

The Role of the Language Courses Department in Supporting Listening Readiness among Novice Arabic Learners in a Pesantren

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to examine the role of the Language Courses Department (LCD) as a supporting institution in the development of listening readiness among novice Arabic learners in a pesantren context. Although Pondok Modern Darussalam Gontor provides an intensive Arabic-speaking environment, many new students still struggle to comprehend spoken Arabic, indicating that exposure alone is insufficient. This condition underscores the need for institutional support that fosters learners' psychological, cognitive, and behavioral readiness for listening. Using a qualitative descriptive approach, data were collected through observations, semi-structured interviews, and documentation involving LCD administrators, tutors, and novice learners. Data analysis followed Miles and Huberman's interactive model. The findings show that LCD performs a multidimensional role as mentor, mediator, motivator, and inspirator through structured listening activities, graded audio-visual materials, interactive practice, and emotional-academic support. These efforts reduce listening anxiety, enhance familiarity with spoken Arabic, improve attentional focus, and encourage responsive learner behavior. Rather than yielding immediate achievement gains, LCD programs function as preparatory support that strengthens listening readiness as a foundation for effective language immersion and formal instruction.

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Introduction

In Second Language Acquisition (SLA), listening is widely recognized as the primary channel through which learners receive linguistic input and develop communicative competence. Theories of language acquisition consistently emphasize that meaningful language learning begins with exposure to comprehensible input, which enables learners to

process linguistic forms, construct meaning, and gradually produce appropriate spoken responses. Within this perspective, listening is not merely a receptive skill but a foundational mechanism that supports the development of speaking, vocabulary acquisition, and overall language proficiency. Consequently, learners' readiness to engage with spoken language commonly conceptualized as listening readiness becomes a critical prerequisite for successful participation in immersive language-learning environments (Almelhes, 2024).

Listening readiness refers to learners' preparedness to receive, process, interpret, and respond to auditory linguistic input. It encompasses cognitive, linguistic, motivational, and environmental dimensions that collectively influence learners' ability to benefit from language exposure. In intensive language environments, learners are expected to encounter abundant oral input; however, exposure alone does not automatically lead to language acquisition. SLA research suggests that the effectiveness of language exposure depends largely on the extent to which learners are prepared to process incoming input and transform it into communicative competence. Therefore, institutional mechanisms that facilitate listening readiness play a crucial role in bridging the gap between language exposure and language acquisition.

This issue is particularly relevant in Arabic language education within Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*), where immersive language environments constitute a central pedagogical strategy. Among Indonesian *pesantren*, Pondok Modern Darussalam Gontor has long been recognized for implementing a comprehensive Arabic-speaking ecosystem that integrates formal instruction with extensive extracurricular language programs. Students participate in various language-support activities, including *Ilqā' al-Mufradāt*, *Muhādatsah Usbū'iyah*, dormitory-based language supervision, and the *Lughah Court*, all of which aim to increase exposure to Arabic in everyday interactions. These initiatives reflect an institutional commitment to creating an authentic language environment beyond conventional classroom settings.

Despite the existence of such a rich linguistic ecosystem, empirical observations indicate that many novice learners continue to experience difficulties in oral communication, particularly during their initial period of adaptation to the Arabic-speaking environment (Syamsu, 2018). Many students struggle to comprehend spoken Arabic and consequently face challenges in expressing themselves orally. This phenomenon suggests that the availability of language activities does not necessarily guarantee successful language acquisition. From an SLA perspective, one possible explanation is that learners may lack sufficient listening readiness to effectively process the linguistic input available in their environment. Limited listening readiness may restrict learners' ability to understand spoken discourse, recognize linguistic patterns, and participate actively in communicative interactions (Suryadarma et al., 2024).

To address this challenge, Pondok Modern Darussalam Gontor established the Language Courses Department (LCD), a specialized institutional unit designed to strengthen students' Arabic proficiency outside formal classroom instruction. The LCD provides structured language courses utilizing audio-visual materials, interactive learning strategies, and tutor-assisted activities aimed at enhancing learners' exposure to authentic Arabic input. Through these programs, the department seeks to support students' listening development and facilitate their adaptation to the Arabic-speaking environment. As an institutional support system operating alongside formal instruction, the LCD represents a potentially important mechanism for fostering listening readiness among novice learners (Ahmad et al., 2023; Inayah et al., 2023).

