

IMPLEMENTING MUHADHARAH TO DEVELOP SANTRI'S SPEAKING SKILLS AND SELF-CONFIDENCE AT AL-FATTAH ISLAMIC BOARDING SCHOOL, BUNGO

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ABSTRAK

Keterampilan berbicara di depan umum dan kepercayaan diri yang menopangnya merupakan kompetensi penting bagi santri, tetapi banyak santri menghadapi hambatan linguistik sekaligus psikologis ketika harus berbicara di hadapan audiens. Penelitian ini bertujuan menganalisis implementasi kegiatan muhadharah (latihan pidato) dan perannya dalam mengembangkan keterampilan berbicara serta kepercayaan diri santri di Pondok Pesantren Al-Fattah, Bungo, Jambi. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan desain studi kasus. Data dikumpulkan melalui observasi, wawancara mendalam, dan dokumentasi yang melibatkan sembilan informan kunci, kemudian dianalisis dengan model interaktif Miles, Huberman, dan Saldaña. Keterampilan berbicara diidentifikasi melalui observasi penampilan, teks pidato, dan empat kriteria rubrik muhadharah, sedangkan kepercayaan diri diidentifikasi melalui wawancara tentang pengalaman santri serta observasi perilaku mereka ketika tampil. Keabsahan data diuji melalui triangulasi sumber, triangulasi metode, dan member checking. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa muhadharah dilaksanakan secara terstruktur dalam tiga bahasa (Arab, Indonesia, dan Inggris) dengan sistem berjenjang dan evaluasi berbasis rubrik. Kegiatan ini memperbaiki artikulasi, memperkaya kosakata, dan melatih kemampuan menyusun argumen, serta membangun kepercayaan diri melalui keamanan psikologis, pembiasaan, dan apresiasi sebaya. Komitmen pengasuh dan fasilitas yang memadai menjadi faktor pendukung, sedangkan kecemasan awal berbicara diatasi melalui pendampingan intensif. Penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa muhadharah berfungsi sebagai intervensi psikopedagogis, bukan sekadar metode pengajaran bahasa, sehingga model muhadharah yang terstruktur dan berjenjang dapat dipertimbangkan oleh pesantren lain dengan menyesuaikannya pada konteks masing-masing.

Kata Kunci: Muhadharah; Keterampilan berbicara; Kepercayaan diri; Keamanan psikologis; Pondok pesantren

ABSTRACT

Public speaking skills and self-confidence are essential competencies for santri, yet many students in Islamic boarding schools face linguistic and psychological barriers when speaking before an audience. This study aims to analyse the implementation of muhadharah (speech practice) and its role in developing santri's speaking skills and self-confidence at Pondok Pesantren Al-Fattah, Bungo, Jambi. A qualitative approach with a case study design was employed. Data were collected through observation, in-depth interviews and documentation involving nine key informants and were analysed using the interactive model of Miles, Huberman and Saldaña. Speaking skills were identified through observed performances, speech texts and the four criteria of the muhadharah rubric, while self-confidence was identified through interviews on santri's experiences and observation of their behaviour when speaking. Trustworthiness was established through source triangulation, method triangulation and member checking. The findings show that muhadharah is implemented in a structured manner in three languages (Arabic, Indonesian and English) with a tiered progression and rubric-based evaluation. The activity improves articulation, enriches vocabulary and trains argument construction, and it builds self-confidence through psychological safety, habituation and peer appreciation. The commitment of the kyai and adequate facilities support the programme, while initial speaking anxiety is overcome through intensive mentoring. The study concludes that muhadharah functions as a psychopedagogical intervention rather than merely a language-teaching method, and that its structured, tiered model may be adapted by other pesantren in light of their own contexts.

