

Internationalizing Arabic Language Materials in Pesantren Education: An ACTFL-Based Evaluation of *Durusullughah al Arabiyah*

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ABSTRACT

Despite the growing importance of international proficiency standards in foreign language education, studies evaluating Arabic textbooks in pesantren contexts using the ACTFL framework remain scarce. This study examines the alignment of *Durusullughah al Arabiyah*, a textbook used at Pesantren Almuslim, with ACTFL proficiency standards across listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills. Employing a qualitative content analysis approach, the study analyzed communicative functions, proficiency levels, and pedagogical patterns embedded in the textbook using ACTFL descriptors. The findings reveal that the textbook largely corresponds to the ACTFL Novice Mid level, as reflected in its contextual vocabulary, simple dialogues, drill-based exercises, and communicative tasks related to learners' daily experiences. The Direct Method employed in the textbook supports the gradual development of basic communicative competence through repetitive and contextualized language practice. However, instructional activities remain predominantly teacher-centered and rely heavily on controlled communication, providing limited opportunities for interpretive interaction and spontaneous language production. The study highlights the potential compatibility between pesantren-based Arabic language pedagogy and international proficiency frameworks. It contributes to the advancement of Arabic textbook evaluation grounded in global standards while extending ACTFL-related scholarship within the context of Islamic boarding school education.

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Introduction

Pesantren Almuslim (Almuslim Islamic boarding school) is located in Neuheuen Village, Peusangan District, Bireuen Regency, Aceh province, and currently accommodates

approximately seven hundred active *santri*/students (Yayasan Almuslim Peusangan, n.d.). One of its flagship programs is Arabic language mastery, which functions not only as an instructional subject but also as the primary medium of daily communication within the *pesantren* environment (Alfitri et al., 2020). In addition to its role as a communicative tool, Arabic is formally taught in classroom settings to enrich *santris*' linguistic repertoire and deepen their literacy in the language. The core instructional material employed for this purpose is the *Durusullughah al Arabiyah* textbook, which is used particularly in the first and second-year classes. As a central pedagogical resource, this textbook plays a pivotal role in shaping learning outcomes, particularly in the context of Arabic language acquisition (Ramah et al., 2018).

The American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) is an internationally recognized professional body that establishes proficiency benchmarks for foreign language instruction, including Arabic (Hidayah, 2020). Widely adopted in the United States, the ACTFL framework serves as a reference for monitoring and classifying learners' linguistic competence (Lin, 2024). The framework delineates five principal proficiency tiers: Distinguished, Superior, Advanced, Intermediate, and Novice, each of which is further subdivided into three sublevels, namely *high*, *mid*, and *low* (Huhn et al., 2021). These descriptors provide a calibrated continuum ranging from highly articulate expert users to complete beginners with no functional command of the language (Malek, 2020).

The use of ACTFL standards in *pesantren*-based Arabic instruction is particularly significant because it enables a more structured and objective evaluation of learners' communicative competence. The ACTFL framework does not merely assess grammatical accuracy but also encompasses functional proficiency relevant to learners' everyday social, academic, and religious communication needs (Garzia, 2025). In the *pesantren* milieu where Arabic is closely tied to daily interaction and study of classical Islamic texts (*kitab kuning*), an approach that emphasises communicative skill and cognitive engagement is especially relevant (Habibie et al., 2022).

By integrating cognitive analysis with the ACTFL framework, textbook evaluation in this study is directed at ensuring that the material presented genuinely supports the attainment of language competence aligned with internationally recognized standards (Pransiska & Widodo, 2021). Within this perspective, textbooks are evaluated not only in terms of content relevance, but also in terms of their ability to cultivate higher-order thinking and authentic, contextually meaningful communication (Arkan, 2026). Such an evaluative lens aligns with the broader educational mission of *pesantren*, which aims to equip students with the capacity to use Arabic actively and meaningfully in academic as well as social life (Habibie et al., 2022).

Several previous studies have demonstrated the growing adoption of ACTFL as an international framework for Arabic language instruction in Indonesia. Hidayah (2020) emphasized the importance of adapting ACTFL-based competency standards to the Indonesian educational context. Similarly, Firdaus & Siregar (2023) found that the language proficiency targets outlined in KMA 183 tended to exceed the ACTFL novice-low level, while Asy'ari et al., (2024) concluded that the Arabic learning design within the Merdeka Curriculum generally aligns with ACTFL proficiency levels from novice to advanced stages. Collectively, these studies indicate the increasing orientation of Arabic language education toward internationally recognized proficiency standards.