Previous studies have highlighted the significance of language-support programs, institutional learning environments, and technology-enhanced instruction in Arabic language learning. Research by Towler (2025) demonstrates that an overreliance on Standard Arabic may leave learners insufficiently prepared to understand authentic spoken varieties, thereby affecting listening and communicative performance. Akbar and Prasetyo (2022) emphasize the role of institutional organization in enhancing the effectiveness of Arabic language programs, whereas Rahmawati (2018) identifies weaknesses in non-formal course management as factors influencing learning outcomes. Meanwhile, Mohammed (2022) reports that technology-supported Arabic courses employing interactive audio-visual resources can improve learners' listening and speaking abilities.

Although these studies provide valuable insights, the existing literature reveals several limitations. First, most investigations focus on formal educational institutions, university settings, or technology-based interventions rather than examining institutional support structures embedded within immersive pesantren environments. Second, previous research predominantly evaluates language learning outcomes or instructional media without exploring how institutional units mediate the relationship between language exposure and learners' readiness to process spoken input. Third, the concept of listening readiness remains underexplored in Arabic language education, particularly among novice learners transitioning into intensive Arabic-speaking communities (Mustofa et al., 2025; Dodi et al., 2021; Sarah et al., 2024).

Accordingly, a significant research gap exists concerning the role of institutional support systems in developing listening readiness within immersive Arabic-learning environments. While studies have examined language programs, course management, and instructional technologies, limited attention has been paid to how specialized language-support departments contribute to preparing novice learners to engage effectively with spoken Arabic.

Understanding this role is important because listening readiness may function as a mediating mechanism through which language exposure is transformed into communicative competence.

Therefore, this study investigates the role of the Language Courses Department (LCD) in supporting listening readiness among novice Arabic learners at Pondok Modern Darussalam Gontor. Specifically, it examines how LCD programs facilitate learners' adaptation to spoken Arabic, strengthen their listening preparedness, and contribute to broader communicative development. By focusing on listening readiness rather than merely listening achievement, this study extends existing discussions on institutional support in Arabic language learning.

The contribution of this study is twofold. Empirically, it provides evidence regarding the effectiveness of a specialized language-support institution operating within an intensive pesantren environment. Theoretically, it contributes to SLA scholarship by conceptualizing listening readiness as a crucial intermediary construct linking institutional support, language exposure, and communicative competence. In doing so, the study offers a more nuanced understanding of how immersive language environments can be optimized through targeted institutional interventions. Accordingly, this study addresses the following research question: How does the Language Courses Department (LCD) support and influence the development of listening readiness among novice Arabic learners in a pesantren context?

Method

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative descriptive research design to examine the role of the Language Courses Department (LCD) in supporting the development of Arabic listening skills among novice learners at Pondok Modern Darussalam Gontor (Busetto et al., 2020). A qualitative approach was adopted to gain an in-depth understanding of LCD program implementation, institutional roles, and learning practices as they naturally occur within the pesantren context.

Data Collection Techniques

The study focused on describing and interpreting empirical field data rather than numerical measurement or experimental treatment. Participants consisted of approximately 15 individuals, classified into three categories: administrators, tutors, and students. All participants were selected through purposive sampling based on their specific roles, backgrounds, and direct involvement in listening-focused LCD programs (Subhaktiyasa, 2024).

Table 1. Classification of Participants and Their Backgrounds in the LCD Program

No	Participant Category	Number	Background Explanation	Roles, Responsibilities, and Involvement in LCD Program
1	LCD Administrators	2 persons	Institutionally appointed personnel within the pesantren, with authority in curriculum planning and program management, particularly in structured Arabic instruction.	Designing, organizing, and supervising structured Arabic course programs; integrating audio-visual media and interactive listening activities.
2	Arabic Tutors	3 persons	Have direct pedagogical experience more than 4 years.	Implementing listening-focused instruction; guiding learners through graded audio materials, repeated listening practices, and interactive learning sessions aligned with LCD objectives.
3	Novice Students	10 persons	Beginner-level learners who entered the pesantren with limited prior exposure to Arabic and minimal listening comprehension skills.	Participating in listening-focused learning; engaging in intensive Arabic environment while facing challenges in understanding spoken Arabic.