Keyword: Muhadharah; Speaking skills; Self-confidence; Psychological safety; Islamic boarding school

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1. INTRODUCTION

In twenty-first-century education, the ability to communicate orally, and in particular to speak in front of an audience, is increasingly treated as a core competence rather than an optional skill. Employers rank communication and oral presentation among the most valued graduate qualities, and competent presentation draws on content knowledge, professional attitudes, and verbal and non-verbal skills (Mohamed et al., 2023); presentation tasks have also been shown to raise students' confidence in speaking in public (Ningsih et al., 2023). Second language pedagogy likewise regards spoken fluency as the product of meaning-focused practice and repeated performance, not of knowledge about language alone (Newton & Nation, 2021). In Indonesia, the pondok pesantren (Islamic boarding school) plays a strategic role in forming not only the spiritual character of young Muslims but also

intellectually capable and communicative graduates. Field realities, however, show that many santri (pesantren students) experience considerable difficulty with verbal communication and self-confidence. A survey of 113 students at an Islamic boarding school in Samarinda found that anxiety accounted for a large share of the variation in English speaking achievement (Sayuri et al., 2022), and a recent systematic review traced speaking anxiety among learners of English to fear of negative evaluation, limited self-assurance, unsupportive classrooms and cultural expectations (Gunawan, 2026).

Pondok Pesantren Al-Fattah, located in Bungo Regency, Jambi Province, is one of the pesantren that seeks to integrate traditional Islamic values with the demands of modern skills, and one of its flagship programmes is muhadharah. The term derives from the Arabic root *ḥaḍara*, which denotes presence; in pesantren pedagogy, however, muhadharah refers to the practice of delivering speeches, sermons or talks before an audience in Arabic, Indonesian and, in some institutions, English. Comparable programmes appear under related names such as *khitobah* or *khitobiyah*, and they typically combine the preparation of a text, its delivery before peers and some form of evaluation (Mutia & Hasaniyah, 2024; Ratnawati et al., 2025; Yosepin & Husna, 2023).

Although muhadharah is a long-standing pesantren tradition, much of the existing research has approached it as a vehicle for language acquisition, especially for Arabic vocabulary (*mufradāt*), grammar and the speaking skill (*mahārat al-kalām*). Studies in Banten, Malang and elsewhere report that muhadharah improves santri's Arabic vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation and fluency (Maimun, 2024; Mutia & Hasaniyah, 2024; Shofa et al., 2025), and research on the Arabic language environment (*bi'ah lughawiyah*) shows that speeches, drama and conversation sessions help students use Arabic in daily communication (Setiyadi et al., 2023). A second group of studies notes that santri become more confident after joining speech programmes (Adawia et al., 2026; Ramadan & Jamilah, 2026; Sadikin & Sobari, 2025; Zain et al., 2025), and a study of Arabic speech practice in a madrasah in North Sumatra explicitly examined self-confidence in speaking Arabic (Anwar & Al Rasyid, 2025). These studies, however, mostly describe programme stages and outcomes; they seldom explain the psychological processes through which confidence is formed.

Research outside the pesantren offers useful concepts for such an explanation. A systematic review of interventions for speaking anxiety among university students grouped them into direct and indirect approaches and recommended that the causes of anxiety be understood before an intervention is chosen (Elahemer & Said, 2022). Repeated exposure to simulated audiences reduces public speaking anxiety (Premkumar et al., 2021), and practising in front of a supportive audience improves both self-evaluation and observed confidence in a later real presentation (Kroczeck & Mühlberger, 2023). Self-efficacy theory identifies mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, social persuasion and physiological states as the main sources of beliefs about one's capability (Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2021), while research on psychological safety shows that learners speak up when they do not fear being judged or humiliated (Edmondson, 2019; McLeod & Gupta, 2023). Within Islamic education, a da'wah

outreach programme for female santri was found to instil self-confidence alongside communication skills (Ummah et al., 2025), which suggests that religious speaking practices can carry psychological as well as linguistic benefits.