In the area of instructional materials, several studies have examined Arabic textbooks and assessment instruments from an ACTFL-oriented perspective. Maimunah et al (2022) reported that Arabic textbooks for Madrasah Ibtidaiyah reflected novice-low proficiency characteristics and promoted contextual learning. Meanwhile, Ubaidillah et al (2023) found inconsistencies in the organization of proficiency levels within KMA 183 Arabic textbooks, particularly in writing skills. Furthermore, Pransiska & Widodo (2021) focused on developing an Arabic textbook assessment instrument based on the standards of ACTFL, CEFR, and BSNP through the ADDIE model. The findings showed that the instrument was capable of comprehensively evaluating the content, language, presentation, and visual aspects of Arabic language textbooks, while Mahmudi et al (2024) emphasized the importance of ACTFL-based listening assessment for measuring beginner-level proficiency. These studies have contributed significantly to the development of proficiency-oriented Arabic instruction and textbook evaluation in Indonesia.

Despite these contributions, several limitations remain evident in the existing literature. Previous studies have primarily focused on curriculum alignment, proficiency classification, and textbook evaluation within formal madrasah contexts. Limited attention has been given to pesantren-based Arabic learning environments, particularly regarding the communicative and cognitive dimensions of instructional materials. Moreover, empirical studies investigating how ACTFL-oriented proficiency is represented in authentic pesantren textbooks remain scarce. As a result, the relationship between cognitive engagement, communicative competence, and ACTFL-based proficiency development in pesantren Arabic textbooks is still underexplored.

In response to these gaps, this study contributes to Arabic language education in several ways. First, it extends ACTFL-based textbook evaluation into the pesantren context, which possesses distinctive pedagogical and sociolinguistic characteristics. Second, the study integrates proficiency-based evaluation with pedagogical analysis to examine not only the alignment of textbook content with ACTFL standards, but also the communicative functions

and instructional patterns embedded in the learning activities. Third, the study provides empirical evidence regarding the applicability of ACTFL standards within authentic pesantren instructional settings through an analysis of *Durusullughah al Arabiyah*, one of the Arabic textbooks widely used in pesantren education.

Given the central role of textbooks in Arabic instruction in pesantren, it is important to examine whether *Durusullughah al Arabiyah* supports communicative competence in alignment with ACTFL standards. However, the extent to which the textbook reflects ACTFL-oriented proficiency levels and communicative pedagogical practices remains insufficiently explored. Therefore, this study addresses the following research questions:

1. To what extent does *Durusullughah al Arabiyah* align with ACTFL proficiency standards across the four Arabic language skills?
2. How are communicative functions and pedagogical patterns represented in the instructional activities of the textbook?
3. How does the textbook facilitate the development of communicative competence within the context of Arabic language learning in pesantren?

Method

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative approach using content analysis methods. The study aimed to analyze the content and pedagogical structure of the Arabic language textbook *Durusullughah al Arabiyah* based on the language proficiency framework developed by the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL). In this study, the researcher served as the primary research instrument by interpreting the textbook materials through ACTFL proficiency descriptors as the analytical framework (Rahmani et al., 2025).

The object of the study was Volume 1 of the *Durusullughah al Arabiyah* textbook for the Madrasah Tsanawiyah (MTs) level used at Pesantren Almuslim. The textbook, written by KH. Imam Zarkasyi and KH. Imam Syubbani and published by Trimurti Press of Pondok Modern Darussalam Gontor, was selected because it is one of the Arabic instructional materials widely used in pesantren-based education.

The ACTFL proficiency guidelines were employed as the analytical framework to evaluate four language skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing (ACTFL | ACTFL® *Proficiency Guidelines Overview*, n.d.). The framework was used to identify the linguistic competencies represented in the textbook, analyze the progression of instructional materials, and evaluate the extent to which the textbook aligns with internationally recognized foreign language proficiency standards.

Data Collection Techniques

Data collection was conducted through three stages: (1) comprehensive reading and examination of the textbook content; (2) coding of instructional materials based on ACTFL analytical categories, including communicative functions, proficiency levels, and instructional alignment; and (3) analysis of the pedagogical elements embedded in the textbook (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008). The units of analysis included dialogues, vocabulary sections, drills, reading passages, and written exercises contained in the textbook.