The field research was conducted over a period of approximately 8 weeks within the natural setting of the Language Courses Department (LCD) at Pondok Modern Darussalam Gontor, focusing on listening-centered instructional activities, supplementary language programs, and students' daily interactions in the pesantren environment. Data were collected through field research using observation, semi-structured interviews, and documentation. Observations were carried out intensively 3-4 times per week, with each session lasting approximately 60-90 minutes, to examine learning activities, teaching methods, media use, and student participation, particularly in relation to the development of listening readiness. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with administrators, tutors, and novice students, using guiding questions such as: "How are listening activities designed and implemented in LCD programs?", "What challenges do novice learners face in understanding spoken Arabic?", and "How does LCD support students' listening readiness psychologically and academically?". Each interview lasted approximately 30-45 minutes and was conducted flexibly to allow in-depth exploration of participants' perspectives on the role and implementation of LCD programs. Documentation analysis complemented these methods by examining institutional records, program guidelines, learning materials, and relevant written sources related to Arabic language instruction at Gontor.

To ensure data validity and credibility, this study employed triangulation of techniques and sources by cross-checking observational data with interview findings and documentary evidence, as well as comparing information from different informants to identify converging patterns and minimize subjective bias (Ardiansyah, Risnita, & Jailani, 2023). Ethical considerations were strictly maintained by ensuring informed consent, voluntary participation, and the confidentiality and anonymity of all participants, who were also informed of their right to withdraw at any stage of the research. In terms of researcher positionality, the researcher acted as a non-interventionist observer with contextual familiarity of the pesantren environment, which facilitated access and trust while maintaining reflexivity to minimize bias, thereby ensuring that the data genuinely reflected participants' experiences and perspectives.

Data Analysis Techniques

Data analysis was conducted qualitatively using an inductive approach and followed the interactive model proposed by Miles and Huberman, consisting of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing with verification. Data reduction involved selecting, categorizing, and organizing information relevant to the research focus. The reduced data were then presented in a thematic narrative form to facilitate interpretation. Finally, conclusions were drawn by identifying patterns, relationships, and meanings related to the role of LCD in enhancing listening skills, with continuous verification to ensure data credibility and consistency across sources (Mishra et al., 2019).

Result

Forms of LCD Support for Novice Learners

Based on the findings obtained through observations, interviews, and documentation, the Language Courses Department (LCD) at Pondok Modern Darussalam Gontor provides various forms of structured and contextual support for novice learners in developing their Arabic language skills, particularly listening skills. These forms of support are not limited to instructional activities but extend to motivational, facilitative, and emotional dimensions (Observation, 2025). The support provided by LCD can be classified into five main forms: mentoring support, motivational support, inspirational support, mediational support, and academic-emotional support (Putra, 2020).

Mentoring Support

One of the primary forms of support provided by LCD for novice learners is mentoring. Based on field observations and interviews with LCD staff and new students, LCD lecturers act as mentors who guide students systematically in acquiring basic Arabic language skills. This mentoring process is especially crucial for novice learners, most of whom enter Pondok Modern Darussalam Gontor with minimal or no prior exposure to Arabic (Dikilitaş, 2022).

LCD mentors introduce Arabic language elements gradually, starting from basic vocabulary, simple sentence patterns, and listening comprehension exercises. They also provide continuous guidance during learning sessions, ensuring that novice learners do not feel overwhelmed. This finding aligns with the mentoring concept proposed by Brenda in review Zachary book (Mendiola, 2012), which emphasizes reciprocal learning relationships aimed at achieving clearly defined learning goals.

The mentoring role of LCD is not only academic but also personal. LCD lecturers build close interpersonal relationships with novice learners, encouraging them to ask questions, express difficulties, and actively participate in learning activities. This supportive mentoring atmosphere contributes significantly to the improvement of novice learners' confidence and listening comprehension skills.

Motivational Support

Motivational support constitutes another essential form of LCD assistance for novice learners. Interview data with new students reveal that LCD plays a significant role in increasing learners' motivation to engage in Arabic language learning. LCD lecturers consistently provide encouragement, positive reinforcement, and constructive feedback during teaching and learning activities (Interview with Adam MS, 2025).