The gap addressed by this study therefore lies in the need to understand muhadharah not only as a linguistic method but as a comprehensive psychopedagogical intervention, one in which language practice, emotional regulation, social recognition and religious motivation operate together. Three limitations of recent work make this need evident. First, most studies of muhadharah and khitobah describe programme stages and perceived improvements without tracing the processes that link practice to confidence (Muttaqin et al., 2025; Ramadan & Jamilah, 2026; Yosepin & Husna, 2023). Second, studies that address confidence usually treat it as a by-product of language practice rather than as an outcome with its own psychological mechanisms (Anwar & Al Rasyid, 2025; Zain et al., 2025). Third, research on speaking anxiety and psychological safety has been conducted mainly in universities and general schools (Elahemer & Said, 2022; Gunawan, 2026; McLeod & Gupta, 2023), so little is known about how these mechanisms operate in a boarding community in which religious meaning, communal life and the authority of the kyai shape speaking practice. Pondok Pesantren Al-Fattah Bungo was chosen as the research site because it runs a structured and innovative model of muhadharah and has been relatively successful in producing santri who are vocal and confident, a positive anomaly amid the common stereotype of santri as passive or shy. Its location in Jambi also adds regional diversity to a body of muhadharah research that has been drawn largely from Java. Al-Fattah is also an informative case for three further reasons. Its programme combines three languages, each with its own speech genre, and a tiered progression from reading a text to impromptu speech, which allows the contribution of programme structure to be examined. Its santri live and practise in the same community, so peer responses and institutional recognition can be observed in their natural setting. Finally, the regular involvement of the kyai makes it possible to examine how religious authority shapes the meaning that santri attach to speaking. These features make Al-Fattah a case from which much can be learned about the processes under study (Yin, 2018).

Based on this background, the study aims (1) to describe the implementation of muhadharah at Pondok Pesantren Al-Fattah Bungo, (2) to analyse the role of muhadharah in developing santri's speaking skills, and (3) to explore how muhadharah shapes santri's self-confidence. The unit of analysis is the muhadharah programme as a bounded case, studied through the experiences of the kyai (pesantren leader), the language supervisors who coach the activity, and senior and junior santri who take part in it. In this study, speaking skills refer to the quality of santri's oral delivery, covering linguistic aspects such as vocabulary, articulation, intonation and the organisation of ideas, and non-linguistic aspects such as gesture, body language and stage presence. Self-confidence refers to santri's belief that they are capable of speaking before an audience and their willingness to do so, a notion closely related to self-efficacy (Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2021). The two are treated as related but distinct outcomes: speaking skills describe how well santri speak, whereas self-confidence

describes how santri feel about speaking and whether they are willing to come forward. The study is expected to contribute theoretically and practically to the development of communication pedagogy in pesantren.

The remainder of the article is organised as follows. The next section explains the research method, including the case study design, informants, data collection, analysis and trustworthiness procedures. The results and discussion section first presents the findings on the implementation of muhadharah, its contribution to speaking skills and self-confidence, and its supporting and inhibiting factors, and then interprets these findings in light of theory and prior studies. The conclusion summarises the answers to the research questions and outlines prospects for further research.

2. METHOD

This study employed a qualitative approach with a case study design. A case study is appropriate when the aim is to understand a contemporary phenomenon in depth within its real-life context, particularly when the boundary between the phenomenon and its context is not clearly evident (Yin, 2018). The muhadharah programme at Pondok Pesantren Al-Fattah is such a phenomenon: the speaking practice cannot be separated from the boarding-school routine, the relationship between santri and their teachers, or the religious meanings attached to delivering a speech. The design allowed the researchers to examine how muhadharah is organised, how participants experience it, and how it relates to santri's psychological and social reality (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The validity of the design rests on its reliance on multiple sources of evidence collected in the natural setting and on a clear chain of evidence from field data to interpretation, which are the main safeguards recommended for qualitative case studies (Yin, 2018).

The research was conducted at Pondok Pesantren Al-Fattah, Bungo Regency, Jambi Province, over four months, from March to June 2025. During this period the researchers were present at the pesantren to observe the weekly muhadharah sessions, which are held every Friday night and Sunday morning. Their presence combined participant and non-participant observation, which allowed them to follow the activity closely while recording what happened before, during and after the sessions. Observation therefore followed the programme's own rhythm of two sessions a week, on Friday nights after the Isha prayer until 21.30 and on Sunday mornings after the Fajr prayer until 07.00, throughout the four months of fieldwork, and it also covered santri's preparation before the sessions and the evaluation that followed them.