Data Analysis Techniques

The analysis focused on three main aspects: (1) the alignment of the textbook materials with ACTFL proficiency standards; (2) the representation of the four language skills based on ACTFL descriptors; and (3) the relevance of the pedagogical approach employed in the textbook.

Data analysis was conducted through three stages: data organization, descriptive analysis, and interpretative analysis within the framework of qualitative content analysis (Mayring, 2014), emphasizing systematic categorization, contextual interpretation, and iterative analysis of textual data. In the data organization stage, textbook materials were classified according to the four ACTFL language skills and relevant proficiency categories. The descriptive analysis stage involved systematically comparing the instructional materials with ACTFL indicators to identify patterns of alignment and potential limitations within the textbook content. Finally, the interpretative analysis stage was conducted to construct pedagogical meanings and conceptual implications derived from the findings within the context of Arabic language learning in pesantren.

To ensure trustworthiness, this study applied document and theoretical triangulation by comparing the findings with ACTFL literature, Arabic language pedagogy theories, and relevant previous studies. In addition, a contextual expert review was conducted through consultation with two experienced Arabic language teachers who had taught *Durusullughah al Arabiyah* in pesantren settings to ensure contextual accuracy and pedagogical relevance. Meanwhile, the proficiency classification and coding processes were conducted independently by the researcher based on the official ACTFL guidelines. All analytical procedures and data documentation were systematically recorded to maintain consistency and transparency throughout the study.

Result and Discussion

Cognitive Analysis Based on The ACTFL Framework

This analysis aims to evaluate the *Durusullughah al Arabiyah* Arabic textbook used at *Pesantren Almuslim* in Bireuen through the cognitive and pedagogical framework established by the ACTFL. The ACTFL proficiency framework provides a comprehensive and hierarchical description of communicative competence in the four core language skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing, organized across progressive levels from *Novice* to *Distinguished*.

By situating this evaluation within the ACTFL framework, the study not only measures the textbook's conformity to international proficiency benchmarks but also examines the cognitive demands embedded in its instructional design. The integration of ACTFL with cognitive analysis enables the identification of how the textbook facilitates *linguistic processing*, *conceptual understanding*, and *skill transfer* among *santri* (students) in the context of Arabic as a foreign language.

Tabel 1. Evaluation Framework of Arabic Textbooks through ACTFL-Based Cognitive Analysis

No	Language Skills	Cognitive Indicators	ACTFL Standard Descriptors (Novice - Intermediate)	Textbook Evaluation Criteria
1	Listening (<i>Istima'</i>)	Identifying, comprehending basic meaning	Able to understand simple expressions and basic vocabulary, repeated exposure is required to comprehend messages	Text and audio materials present simple and contextualized expressions
2	Speaking (<i>Kalam</i>)	Imitating, repeating, responding to simple expressions	Able to produce isolated words and expressions, communication remains limited and relies on simple vocabulary	Simple dialogue exercises based on everyday <i>pesantren</i> situation
3	Reading (<i>Qira'ah</i>)	Reading and comprehending basic texts, recognizing letters, words, and expressions	Able to read short texts and identify familiar symbols, words, and expressions	Simple reading materials introducing functional and contextualized texts
4	Writing (<i>Kitabah</i>)	Copying and rewriting simple expressions, basic information	Able to write simple words and expressions, including basic biographical information (names, numbers, countries), accuracy remains limited	Writing exercises focusing on words, phrases, numbers, punctuation, and daily expressions

Before discussing the four language skills, the analysis indicates that *Durusullughah al Arabiyah* is systematically organized in accordance with the characteristics of beginner-level learners. Each chapter begins with the introduction of contextual vocabulary, followed by simple reading passages, dialogues (*hiwār*), and structured exercises. The activities are arranged progressively, including sentence completion, question-and-answer tasks, question construction, sentence arrangement, and the contextual use of pronouns and numbers.

The instructional materials focus on themes closely related to students' daily lives in the pesantren environment, such as school equipment, spatial expressions, colors, numbers, body parts, and directions. Overall, the textbook emphasizes vocabulary mastery, repetition of language patterns, and gradual practice as the foundation for developing beginner-level Arabic language competence.