Motivation is fostered through varied teaching strategies, such as interactive listening activities, language games, and the use of songs in Arabic learning. These strategies reduce learners' anxiety and boredom, which are common challenges faced by novice learners. Observational data further indicate that motivated students tend to participate more actively in listening exercises, resulting in better comprehension and retention (Gajewska, 2020).

This form of support demonstrates that LCD does not merely transfer linguistic knowledge but also cultivates intrinsic motivation, which is a critical factor in second language acquisition, particularly for beginners.

Inspirational Support

LCD also functions as an inspirational agent for novice learners. Based on observations and student interviews, LCD creates an inspiring learning environment that encourages enthusiasm and positive attitudes toward Arabic. This inspiration is generated through role modeling, engaging learning materials, and extracurricular language activities (Observation, 2025).

Activities such as Friday Language Cinema (FLC), language competitions, and performances provide novice learners with real-life exposure to Arabic in enjoyable contexts. These activities inspire learners to view Arabic not merely as a subject but as a living language used for communication and creativity. Students reported that such activities increased their

interest in listening to Arabic and helped them become more familiar with native-like pronunciation and intonation (Interview with Rais Razzan, 2025).

Thus, inspirational support from LCD helps novice learners develop long-term interest and positive perceptions toward Arabic language learning.

Mediational Support

Another important form of support provided by LCD is mediational support. LCD acts as a bridge between novice learners and Arabic language resources, teachers, and learning materials. Based on field findings, LCD facilitates communication between students and instructors by organizing consultation sessions and providing additional tutoring opportunities for learners who require extra assistance (Observation, 2025).

Moreover, LCD mediates differences in learners' linguistic backgrounds. Novice learners come from diverse educational settings, some from Islamic boarding schools with prior Arabic exposure and others from general schools without such backgrounds. LCD addresses this disparity by implementing a level-based system that ensures learners receive instruction appropriate to their abilities (Liu et al., 2021).

Through this mediational role, LCD ensures equitable learning opportunities and prevents novice learners from being marginalized due to limited prior knowledge.

Academic and Emotional Support

The final form of LCD support identified in this research is academic and emotional support. Interviews with novice learners indicate that LCD provides additional academic assistance beyond formal teaching hours, such as after-dinner consultation sessions. These sessions allow students to clarify listening materials, vocabulary, and pronunciation difficulties.

Emotionally, LCD staff demonstrate empathy toward learners' struggles, helping them cope with anxiety and lack of confidence. This emotional support fosters a safe learning environment where novice learners feel comfortable making mistakes, a crucial condition for language acquisition (Interview with a respondent, November 2025).

The integration of academic and emotional support enhances learners' persistence and engagement, contributing positively to the development of listening skills (Observation, 2025).

Table 2. Forms of LCD Support for Novice Learners

No	Form of Support	Description	Impact on Novice Learners
1	Mentoring	Guidance by LCD lecturers through structured listening activities	Improved basic listening comprehension
2	Motivational	Encouragement and interactive learning strategies	Increased learning motivation

3	Inspirational	Language events and engaging materials	Positive attitudes toward Arabic
4	Mediational	Bridging learners with resources and level-based instruction	Reduced learning gaps
5	Academic & Emotional	Extra tutoring and emotional reassurance	Increased confidence and persistence

Overall, the findings indicate that the Language Courses Department (LCD) provides comprehensive and multidimensional support for novice learners at Pondok Modern Darussalam Gontor. These forms of support work synergistically to enhance listening skills by addressing not only linguistic needs but also motivational, emotional, and contextual factors. This comprehensive support system confirms the pivotal role of LCD in facilitating effective Arabic language acquisition for beginner learners.

Impact of LCD Programs on Students' Listening Readiness

Overview of Listening Readiness as an Impact Indicator

Listening readiness in this study refers to students' psychological, cognitive, and behavioral preparedness to engage with spoken Arabic during learning activities along 8 weeks. Drawing on the field evidence reported in the thesis (classroom observations, instructor interviews, and student reflections), LCD programs show a positive impact on readiness by reducing anxiety, increasing familiarity with spoken input, and strengthening students' responsiveness to oral instructions.