Informants were selected through purposive sampling, that is, on the basis of their direct involvement in and knowledge of the muhadharah programme. Nine key informants took part: the kyai who leads the pesantren, two heads of the language section who also act as muhadharah supervisors, three senior santri in the third year of Aliyah (senior secondary) or college level who are active speakers, and three junior santri in the first year of Aliyah who had recently begun to take part in the activity. The kyai was included because he sets the

purpose of the programme and regularly attends the sessions; the supervisors because they organise the tiered system, apply the rubric and give feedback; and the senior and junior santri because they could report the experience of speaking at different stages of the programme. This composition allowed the study to compare the perspective of those who design and supervise the programme with the perspectives of santri at different stages of experience. The composition of the informants is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Key informants of the study

Informant category	Number	Role in the study
Kyai (leader of the pesantren)	1	Institutional policy and commitment to muhadharah
Head of the language section / muhadharah supervisor	2	Design, coaching and evaluation of muhadharah
Senior santri (third year of Aliyah or college level), active speakers	3	Experience of progression over time
Junior santri (first year of Aliyah), new participants	3	Experience of initial speaking anxiety and adaptation
Total	9	

Source: Research data (2025).

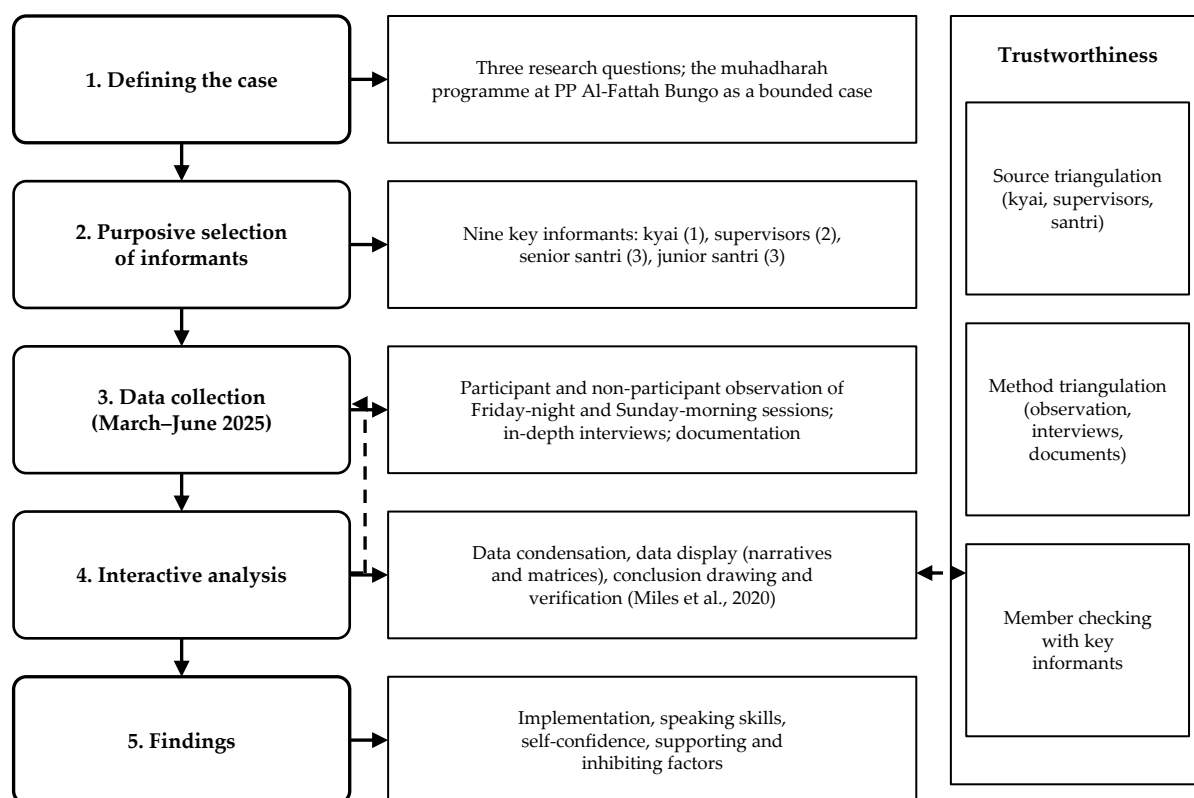
Table 1 shows that the informants represent three levels of the programme: institutional leadership, supervision and participation. Including both senior and junior santri was important because the study sought to understand how confidence develops over time; the senior santri could reflect on their progress from the time they entered the pesantren, while the junior santri could describe their current experience of speaking anxiety. In qualitative research, such variation within a purposive sample strengthens the credibility of interpretations by allowing patterns to be compared across different positions (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

