucial role in strengthening students' academic Arabic competence. Written tests assess students' mastery of nahwu, sharaf, reading comprehension, translation, sentence construction, and Arabic composition skills. The examination materials are closely aligned with curricular targets and emphasize both linguistic accuracy and analytical understanding.

Document analysis showed that written examinations are structured progressively according to students' educational levels. Lower-grade students focus more on vocabulary recognition and basic grammatical structures, while advanced students are required to analyze Arabic texts, compose essays, and apply grammatical concepts contextually. This staged assessment system indicates a spiral and developmental curriculum model consistent with contemporary Arabic curriculum integration in pesantren education (Bakiruddin et al., 2024).

Teachers explained that written examinations are designed not only to evaluate memorization but also to measure students' critical understanding of language structures and textual interpretation. Such findings correspond with recent studies highlighting the importance of higher-order thinking skills (HOTS) and analytical writing assessment in Arabic language education (Muslimah et al., 2025).

The study also identified that written assessments contribute significantly to curriculum refinement because examination results are continuously evaluated by teachers and curriculum coordinators. Weaknesses identified through examination outcomes become the basis for revising teaching strategies, instructional materials, and language reinforcement programs. Therefore, assessment functions as a feedback mechanism for sustainable curriculum improvement rather than solely as a grading instrument.

Assessment as a Mechanism for Curriculum Enhancement in Pesantren

One of the central findings of this study is that Arabic language assessment at PMDG Putri Campus 1 functions as an institutional mechanism for curriculum enhancement. The assessment system creates reciprocal relationships between learning objectives, teaching implementation, language discipline, and curriculum evaluation. Examination results are regularly discussed in teacher coordination meetings to identify students' linguistic weaknesses and determine follow-up language programs.

The curriculum coordinators emphasized that assessment outcomes influence decisions regarding vocabulary enrichment programs, language mentoring, remedial instruction, and extracurricular Arabic activities. Consequently, the curriculum remains dynamic and adaptive to students' actual linguistic conditions. This finding reinforces previous scholarship suggesting that effective assessment systems contribute substantially to curriculum quality assurance and educational innovation (Hanifa & Ali, 2025).

Moreover, the integration of oral and written examinations reflects a holistic assessment paradigm combining cognitive, communicative, and behavioral dimensions of language learning. Such an approach corresponds with current global trends in language education that prioritize authentic assessment, competency-based evaluation, and contextual learning environments. In the pesantren context, this holistic assessment model simultaneously strengthens institutional language culture and students' academic achievement.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that Arabic oral and written examinations at PMDG Putri Campus 1 are not merely evaluative tools but integral components of curriculum development and language ecosystem maintenance. The assessment system contributes to improving communicative competence, academic literacy, language discipline, and institutional curriculum sustainability within modern pesantren education.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study demonstrate that Arabic oral and written examinations at Pondok Modern Darussalam Gontor Putri Kampus 1 function beyond conventional assessment practices and operate as strategic instruments for curriculum enhancement, language habituation, and institutional culture formation. This indicates that assessment within pesantren education is not merely outcome-oriented but deeply integrated into the broader ecosystem of language learning and character development. The integration of oral and written assessment into curricular and extracurricular activities reflects a holistic educational paradigm in which evaluation, instruction, and language discipline mutually reinforce one another. Such findings support the argument that effective language assessment should become an integral part of curriculum implementation rather than a separate administrative activity (Rao & Banerjee, 2023).

One significant finding concerns the dominant role of oral examinations in strengthening students' communicative competence and linguistic confidence. The oral assessment system implemented at PMDG Putri Campus 1 encourages students to actively produce language in authentic communicative situations through direct interaction, spontaneous responses, and contextual dialogue practices. This finding aligns with communicative language teaching (CLT) theory, which emphasizes meaningful interaction and language use as the foundation of language acquisition. Contemporary studies in Arabic language pedagogy similarly emphasize that communicative and immersive language environments significantly improve students' productive skills and speaking fluency (Hamid et al., 2024). The present study extends these findings by demonstrating that oral assessment itself can function as a mechanism for sustaining the *bi'ah lughawiyah* (language environment) in pesantren institutions.

Moreover, the implementation of oral examinations reflects the principles of authentic assessment, where students' real communicative abilities are evaluated through performance-based activities rather than memorization-oriented testing. In this context, assessment becomes a pedagogical strategy that shapes students' language behavior and interactional competence. This finding corresponds with Mahmudi et al. (2024), who argue that Arabic language assessment should prioritize communicative performance and contextual language use in order to align with contemporary international proficiency frameworks such as ACTFL and CEFR. Therefore, the oral examination model at PMDG Putri Campus 1 can be interpreted as a localized adaptation of global communicative assessment practices within pesantren education.