Psychological Readiness

Field observations indicate that novice learners initially demonstrated hesitation and anxiety when exposed to continuous Arabic input. After sustained participation in LCD activities (guided listening, repeated exposure, and supportive feedback), students appeared more confident and willing to attend to spoken Arabic. Instructors reported fewer avoidance behaviors (e.g., silence, disengagement) during listening tasks (Observation, 2025).

Table 3. Qualitative Indicators of Psychological Readiness

Indicator	Before LCD Participation	After Sustained LCD Participation
Anxiety toward Arabic audio	High hesitation; visible tension	Reduced anxiety; calmer engagement
Willingness to listen	Avoidance of long audio	Increased tolerance for longer input
Confidence	Low self-confidence	Improved self-assurance

Cognitive Readiness

LCD programs emphasize graded audio materials and repeated listening cycles. As a result, students demonstrated greater familiarity with phonological patterns, intonation, and common expressions. Although no listening test scores are reported, instructors noted quicker recognition of keywords and improved anticipation of meaning during listening sessions.

Table 4. Qualitative Indicators of Cognitive Readiness

Indicator	Observed Change
Recognition of common expressions	From sporadic to frequent recognition
Attention span	Short → more sustained
Comprehension strategy use	Guessing → contextual inference

Behavioral Readiness

Data on students' behavioral readiness were obtained through systematic non-participant observations conducted during LCD sessions and within the broader pesantren environment over the course of the program (Observation, 2025). The observations focused on students' immediate responses to oral instructions delivered in Arabic, including response time, level of participation, and the appropriateness of follow-up actions. The summarized results of these observations are presented in Table 3 as a comparative description of students' behavioral readiness development.

Table 5. Behavioral Readiness Observed During Activities

Aspect	Initial Observation	Later Observation
Response time to instructions	Delayed	Quicker
Participation	Passive	More active
Follow-up actions	Inaccurate	More appropriate

Integrative Impact of LCD Programs

The combined effects across psychological, cognitive, and behavioral domains suggest that LCD programs contribute to an integrative form of listening readiness. Rather than producing immediate measurable achievement, LCD prepares learners to benefit more effectively from subsequent listening exposure in both formal classes and daily language immersion.

Figure 1. Conceptual Diagram of Listening Readiness Impact

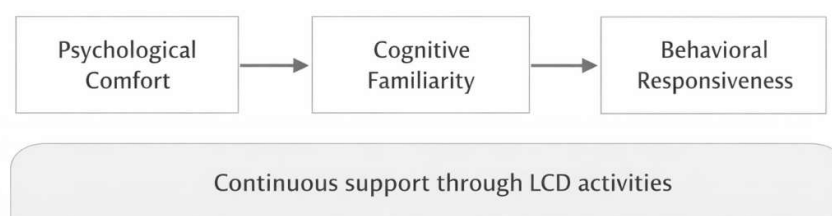


Figure 1 illustrates the conceptual progression of listening readiness among novice learners, showing how psychological comfort facilitates cognitive familiarity with spoken Arabic, which subsequently leads to behavioral responsiveness. This process is continuously supported through LCD instructional activities.

These findings align with the descriptive aim of the study: to understand how LCD programs shape readiness conditions for novice learners. The impact observed is developmental and preparatory, supporting the view that readiness is a prerequisite for later listening achievement. Thus, LCD's impact is best interpreted as facilitative rather than causal, strengthening students' capacity to engage with spoken Arabic meaningfully.

In summary, the impact of LCD programs on students' listening readiness is evident in improved confidence, enhanced familiarity with spoken Arabic, and more adaptive learning behaviors. While these impacts are not expressed numerically, they represent substantive qualitative changes that support learners' successful participation in Arabic listening contexts.

Discussion

The findings of this study demonstrate that the Language Courses Department (LCD) at Pondok Modern Darussalam Gontor plays a pivotal role in strengthening novice learners' listening readiness within the pesantren context by functioning as a complementary non-formal institution (Pham, 2021). Unlike formal classroom instruction, which is often constrained by curriculum targets and time limitations, LCD provides a flexible learning space that prioritizes receptive language development, particularly listening. This finding supports recent studies emphasizing that listening competence requires sustained exposure and guided mediation beyond conventional classroom settings, especially for beginner learners in foreign language environments (Mahmudi et al., 2024).

