Optimizing the Role of the Language Court in Developing Students' Arabic Speaking Skills: A Case Study at MTsS Nurul Falah Meulaboh

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Abstract: This study examines the role of the Language Court in improving students' Arabic speaking skills at MTsS Nurul Falah Meulaboh. Using a qualitative descriptive case study approach, data were collected through interviews and document analysis to explore the pedagogical benefits and potential drawbacks of this institutional practice. The results indicate that the Language Court has three main functions: organizing individual and group language activities, implementing gradual sanctions for violations of language usage rules, and enriching the language environment through structured programs. This system has been shown to foster discipline and provide consistent speaking practice opportunities, but certain forms of punishment, particularly physical or psychological ones, have the potential to negatively impact student well-being. This study recommends a balanced approach between discipline and motivational support to ensure the goal of improving speaking skills is achieved without neglecting student well-being.

Keywords: Language Court, Arabic Speaking Skills, Language Policy.

INTRODUCTION

Arabic holds a very special position in Islamic education. As the revealed language that serves as a medium for the holy book, the Qur'an, it plays a crucial role not only in religious rituals but also in the development of Islamic sciences (Al-Attas, 1991; Azra, 2014). Furthermore, Arabic is also recognized as one of the official languages of the United Nations, thus holding a strategic position as a language of international communication (United Nations, 2023). Given this broad scope, mastery of Arabic, particularly speaking skills (maharah al-kalam), is a crucial goal in the curriculum of madrasas, Islamic boarding schools, and other Islamic educational institutions (Mahmud, 2018).

Arabic speaking skills extend beyond the ability to pronounce words or memorize vocabulary; they also encompass the fluency in conveying ideas, opinions, and feelings clearly and precisely. This ability is a crucial indicator of successful Arabic language learning, as speaking is a productive skill that requires mastery of vocabulary, language structure, correct pronunciation, and confidence in communication (Brown, 2007; Al-Khuli, 2000). In Arabic language education, various strategies have been developed to foster and strengthen students' speaking skills. One innovation widely implemented in Islamic educational institutions is the establishment of a Language Court. This institution is designed as an internal authority tasked with enforcing Arabic language policy within schools or Islamic boarding schools (Rahman, 2020). Its duties extend beyond overseeing

language use to organizing structured language development programs, including speech competitions, debates, conversation practice, and other immersive activities (Suryadi, 2017).

According to Jubaidah (2015), the Language Court is an internal institution under the auspices of the language department and serves as the authority in enforcing the target language policy within educational settings. This institution is not only tasked with overseeing student interactions to ensure consistent use of Arabic in daily conversation, but also plays a role in evaluating and imposing sanctions for language rule violations. The Language Court's primary goal is to create an immersive learning environment, where all students are encouraged to communicate continuously in the target language. This strategy is expected to foster language habits that extend beyond the classroom and encompass all students' daily activities, making the language acquisition process more natural and effective.

Arabic speaking skills require mastery of several key aspects, from adequate vocabulary and correct sentence structure to proper pronunciation and the confidence to express oneself in various communication situations. According to Al-Tamimi (2017), intensive language exposure through continuous interaction and targeted speaking practice is key to accelerating the process of mastering speaking skills. In other words, the more frequently a student is exposed to Arabic in real-life situations, whether through everyday conversation, dialogue exercises, or academic activities, the greater their chances of achieving fluency. Therefore, Arabic language learning that focuses on the teachings of the Arabic language (maharah al-kalam) must be designed in such a way that students not only master the theory but also are able to use it practically in communication.

In the context of discipline and learning motivation, sanctions in education can indeed function as a behavioral control tool to foster compliance with rules. However, their application must be carried out carefully and proportionally to avoid negative impacts on students' psychological development. Rahman (2020) emphasized that physical punishment or public humiliation of students has the potential to reduce intrinsic motivation and even create resistance to the learning process. If this occurs, the primary goal of education, which is to create a pleasant, safe learning environment that supports the development of students' potential, will be undermined. Therefore, it is important for educational institutions to balance the implementation of strict rules with the provision of constructive motivation. In this way, the Language Court can function optimally as a pedagogical tool that instills discipline without compromising students' psychological well-being (Rahman, 2020).