Analysis of Listening Skills (*Maharah Istima'*)

Table 2. Listening Skills Analysis for First-Grade Students

Description of the Teaching Material <i>Durusullughah al Arabiyah</i> Textbook	ACTFL Standards (Novice-Intermediate)	Description of the Proficiency Level of <i>Durusullughah al Arabiyah</i>
Listening skills are implemented through the Direct Method, in which students repeatedly listen to the pronunciation of objects and simple sentences and subsequently imitate them individually and collectively.	Listeners at the Novice Mid sublevel are able to recognize letters, symbols, the alphabet, syllabic writing systems, or a limited number of characters in character-based languages. They can understand a range of highly contextualized words and phrases, such as cognates and loanwords, but rarely comprehend material beyond single words. Repetition is very frequently required for listening comprehension.	The <i>Durusullughah al Arabiyah</i> textbook reflects the Novice Mid standard through the implementation of the Direct Method.

The analysis presented in Table 1 indicates that the listening materials in *Durusullughah al Arabiyah* are constructed using contextual vocabulary and simple sentences closely related to students' daily lives in the pesantren environment, such as:

According to the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines, Novice-level learners are able to understand simple words and expressions through contextual support, repetition, and visual assistance. In this context, the teacher's role as a language model helps students develop basic interpretive listening abilities, such as recognizing familiar vocabulary and understanding simple information (Zaeni et al., 2025). This approach reflects the principles of communicative language teaching, which position receptive skills as the foundation for the development of productive language abilities (Mana et al., 2020).

Nevertheless, the listening activities in the textbook remain dominated by teacher-centered listening and mechanical repetition. Students are more frequently engaged in listening and imitation than in developing interpretive understanding or spontaneous interaction. Therefore, the listening skills represented in the textbook reflect competencies approaching the ACTFL Novice Mid profile, particularly in recognizing basic vocabulary, understanding simple expressions, and following short instructions within familiar contexts. To strengthen these competencies, the integration of *bi'ah lughawiyah* is needed to provide students with more communicative and authentic language exposure (Alfitri et al., 2020).

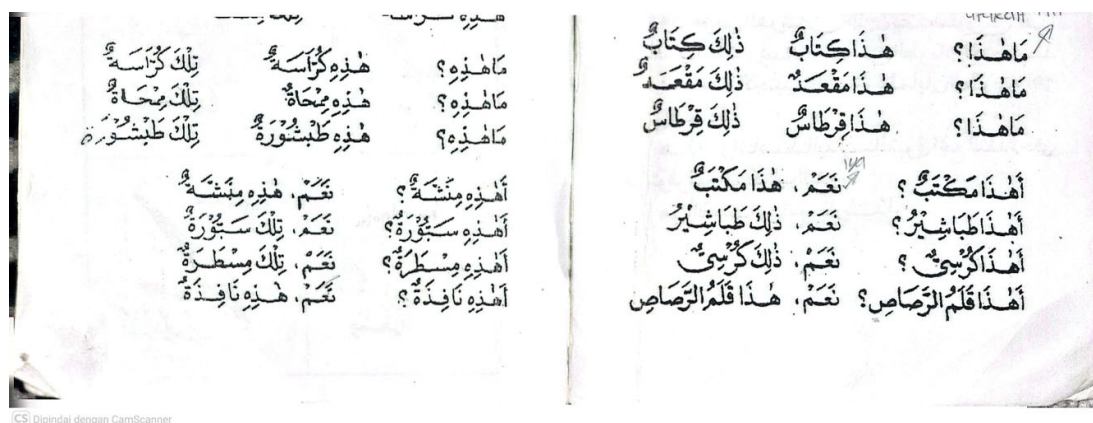
Analysis of Speaking Skills (*Maharah Kalam*)

Table 3. Speaking Skills Analysis for First-Grade Students

Description of the Teaching Material <i>Durusullughah al Arabiyah</i> Textbook	ACTFL Standards (Novice-Intermediate)	Description of the Proficiency Level of <i>Durusullughah al Arabiyah</i>
Speaking skills are implemented through the Direct Method by requiring students to: (1) imitate the teacher's pronunciation and expressions; (2) respond to the teacher's questions according to the topic of discussion; and (3) produce simple spoken expressions relevant to the instructional topic..	Speakers at the Novice Mid sublevel typically communicate using simple words and memorized phrases that are highly limited to the language contexts being learned. Students may produce only two or three words at a time when responding to direct questions, or they may rely on pre-formulated responses. They frequently pause while speaking as they attempt to recycle vocabulary used by their interlocutors or search for simpler lexical alternatives. As a result, native speakers often experience difficulty when communicating directly with Novice Mid speakers. Students also tend to repeat words from their first language or remain silent when required to address topics and perform tasks associated with the Intermediate level.	The <i>Durusullughah al Arabiyah</i> textbook reflects the Novice Mid standard through the application of the Direct Method.