The researchers served as the main instrument of data collection, supported by a semi-structured interview guide. Data were collected through three techniques. First, participant and non-participant observation focused on the weekly muhadharah sessions on Friday nights and Sunday mornings, the santri's preparation for their speeches, and the dynamics of evaluation after each performance. Second, in-depth semi-structured interviews explored the informants' psychological experiences, the obstacles they faced and their perceptions of the activity. Third, documentation was used to collect santri's speech texts, the muhadharah assessment rubric, photographs of the activity and the pesantren's institutional profile. Speaking skills were identified from observed performances, from santri's speech texts and from the four criteria of the muhadharah rubric, which also served as the focus of observation. Self-confidence was identified from santri's accounts of how they felt before and during their speeches and from behaviour observed in the sessions, such as a trembling voice, going blank, voice modulation and reliance on the text. No standardised test or scale was used; changes were identified by comparing the accounts and observed performances of junior and senior santri and the santri's descriptions of their own progress. The combination of these techniques

allowed observed behaviour to be compared with what informants said about their experiences and with the written records of the programme.

Data were analysed using the interactive model of Miles et al. (2020), which consists of three concurrent streams of activity. Data condensation involved selecting, focusing and simplifying the field notes, interview transcripts and documents that were relevant to speaking skills and self-confidence. Data display organised the condensed data into narrative texts and matrices, for example matrices that set the experiences of junior and senior santri side by side. Conclusion drawing and verification involved identifying patterns, such as the stages through which anxiety diminished, and checking them repeatedly against the data. Throughout this process, data segments relevant to each research question were labelled so that recurring themes could be identified and compared across informants (Miles et al., 2020).

Trustworthiness was established through source triangulation, method triangulation and member checking. Source triangulation compared the statements of the kyai, the supervisors and the santri on the same issues; method triangulation compared the results of observation with those of the interviews and documents; and member checking was carried out by confirming the main findings with the key informants. These procedures are widely recommended for establishing the credibility of qualitative findings (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The overall research procedure is summarised in Figure 1.



Qualitative case study at Pondok Pesantren Al-Fattah, Bungo, Jambi; dashed lines mark iterative checking

Figure 1. Research procedure of the qualitative case study

Source: Authors' elaboration based on research data (2025).

Figure 1 illustrates that data collection, analysis and verification were not separate linear phases but overlapping activities. Field observations of a given session informed later interviews, and preliminary interpretations from the matrices were checked through further observation and member checking. This iterative movement between data and interpretation is characteristic of qualitative case studies and helped ensure that the conclusions remained grounded in the participants' experiences (Miles et al., 2020; Yin, 2018).

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

RESULTS

Implementation of Muhadharah at Al-Fattah

Observation and interviews showed that muhadharah at Pondok Pesantren Al-Fattah is not carried out sporadically but through a structured and measurable system. The activity is held routinely twice a week: on Friday nights, from after the Isha prayer until 21.30 Western Indonesian Time, and on Sunday mornings, from after the Fajr prayer until 07.00. The language of the session rotates. Arabic muhadharah focuses on religious speeches, such as sermons (*khutbah*) and good admonition (*mau'izah hasanah*); Indonesian muhadharah focuses on speeches on nationhood, motivational talks and activity reports; and English muhadharah focuses on speeches, news reading and storytelling. The main components of the programme are summarised in Table 2.