MTsS Nurul Falah Meulaboh is one example of an educational institution that intensively implements the Language Court. At this madrasah, the Language Court has a set of strict regulations governing the use of Arabic in daily interactions, both in the classroom and in the classroom.

METHODS

This research uses a qualitative descriptive approach with a case study design. This approach was chosen because it provides an in-depth understanding of the social and educational phenomenon being studied, namely the Language Court at MTsS Nurul Falah Meulaboh. According to Yin (2018), qualitative case studies allow researchers to explore an event or program in a real-life context, considering multiple perspectives. This approach is relevant because the focus of the research is to explore the meaning, role, benefits, and challenges of the Language Court as perceived by participants, rather than simply measuring quantitative variables. This aligns with Creswell and Poth's (2018) view that qualitative research is more appropriate for understanding individual and group experiences in depth, allowing researchers to construct rich and contextual interpretations.

The study participants consisted of the Language Court supervisor, the head of the Arabic language department, and several students actively participating in the language program. Participant selection was carried out using a purposive sampling technique, selecting informants deemed to have the best understanding of the phenomenon being studied (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014). The research location was MTsS Nurul Falah Meulaboh, an Islamic educational institution with an intensive language program, particularly the implementation of the Language Court as an instrument to improve students' Arabic language skills. This location was chosen because the implementation of the Language Court at the madrasah is quite systematic and a unique practice worthy of further study.

The research data was obtained through several primary techniques. First, semi-structured interviews were conducted with administrators, supervisors, and students. This technique allowed researchers to ask flexible, open-ended questions while also providing space for informants to explain their views in depth (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015). Second, participant observation was used to directly observe the use of Arabic and the implementation of sanctions by the Language Court within the madrasah. This observation was crucial for obtaining factual data to support the interview results (Spradley, 2016). Third, document analysis was conducted on various language regulations, handbooks, and records of language violations issued by the Language Court. These documents served as secondary data that helped validate the information from the interviews and observations (Bowen, 2009).

The data analysis was conducted using a thematic approach. According to Braun and Clarke (2006), thematic analysis is an effective method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns or themes in qualitative data. The analysis process begins with repeated reading of interview data, observation notes, and documents, followed by coding to identify key themes related to the role, benefits, and risks of implementing the Language Court. These themes are then organized into larger categories to provide a comprehensive overview of the phenomenon being studied. To enhance the validity of the findings, the researchers also used data source triangulation techniques by comparing the results of interviews, observations, and documents (Patton, 2015). In this way, the research is expected to produce valid, reliable, and meaningful interpretations in explaining how the Language Court plays a role in the Arabic language learning process at MTsS Nurul Falah Meulaboh.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

As part of the research findings, this discussion focuses on the role, benefits, and challenges of the Language Court in supporting Arabic language learning at MTsS Nurul Falah Meulaboh. The Language Court is positioned as a strategic instrument that not only regulates language use within the madrasah environment but also fosters language habits through structured activities, consistent discipline, and educational mentoring. Research findings indicate that this mechanism significantly contributes to students' speaking skills, although on the other hand, there are still obstacles related to the form of sanctions and disciplinary approaches that need to be adjusted to be more humane. Therefore, the following analysis outlines in more detail the primary role of the Language Court, its impact on speaking skills, and the challenges faced in its implementation.

1. Role of the Language Court
a. Language Activities

The research findings indicate that the Language Court has three primary roles in developing Arabic language skills in the Islamic boarding school environment: language activities, discipline enforcement, and mentoring. In terms of language activities, the Language Court organizes various activities such as conversation practice, vocabulary memorization, short speeches, and debates. These activities are designed as a form of language immersion aimed at creating a communicative and conducive atmosphere, so that students become accustomed to using Arabic in their daily interactions. In second

language acquisition theory, Krashen (1982) emphasizes the importance of comprehensible input as a prerequisite for language mastery. Through daily conversation in Arabic, students receive continuous linguistic exposure, accelerating the process of internalizing the language's structure and vocabulary.