The analysis presented in Table 2 indicates that the speaking materials in *Durusullughah al Arabiyah* are presented through simple dialogues and question-and-answer exercises related to students' daily lives in the pesantren environment, such as:

Figure 2. Example of Speaking Materials in *Durusullughah al Arabiyah*, pp. 2-3



In the speaking activities represented in the textbook, the teacher asked questions following the patterns provided in the textbook, after which students responded orally using answers available in the text. In several situations, students were also given opportunities to provide responses freely according to the context they understood. Speaking activities are predominantly characterized by question-and-answer drills, repetition, and sound imitation through responses in the form of short phrases and simple sentences.

The findings indicate that the speaking materials are directed toward strengthening basic vocabulary mastery and developing initial communicative abilities through drill-based activities and systematic repetition. The use of familiar vocabulary within students' daily learning environment helps learners gradually build speaking confidence and improve pronunciation and articulation. In addition, speaking skills appear to develop through their close relationship with listening skills (*istima'*) as the primary source of language input (Mohammed, 2022).

This approach is consistent with the characteristics of the Direct Method and the ACTFL Novice Mid proficiency level, in which learners are able to respond to simple communicative situations using limited and formulaic expressions within familiar contexts. At this level, students generally produce short responses consisting of brief phrases and simple sentences while still relying on teacher guidance and instructional prompts. Such activities align with ACTFL-oriented speaking instruction that emphasizes gradual oral fluency through repetition and continuous reinforcement.

The use of drill activities in *Durusullughah al Arabiyah* also reflects a strategic pedagogical approach commonly practiced in pesantren-based language instruction. Repetitive exercises help students strengthen vocabulary retention and reinforce frequently used sentence patterns (Jannah et al., 2023). Previous studies further indicate that drill-based instruction contributes significantly to vocabulary mastery and oral fluency among beginner learners (Alimuddien et al., 2022; Prabowo et al., 2024).

Although the speaking activities remain dominated by controlled speaking patterns, the provision of opportunities for free responses indicates an effort to encourage semi-guided communication. Therefore, the speaking skills represented in *Durusullughah al Arabiyah* reflect competencies approaching the ACTFL Novice Mid profile, particularly in responding to simple questions and using basic expressions within everyday contexts.

Analysis of Reading Skills (*Maharah Qira'ah*)

Table 4. Reading Skills Analysis of First-Year Students

Description of the Teaching Material <i>Durusullughah al Arabiyah</i> Textbook	ACTFL Standards (Novice-Intermediate)	Description of the Proficiency Level of <i>Durusullughah al Arabiyah</i>
Reading skills are implemented through the Direct Method by requiring students to: (1) read aloud expressions previously pronounced and written by the teacher; (2) read texts presented in the textbook; and (3) demonstrate the ability to read expressions, punctuation marks, nouns, numbers, and colors according to the instructional topics presented in the textbook.	At the Novice Mid sublevel, readers are able to recognize letters or alphabetic symbols, syllabic writing systems, or a limited number of characters in character-based languages. They can also identify a range of highly contextualized vocabulary and expressions, including cognates and loanwords, but they rarely comprehend material consisting of more than one expression. Repeated reading is often required to understand texts containing more than a single expression.	The <i>Durusullughah al Arabiyah</i> textbook reflects the Novice Mid ACTFL standard through the implementation of the Direct Method.

The analysis of the *mahārah qirā'ah* materials in *Durusullughah al Arabiyah* indicates that the reading texts are presented in the form of simple descriptive paragraphs related to the school environment and students' daily activities in the pesantren context, such as:

Figure 3. Example of Reading Materials in *Durusullughah al Arabiyah*, pp.13



The reading materials are structured through guided pronunciation practice, in which students read the texts presented in the textbook under the teacher's guidance through gradual pronunciation practice and repetition. Reading activities were primarily focused on the recognition of Arabic letters, basic vocabulary, and the literal comprehension of simple contextual and repetitive sentences. The use of short and familiar texts helped students gradually connect sounds, letter symbols, and meanings.