Table 2. Components of the muhadharah programme at Pondok Pesantren Al-Fattah

Component	Description
Schedule	Friday night (after Isha until 21.30 WIB) and Sunday morning (after Fajr until 07.00 WIB)
Arabic muhadharah	Religious speeches: sermons (<i>khutbah</i>) and good admonition (<i>mau'izah hasanah</i>)
Indonesian muhadharah	Speeches on nationhood, motivational talks and activity reports
English muhadharah	Speeches, news reading and storytelling
Tiered progression	First year: reading a text (<i>manthuqi</i>); second year: reduced dependence on the text (<i>nashfi</i>); third year: speech without a text (<i>irtijali</i> /impromptu)
Assessment rubric	(a) fluency and articulation; (b) relevance of content; (c) gestures and body language; (d) stage presence
Feedback	Educational correction using the 'sandwich' pattern: praise, correction, renewed praise

Source: Observation, interviews and documentation (2025).

Table 2 shows that the programme regulates four aspects at once: time, language, level of difficulty and assessment. The tiered system is particularly important. First-year santri (beginners) are required to read from a text (*manthuqi*); second-year santri begin to reduce their dependence on the text (*nashfi*); and third-year santri must deliver their speeches without a text (*irtijali*, or impromptu). Each performance is assessed with a rubric covering fluency and articulation, relevance of content, gestures and body language, and stage presence. The

rubric was among the programme documents collected during fieldwork. A language supervisor explained the reasoning behind this progression and the way feedback is given:

"Here we do not force first-year santri to come forward without a text straight away. That would kill their spirit. We give them a text, they memorise it, and then we slowly let go. Evaluation is also not done by scolding them; we use a 'sandwich' system: praise first, give the correction, then praise their enthusiasm again." (Ustadz A, language supervisor, interview, 12 April 2025)

The structure described in Table 2 and in this statement can be represented as a cycle in which scheduled practice, language rotation, tiered tasks and evaluation follow one another every week (Figure 2).