Furthermore, vocabulary memorization activities not only increase vocabulary but also train memory and semantic associations, which are crucial for communication. Nation (2013) emphasizes that vocabulary mastery is one of the main indicators of successful language learning, because without a sufficient vocabulary, communication skills will not develop optimally. Therefore, the Language Court acts as a facilitator of an immersive learning environment rich in linguistic stimuli, which has proven effective in improving student competency.

b. Enforcing Discipline

In addition to organizing language activities, the Language Court also plays a role in enforcing discipline. The rules enforced are usually strict, for example, prohibiting the use of languages other than Arabic in certain areas of the madrasah. If violations occur, students are subject to various forms of sanctions. Some sanctions are educational, such as writing new vocabulary, creating sentences, or memorizing short texts. However, there are also mild physical sanctions such as standing in the yard, cleaning the area, or physical exercise.

This disciplinary enforcement aligns with Skinner's (1953) theory of operant conditioning, which states that human behavior can be shaped through positive and negative reinforcement. In the context of the Language Court, positive reinforcement is seen in the rewards given to students who adhere to Arabic, while negative reinforcement is seen in the form of sanctions for those who violate the rules. These two mechanisms create behavioral control that ultimately fosters the habit of speaking Arabic.

c. Guidance and Support

Beyond its role as rule enforcer, the Language Court also plays a role in the aspect of guidance. Supervisors or administrators of the Language Court frequently provide motivation, direction, and moral guidance to students. This approach ensures that students do not feel pressured by rules but also feel guided and accompanied in the learning process.

This concept of guidance aligns with Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory, particularly the idea of scaffolding, which is the support provided by teachers or peers to enable students to transcend their zone of proximal development. In practice, the Language Court implements this support in the form of friendly supervision, advice, and encouragement to speak Arabic, even when still hesitant. Thus, guidance ensures a balance between rules and emotional support.

2. Benefits for Speaking Skills

The role of the Language Court directly impacts students' speaking skills. Based on interviews, students reported significant improvements in their fluency, vocabulary mastery, and confidence when communicating in Arabic.

a. Fluency and Speed of Speech

Regular conversation activities help students get used to thinking quickly in the target language. This is important because one of the main obstacles to speaking a foreign language is speech anxiety and delayed responses. With daily practice, students become more skilled at responding spontaneously, thereby improving their fluency. Richards (2008) describes speaking as a highly complex skill because it simultaneously involves speed of thought, appropriate vocabulary selection, and grammatical accuracy.

b. Vocabulary Mastery

The weekly memorization of vocabulary enriches the students' vocabulary. This process not only expands lexical resources but also helps them master collocations, phrases, and idiomatic expressions in Arabic. Thornbury (2002) emphasizes that

vocabulary is a key building block in communication, so the broader the vocabulary, the higher a person's communication skills.

c. Self-Confidence and Rhetoric

Short speeches and debates, on the other hand, strengthen rhetorical skills and build confidence in public speaking. Students are trained to structure arguments, use persuasive language, and calmly address an audience. This aligns with Sholihin's (2018) findings, which confirmed that immersive, rule-based environments can improve students' oral skills. Furthermore, this study also supports Richards and Rodgers' (2014) view regarding the communicative language teaching (CLT) approach, stating that practicing language in real-life contexts accelerates mastery of speaking skills.

d. Integration of Theory and Practice

Overall, these findings confirm that the Language Court plays a crucial role as a platform for integrating language learning theory with the real-life practices of students. While linguistic theory emphasizes the importance of balancing input and output (Swain, 2005), the Language Court provides a space for both processes to occur naturally.