The findings indicate that the *qirā'ah* instruction in *Durusullughah al Arabiyah* is directed toward developing foundational reading abilities through the reinforcement of contextual vocabulary and structured repetition. In addition to strengthening phonological recognition of Arabic letters, reading exercises also help students understand the meanings of simple words and expressions within familiar contexts (Shobirin et al., 2020; Wargadinata et al., 2020). Vocabulary mastery acquired through repetitive reading practices further contributes to the gradual development of students' Arabic language proficiency (Y. Chamba & Rossana Ramirez-Avila, 2021).

From the ACTFL perspective, these instructional characteristics correspond to the Novice Mid proficiency level, in which learners are able to recognize letters, words, and simple phrases but still require contextual support and repetition to comprehend texts more fully. At this level, learners generally rely on familiar vocabulary, visual cues, and guided reading activities to achieve basic comprehension. ACTFL emphasizes that Novice Mid learners are not yet able to comprehend longer texts independently; therefore, instructional materials should be presented progressively and contextually. The use of vowel markings, punctuation, and

structured repetition has also been shown to facilitate reading comprehension among beginner-level learners (Rabie & Mohamed, 2022).

Therefore, the *qirā'ah* skills represented in *Durusullughah al Arabiyah* reflect competencies approaching the ACTFL Novice Mid profile, particularly in understanding simple texts based on familiar vocabulary and repetitive sentence patterns. The implementation of the Direct Method in reading instruction is also relevant because it integrates pronunciation practice, recognition of letter symbols, and direct comprehension of meaning through guided exercises. Within the pesantren context, this approach becomes more effective due to the language environment that enables students to engage in continuous reading practice (Husna et al., 2022).

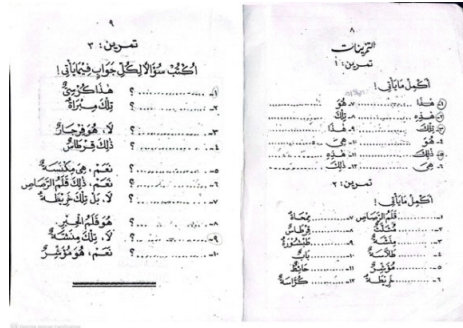
Analysis of Writing Skills (Maharah Kitabah)

Table 5. Writing Skills Analysis of First-Year Students

Description of the Teaching Material <i>Durusullughah al Arabiyah</i> Textbook	ACTFL Standards (Novice-Intermediate)	Description of the Proficiency Level of <i>Durusullughah al Arabiyah</i>
Writing skills are implemented through the Direct Method by requiring students to: (1) write expressions previously pronounced and read aloud by the teacher; (2) reproduce written materials presented in the textbook; (3) write words or expressions related to pictures, punctuation marks, numbers, and colors according to the instructional topics in the textbook; and (4) complete writing tasks based on the instructions provided in the textbook.	At the Novice Mid sublevel, learners are able to write a limited number of words, simple sentences, and basic expressions within familiar contexts. They can convey very limited information, such as completing personal data, self-introductions, and other basic biographical information. When asked to write about well-practiced and familiar topics using formulaic language, Novice Mid writers are generally able to perform effectively. However, when required to write about new or unfamiliar topics, they experience significant difficulty. In addition, errors and inaccuracies in the use of symbols and written forms frequently occur. At this stage, their written production may be difficult to understand, even for readers who are accustomed to non-native writers.	The <i>Durusullughah al Arabiyah</i> textbook demonstrates alignment with the ACTFL Novice Mid standards by employing a Direct Method approach.

The analysis of the writing skills materials in *Durusullughah al Arabiyah* indicates that writing exercises are presented through structured tasks, such as completing sentences, answering questions, and constructing questions based on the answers provided, for example:

Figure 3. Example of Writing Materials in *Durusullughah al Arabiyah*, pp.8-9



The textbook organizes writing instruction through structured tasks emphasizing vocabulary accuracy and patterned sentence production. Students were instructed to complete sentences, answer questions, and construct questions according to the patterns provided in the textbook. In several activities, students were also given opportunities to provide free responses, although the question structures remained largely patterned and guided. Writing activities primarily focused on vocabulary mastery, accuracy in simple sentence structures, and pattern-based writing (*controlled writing*).