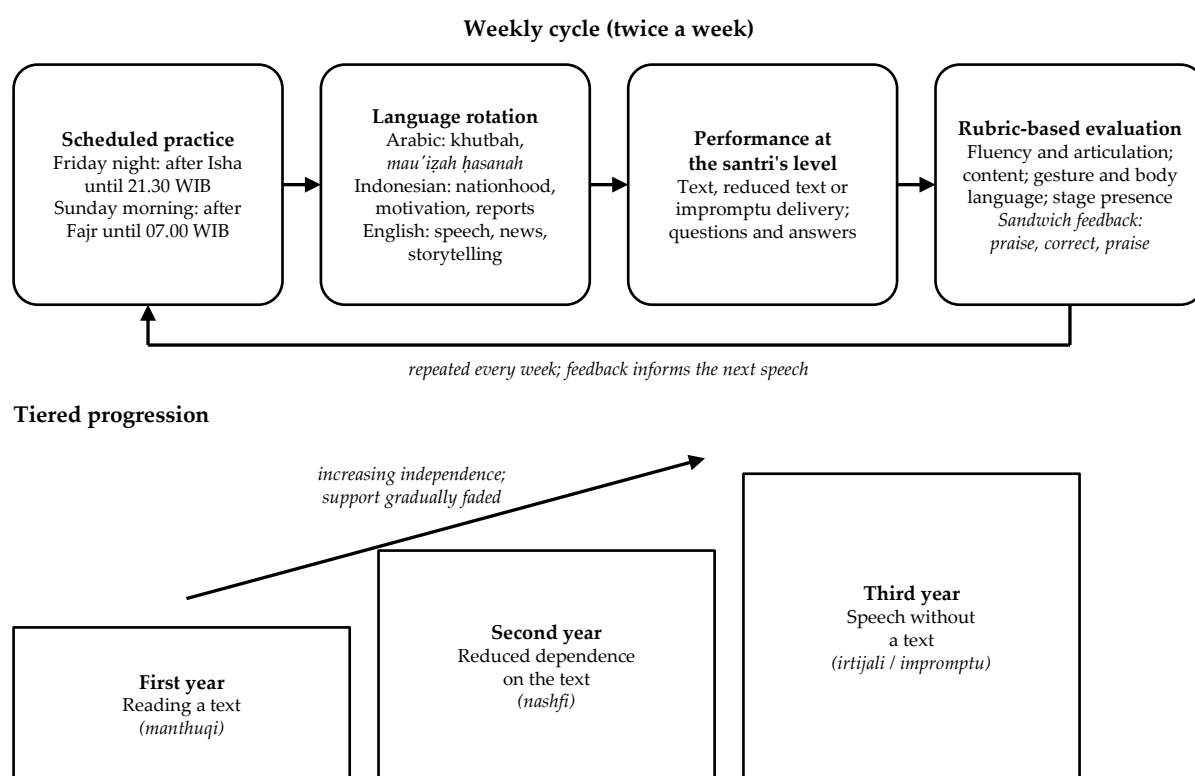


Figure 2. Implementation cycle of muhadharah at Pondok Pesantren Al-Fattah

Source: Authors' elaboration based on research data (2025).

Figure 2 indicates that the programme combines regularity with gradual increases in challenge. The rotation of languages ensures that santri practise religious, civic and international registers, while the tiered progression adjusts the demand of the task to the santri's experience.

Development of Santri's Speaking Skills

The implementation of muhadharah appeared to contribute substantially to the development of santri's speaking skills. The findings indicate marked improvement in three main areas: linguistic mastery and vocabulary, articulation and intonation, and the ability to construct arguments.

With regard to linguistic mastery and vocabulary, the obligation to compose and deliver texts in three languages pushes santri to keep accessing and storing new vocabulary. They do not simply memorise words; they use them in the context of a speech. A senior santri described this change as follows:

"I used to find it really hard to speak Arabic; my tongue was stiff. But because I was made to come forward every week, I had no choice but to look for new vocabulary so that my speeches would not always be the same. Now when I speak Arabic or English it is more fluent; I no longer translate in my head." (Santri R, third year, interview, 15 April 2025)

With regard to articulation and intonation, repeated practice in muhadharah helped santri overcome articulation problems. Santri are taught diaphragmatic breathing, word stress and appropriate intonation so that their message is not delivered monotonously. Observation showed that senior santri displayed far more dynamic voice modulation than they reportedly had when they first entered the pesantren. This comparison combined observation of junior and senior santri in the same sessions with the senior santri's own accounts of how they spoke when they first arrived. With regard to argument construction and critical thinking, the impromptu stage and the question-and-answer sessions that follow speeches train santri to think quickly. They must organise an argument systematically, with an opening, a body and a closing, within a short time.

Formation of Self-Confidence

The most prominent finding of this study concerns the role of muhadharah in breaking down santri's psychological fear of speaking. Self-confidence did not appear instantly; it developed through a psychological process facilitated by the pesantren environment. Three mechanisms were identified: overcoming glossophobia through repeated exposure, psychological safety and peer appreciation, and the formation of identity and social roles.

Almost all of the junior santri informants admitted to experiencing stage fright, trembling and going blank (forgetting their material) during their first months. The high frequency of the activity, twice a week, nevertheless pushed them into a natural form of exposure. One junior santri recalled:

"In the first week my legs felt very weak, my voice was shaking, and I even forgot what I was going to say. I was embarrassed to be watched by my friends. But because I was asked to come forward every week, I gradually realised that when I go up, my friends do not eat me alive. They actually support me. Now I actually look forward to going up." (Santri F, first year, interview, 18 April 2025)

The pesantren has also built a culture of psychological safety in which mistakes in speaking are not punished with physical or demeaning verbal sanctions but are corrected educationally. Loud applause from hundreds of santri after a speaker finishes, regardless of whether the speech was perfect, provides a strong social reward. This culture was evident in both the observed sessions and the interviews: the supervisor quoted above described corrections that begin and end with praise, and the account of Santri F shows that peers were experienced as supportive rather than threatening. In addition, confidence grows because

santri feel that they have a role. Santri who are skilled in muhadharah are often appointed to lead ceremonies, to act as masters of ceremonies at major events or to represent the pesantren in inter-pesantren competitions. This social recognition helps them internalise the identity of someone who is able to speak and to be heard.