One important contribution of this study lies in highlighting the mentoring and mediational roles of LCD in facilitating access to comprehensible spoken Arabic. Through graded audio materials, repeated listening activities, and the integration of audio-visual media, LCD helps learners bridge the gap between abstract linguistic knowledge and authentic language use (Shamsi & Bozorgian, 2024). This finding aligns with recent research suggesting that audio-visual and scaffolded listening input significantly enhance learners' ability to process spoken language by providing contextual and pragmatic cues. In the pesantren environment,

where Arabic exposure is abundant but often linguistically demanding, such mediation is essential to prevent learners from being overwhelmed by native-like input (Wallace, 2022).

Furthermore, the study reveals that LCD's motivational and inspirational roles contribute substantially to learners' affective readiness for listening. Many novice learners initially experience anxiety and low confidence when engaging with Arabic listening tasks. LCD addresses these challenges by fostering a supportive learning atmosphere through interactive methods, positive reinforcement, and meaningful language activities (Zeng & Goh, 2018). This finding is consistent with contemporary research that underscores the importance of affective factors, such as motivation and anxiety reduction in sustaining learners' engagement with listening practice. By reframing listening as an active and manageable process, LCD helps learners develop more positive attitudes toward spoken Arabic (Suryadarma et al., 2025).

From a theoretical perspective within Second Language Acquisition, these findings can be interpreted as evidence that language acquisition is not solely driven by exposure, but by the quality of mediated input and the learner's readiness to process it. The role of LCD reflects the principle of comprehensible input, where learners require linguistically accessible and contextually supported language before meaningful acquisition can occur, particularly in listening (Samin et al., 2025). At the same time, the mentoring and scaffolding practices observed in LCD resonate with sociocultural perspectives that emphasize mediation and guided interaction as central to internalizing language. Furthermore, the emphasis on affective readiness aligns with the notion that emotional variables such as anxiety, confidence, and motivation directly influence learners' ability to attend to and process input (Inayah et al., 2023). Therefore, this study conceptually reinforces the idea that listening readiness operates as an intermediary construct linking input exposure, affective conditions, and observable communicative behavior. In this sense, LCD does not merely function as a supplementary program, but as a mediating system that optimizes the conditions under which input can be transformed into intake, ultimately contributing to the gradual development of communicative competence.

Finally, the impact of LCD programs is best understood in terms of listening readiness rather than immediate listening achievement. The findings indicate improvements in learners' psychological comfort, cognitive familiarity, and behavioral responsiveness toward spoken Arabic. This suggests that LCD programs function as preparatory mechanisms that enable learners to benefit more effectively from both formal instruction and daily language immersion within the pesantren (Dewaele & Alfawzan, 2018). This study therefore contributes to the broader discussion on non-formal language education by demonstrating that institutional support structures play a critical role in shaping learners' readiness conditions, which serve as a foundation for long-term communicative competence development.

Conclusion

This study concludes that the Language Courses Department (LCD) plays a significant facilitative role in supporting Arabic listening skills among novice learners at Pondok Modern Darussalam Gontor. As a complementary non-formal institution, LCD provides structured mentoring, mediational support, motivational reinforcement, and contextual language exposure that primarily strengthen learners' listening readiness rather than producing immediate measurable achievement. The findings demonstrate that LCD programs positively influence learners' psychological comfort, cognitive familiarity with spoken Arabic, and behavioral responsiveness to oral input, enabling more effective participation in both formal classroom instruction and daily language immersion within the pesantren environment.

These findings contribute to the growing body of research on non-formal language education by highlighting listening readiness as a critical prerequisite for long-term communicative competence development. The study underscores the need for future research to further examine institutional support mechanisms, particularly in immersive language environments where exposure alone may not guarantee comprehension. Future studies may extend this research by incorporating longitudinal designs, comparative institutional contexts, or mixed-method approaches to explore how preparatory listening programs influence subsequent language achievement. By situating non-formal institutions as integral components of language learning ecosystems, this study offers a conceptual foundation for advancing research on receptive skill development and institutional mediation in second and foreign language acquisition.

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