3. Challenges and Risks

Despite its numerous benefits, the implementation of the Language Court is not without challenges and risks.

a. Excessive Sanctions and Their Impact

One issue that has arisen concerns the application of sanctions, which some students consider excessive, particularly corporal punishment. This punishment sometimes creates fear, which hinders learning and potentially reduces intrinsic motivation. Deci and Ryan (1985), using their Self-Determination theory, emphasized that excessive external pressure can reduce students' autonomous motivation. When students speak Arabic solely out of fear of punishment, their motivation is extrinsic and short-lived.

b. Historical Perspective

Historically, punishment practices in traditional Islamic boarding schools were even harsher than they are today. Dhofier (2011) noted that the tradition of Islamic boarding school education from the 19th to early 20th centuries was rife with severe forms of corporal punishment. However, developments have brought about a shift toward a more humane approach to education. This comparison demonstrates progress in the educational approach in Islamic boarding schools, although punishment practices still require evaluation.

c. The Need for Pedagogical Adjustments

The application of sanctions in the Language Court still requires adjustments to align with modern educational principles, which emphasize development rather than punishment. Educative punishment models, such as literacy assignments, remedial language activities, or counseling services, are considered more effective in supporting learning (Brookfield, 2017). With this approach,

Research Findings and Discussion Table

Aspek	Research Findings	Discussion / Analysis	References
1. The Role of the Language Court	1. *Language activities (conversation practice, vocabulary memorization, short speeches, debates). 2. Discipline enforcement (sanctions in the form of educational assignments, light to heavy punishments). 3.*	- The Language Court is not only administrative, but also pedagogical. - Language training supports the communicative language teaching method, which emphasizes direct practice. - Discipline enforcement is controversial, as it reinforces order while potentially hindering students' psychological well-	Brown (2007); Nunan (2004)

	Protection (guidance and motivation)..	being. - The protective function demonstrates a humanistic approach to learning.	
2 Benefits to Speaking Skills	Students experience improvements in: - Speaking fluency. - Vocabulary mastery. - Self-confidence.	- This finding aligns with language immersion theory, where the language environment encourages active participation. This is in line with Sholihin's (2018) research finding that language practice in an immersive setting strengthens oral skills.	Sholihin (2018); Krashen (1985)
3 Challenges and Risks	- Some sanctions are considered excessive. - Potential for fear and psychological distress. - Comparison with the past shows harsher penalties in previous eras..	- Discipline needs to be educational and restorative, not repressive. Psychological risks can reduce the effectiveness of learning. A discipline enforcement model that balances order and learning comfort is needed.	Foucault (1995); Santrock (2011)

This table explains the narrative flow of the findings and discussions in a more coherent manner:

1. The Language Court functions in three aspects (linguistics, discipline, and protection).
2. This role has proven beneficial in improving students' speaking skills.
3. However, challenges remain regarding the sanction mechanism, which needs to be reformulated to be more educational.

CONCLUSION

This study found that the Language Court plays a significant role in supporting Arabic language learning in modern Islamic boarding schools (pesantren). The three main roles identified are language activities, discipline enforcement, and mentoring. Through conversation practice, vocabulary memorization, short speeches, and debates, the Language Court serves as a platform for developing oral skills. Discipline enforcement, while still controversial, plays a role in creating order and motivation for learning, while the mentoring function provides moral and psychological support for students. The study also showed significant improvements in students' fluency, vocabulary mastery, and self-confidence. However, the practice of harsh punishments remains a challenge that needs to be reviewed to prevent them from hindering learning.

These findings imply that educational institutions, particularly modern Islamic boarding schools, need to optimize the Language Court as a non-formal learning tool that supports students' communication competencies. Administrators need to balance the aspects of coaching and discipline with a more humanistic and educational approach. Furthermore, structured language activities can serve as a model for effectively developing Arabic speaking skills.

Based on the findings and implications above, this study recommends that corporal punishment within the Language Court be reduced and replaced with educational sanctions that encourage creativity, such as writing essays or conducting Arabic language presentations. The Language Court should also strengthen its protective function by providing a more intensive mentoring program. Furthermore, training is needed for Language Court administrators to manage activities with a pedagogical approach that is appropriate to students' needs. Further research is also recommended to explore the long-term impact of the Language Court on students' communication skills and learning motivation.

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