The findings indicate that the writing instruction in *Durusullughah al Arabiyah* is directed toward developing foundational writing abilities through gradual exercises and systematic repetition. These activities involve both cognitive and psychomotor skills simultaneously, particularly in mastering Arabic letters, organizing words, and applying simple sentence patterns (Wargadinata et al., 2021). Writing exercises such as sentence completion, question construction, and repetitive writing practices help strengthen vocabulary mastery and improve writing accuracy through continuous practice and consistent feedback (Sutaman & Febriani, 2021).

From the ACTFL perspective, these instructional characteristics correspond to the Novice Mid proficiency level, in which learners are able to write words, phrases, and short sentences using familiar and contextual patterns. The Direct Method applied in *Durusullughah al Arabiyah* is also relevant because it facilitates learners' internalization of written forms through the simultaneous processes of listening, speaking, and writing (Ghani et al., 2011). This integration is important because Arabic writing skills require the simultaneous mastery of letters, structures, and meanings (Fidayani et al., 2023).

The use of structured and repetitive writing activities in the textbook also reflects a drill-based instructional approach that is appropriate for beginner-level learners. Such activities help students reinforce frequently used vocabulary and sentence patterns while gradually developing foundational writing competence.

Nevertheless, the *kitābah* activities remain dominated by controlled writing patterns and provide limited opportunities for independent free writing. Therefore, the writing skills represented in *Durusullughah al Arabiyah* reflect competencies approaching the ACTFL Novice Mid profile, particularly in writing simple expressions based on familiar and structured patterns.

The findings indicate that Arabic language instruction in *Durusullughah al Arabiyah* generally reflects the characteristics of learners at the ACTFL Novice Mid proficiency level. The four language skills are developed through a gradual instructional approach emphasizing basic vocabulary mastery, structured repetition, and the use of contexts familiar to pesantren students. This pattern is reflected in *istima'*, *kalam*, *qir'ah*, and *kitabah* activities, which are predominantly characterized by drill-based exercises, imitation, and simple responses.

The findings further reveal that the Direct Method remains the dominant instructional strategy in Arabic language learning within pesantren settings. Teachers function as language models through activities such as reading aloud, pronunciation practice, and direct questioning, while students respond through repetition and guided exercises. This approach is consistent with theories of beginner language acquisition that position repetition and language exposure as the foundation for developing initial communicative competence.

From the ACTFL perspective, the instructional characteristics identified in the textbook indicate that students are able to comprehend and produce words, phrases, and simple sentences within highly familiar contexts. However, most learning activities remain at the level of controlled communication, limiting the development of interpretive, interactive, and independent language production skills.

These findings suggest that *Durusullughah al Arabiyah* is effective as a foundational textbook for beginner Arabic language learning, particularly in strengthening basic receptive and productive skills. Nevertheless, achieving higher communicative competence requires the development of more communicative, interactive, and authentic language-based learning activities. The integration of *bi'ah lughawiyah* and contextual language practice therefore becomes essential to enable students not only to reproduce language patterns, but also to use Arabic more spontaneously and meaningfully in everyday communication.

Analytical Interpretation of ACTFL Alignment in Pesantren-Based Arabic Language Learning

The findings indicate that *Durusullughah al Arabiyah* reflects a communicative learning orientation substantially aligned with the ACTFL proficiency framework, particularly at the novice and intermediate levels. This alignment suggests a pedagogical shift in pesantren-based Arabic learning from grammar-oriented instruction toward proficiency-based learning

that emphasizes meaningful communication. In this regard, pesantren pedagogy appears to have implicitly embodied principles of communicative language acquisition despite historically developing within the tradition of classical Islamic education.

The organization of *mufradat* (vocabulary), *muhadatsah* (conversation), reading, and writing materials demonstrates the gradual development of communicative competence through contextual exposure and repeated interaction. This pattern is consistent with ACTFL's emphasis on interpersonal, interpretive, and presentational communication. Furthermore, the classification of instructional objectives according to proficiency levels enables more systematic and goal-oriented learning evaluation and planning (Maimunah et al., 2022).

These findings challenge the assumption that international proficiency frameworks are only applicable to formal or Western-oriented educational systems. Instead, the pesantren tradition demonstrates the existence of an indigenous communicative foundation compatible with global proficiency standards. The implementation of *bi'ah lughawiyah* further strengthens this alignment by creating a natural environment for authentic and contextualized language acquisition through continuous interaction both inside and outside the classroom.