Table 3. The Contribution of Assessment to Curriculum Enhancement

Assessment Findings	Identified Problems	Institutional Response	Curriculum Enhancement Impact
Limited vocabulary mastery among	Students experienced difficulties in	Intensive vocabulary enrichment	Improved students' speaking fluency and active

students	spontaneous Arabic communication	programs and daily mufradāt activities	vocabulary usage
Weak grammatical accuracy in written examinations	Frequent errors in nahwu and sharaf application	Additional grammar reinforcement sessions and guided writing exercises	Stronger academic writing competence and grammatical understanding
Low confidence in oral communication	Some students were hesitant to speak Arabic publicly	Increased oral practice sessions, muhādathah programs, and language mentoring	Enhanced communicative confidence and speaking participation
Difficulties in reading Arabic texts	Limited comprehension of academic Arabic materials	Guided reading activities and structured text analysis programs	Improved reading comprehension and analytical literacy
Inconsistent use of Arabic outside the classroom	Students occasionally reverted to their native language in dormitory interactions	Strengthening language supervision and bi'ah lughawiyah regulations	More sustainable institutional Arabic language environment
Variation in students' language proficiency levels	Different educational backgrounds affected learning achievement	Remedial instruction and differentiated language support programs	More adaptive and inclusive curriculum implementation
Assessment results indicating learning gaps	Curriculum targets were not fully achieved in certain competencies	Periodic curriculum evaluation meetings and instructional revisions	Continuous curriculum improvement and better learning alignment

*Source: Research Data Processed by Author (2024).

At the same time, written examinations were found to contribute substantially to the development of students' academic Arabic proficiency. Unlike oral assessments that emphasize fluency and interaction, written examinations focus on grammatical accuracy, reading comprehension, text analysis, and academic writing skills. This balance between communicative and analytical competence reflects a comprehensive language curriculum model that integrates linguistic performance with cognitive mastery. The findings reinforce previous research suggesting that Arabic language learning in pesantren increasingly combines traditional grammatical approaches with modern competency-based curriculum frameworks (Mukminin et al., 2024).

The study also reveals that written examinations function as an institutional feedback mechanism for curriculum refinement. Examination outcomes are continuously evaluated by curriculum coordinators and teachers to identify learning gaps, instructional weaknesses, and students' linguistic difficulties. As a result, assessment data influence subsequent decisions regarding teaching strategies, remedial programs, vocabulary reinforcement, and extracurricular language activities. This finding supports assessment-for-learning theory, which views assessment as a formative process contributing to sustainable curriculum development and educational improvement (Fernández-Ruiz et al., 2021). Consequently, assessment at PMDG Putri Campus 1 operates not only as measurement but also as a dynamic tool for curriculum quality assurance.

Another important aspect identified in this study is the interconnected relationship between assessment and institutional language culture. In the pesantren context, language learning is inseparable from daily social interaction, dormitory discipline, and collective educational values. The oral and written

examination systems indirectly reinforce students' commitment to maintaining Arabic communication beyond classroom settings. This finding indicates that assessment contributes to constructing students' linguistic identity and institutional belonging. Such a perspective expands the understanding of language assessment from a purely academic practice into a socio-cultural process embedded within educational traditions and institutional norms.

From a broader educational perspective, the findings of this study highlight the relevance of integrating authentic, communicative, and competency-based assessment models into Islamic educational institutions. The assessment system implemented at PMDG Putri Campus 1 demonstrates that pesantren education is capable of adapting modern educational principles while preserving its traditional linguistic and religious identity. This integration challenges the common assumption that pesantren curricula are exclusively traditional and resistant to pedagogical innovation. Instead, the study confirms that pesantren institutions possess adaptive curriculum mechanisms capable of responding to contemporary educational demands and global language assessment trends.

Nevertheless, this study also identified several challenges within the implementation of Arabic oral and written assessments. Some teachers reported limitations related to time allocation, assessment standardization, and students' varying linguistic backgrounds. Oral examinations, in particular, require intensive supervision, detailed scoring rubrics, and substantial institutional commitment to maintain assessment consistency. Similar challenges have been identified in recent studies concerning Arabic language evaluation in Islamic educational institutions, especially regarding reliability, assessment objectivity, and alignment between curricular goals and testing instruments (Pangestika et al., 2024). These findings suggest the importance of developing more standardized and technology-supported Arabic assessment systems in pesantren contexts.

Overall, this study contributes to the growing discourse on Arabic language assessment, curriculum development, and Islamic education by demonstrating that oral and written examinations can serve simultaneously as evaluative instruments, pedagogical strategies, and curriculum enhancement mechanisms. The findings provide empirical evidence that assessment-centered curriculum models are effective in strengthening communicative competence, academic literacy, and institutional language culture within modern pesantren education. Furthermore, this study offers practical implications for Arabic educators, curriculum developers, and Islamic educational institutions seeking to design more integrative, authentic, and sustainable language assessment systems.

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