Conceptual Implications for Arabic Language Pedagogy

Conceptually, this study positions ACTFL not merely as an evaluative framework, but as a conceptual bridge connecting pesantren learning traditions with modern communicative language teaching. While previous studies have largely situated ACTFL within formal madrasah curricula and textbook evaluation, this study demonstrates that ACTFL principles can also be implemented within pesantren environments characterized by intensive oral interaction, language habituation, and repeated communicative practice.

The compatibility between *Durusullughah al Arabiyah* and ACTFL indicates that traditional pesantren pedagogy should not be viewed as contradictory to modern communicative approaches. Rather, it possesses foundations compatible with proficiency-based language learning. In this context, ACTFL functions not as a replacement for pesantren traditions, but as an analytical framework capable of strengthening and structuring existing pedagogical practices.

The findings also suggest that ACTFL-based instruction encourages more contextual, interactive, and learner-centered learning strategies. The integration of communicative interaction, contextual learning, and technology expands opportunities for meaningful language exposure beyond conventional classroom settings. Access to multimedia learning, online assessment, collaborative interaction, and authentic Arabic resources further supports learning environments that are adaptive to the demands of twenty-first century education (Dalimunthe et al., 2025; Fitrianto, 2024). Moreover, the contextual organization of vocabulary, grammar,

and conversational materials strengthens students' communicative competence by directly connecting language learning with social situations relevant to pesantren life (Utama & Daroini, 2024; Zaeni et al., 2025).

Critical Reflection on the Implementation of ACTFL

Despite the substantial alignment between *Durusullughah al Arabiyah* and the ACTFL standards, this study also reveals several limitations. Although communicative elements are strongly reflected in oral interaction and vocabulary exercises, some instructional components remain structurally oriented and insufficiently directed toward higher-level communicative functions, particularly argumentative writing, interpretive discourse, and spontaneous negotiation of meaning. This indicates that the implementation of ACTFL principles in pesantren learning materials remains concentrated at the basic proficiency level.

In addition, the effectiveness of ACTFL-based learning in pesantren depends heavily on the existence of an active *bi'ah lughawiyah* and sustained language interaction beyond classroom instruction. Textbooks alone are insufficient for developing communicative proficiency without environmental support, teacher mediation, and consistent communicative practice. Consequently, communicative competence in pesantren is shaped not only by instructional materials, but also by the institution's living socio-linguistic environment.

Furthermore, although ACTFL is globally recognized as a language proficiency framework, its indicators were developed within Western academic contexts of foreign language education. The direct adoption of ACTFL without contextual adaptation therefore risks overlooking the social, cultural, religious, and epistemological dimensions that characterize Arabic language learning in pesantren. Accordingly, ACTFL should be critically adapted rather than normatively adopted as a universal framework.

Overall, this study demonstrates that the intersection between *Durusullughah al Arabiyah* and ACTFL opens new possibilities for reconstructing Arabic language pedagogy in pesantren toward a more communicative, proficiency-based, and contextually adaptive learning model without diminishing the distinctive identity of pesantren educational traditions.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that *Durusullughah al Arabiyah* exhibits substantial alignment with the ACTFL language proficiency framework, particularly at the Novice Mid level, through instructional practices that emphasize contextual communication, language habituation, and authentic interaction within the pesantren environment. These findings contribute theoretically to the development of Arabic language pedagogy by showing that proficiency-based learning principles are not only relevant to formal educational settings, but are also compatible with the Arabic language learning traditions of pesantren supported by *bi'ah lughawiyah*.

Academically, this study expands ACTFL-related scholarship into the context of pesantren education, which has remained relatively underexplored in Arabic language pedagogy research. Practically, the findings suggest that ACTFL can serve as a valuable reference framework for developing Arabic language instruction in Islamic educational institutions that is more systematic, communicative, and proficiency-oriented.

Nevertheless, this study is limited to the content analysis of the textbook and does not directly measure students' language proficiency through proficiency testing or observations of communicative performance. In addition, the study was conducted within a single pesantren context and therefore does not fully represent the diversity of Arabic language learning practices across Indonesian pesantren. Future research is therefore recommended to incorporate classroom-based observation, proficiency assessment, and broader analyses of ACTFL implementation across various pesantren models and Arabic language teaching materials.

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