Supporting and Inhibiting Factors

The study identified three supporting and three inhibiting factors in the implementation of muhadharah. These factors, together with the way the pesantren responds to them, are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Supporting and inhibiting factors in the implementation of muhadharah

Category	Factor	Manifestation in the field
Supporting	Commitment of the kyai	The kyai regularly attends and gives advice, giving the activity spiritual and institutional weight
Supporting	Educational rewards and sanctions	Scholarships or privileges for high achievers; additional educational tasks (e.g., memorising an extra text) for unprepared santri, not physical punishment
Supporting	Audio-visual facilities	A good sound system and a projector help santri understand the visual context of speaking
Inhibiting	Individual psychological conditions	Santri from very authoritarian families or with social trauma need a much longer adaptation period
Inhibiting	Limited reference materials	Santri run out of speech ideas because of limited literature and restricted internet access
Inhibiting	Physical fatigue	Night sessions in a dense schedule are sometimes attended in poor physical condition, affecting vocal quality
Response	Intensive mentoring	Initial speaking anxiety (glossophobia) among new santri is overcome through intensive mentoring

Source: Interviews, observation and documentation (2025).

As Table 3 shows, the most important supporting factor is the commitment of the kyai. The kyai of Al-Fattah regularly attends the sessions and gives advice, which signals that the activity carries high spiritual and institutional weight. The second supporting factor is an educational system of rewards and sanctions: high-achieving santri receive scholarships or privileges, while those who are unprepared are given additional educational tasks, such as memorising an additional text, rather than physical punishment. The third is audio-visual facilities: a good sound system and a projector help santri learn to understand the visual context of speaking. On the inhibiting side, some santri from very authoritarian family backgrounds or with social trauma need a much longer period of adaptation. Santri sometimes run out of ideas for their speeches because of limited literature and restricted internet access in the pesantren. Physical fatigue is a further obstacle; because the pesantren schedule is dense, the night sessions are sometimes attended in less than optimal physical condition, which affects vocal quality. Initial speaking anxiety among new santri is addressed through intensive mentoring.

DISCUSSION

Muhadharah as Structured Scaffolding

The first research question concerned how muhadharah is implemented at Al-Fattah. The findings show a programme that is regular, multilingual and graded, and this structure is itself part of the explanation for its effects.

From a sociocultural perspective, the arrangement shown in Table 2 and Figure 2 resembles the provision and gradual withdrawal of assistance within a learner's zone of proximal development: the text, the supervisor's guidance and peer support act as forms of mediation that are reduced as the learner becomes capable of independent performance (Lantolf et al., 2018). The sandwich feedback described by Ustadz A is also consistent with evidence that feedback is most useful when it addresses the task while preserving the learner's willingness to try again (Hattie & Clarke, 2019). A comparison of feedback models for undergraduate students found that learners tended to prefer the feedback sandwich over an alternative model, although differences between the two were small (Lin et al., 2023). The structure observed at Al-Fattah is broadly similar to programmes elsewhere that move through preparation, presentation and evaluation (Ramadon & Jamilah, 2026; Ratnawati et al., 2025; Sadikin & Sobari, 2025), but its explicit three-level progression from reading to impromptu delivery, together with a written rubric, makes the scaffolding more visible and more systematic than in many reported cases.

The rotation of three languages also deserves comment. Each language is linked to a particular kind of speech: Arabic to religious exhortation, Indonesian to civic and motivational themes, and English to news and stories. This arrangement means that santri do not merely practise three codes; they practise three social roles that they may later take up as preachers, community figures and participants in wider academic or professional settings. Research on the Arabic language environment in pesantren similarly shows that speaking activities are most effective when they are embedded in the daily life of the institution rather than confined to the classroom (Setiyadi et al., 2023); at Darunnajah, daily speaking practice, vocabulary provision and supervision helped santri use Arabic more comfortably and confidently (Sakinah et al., 2026), and a collaborative Arabic programme at a tahfidz boarding school in Malaysia strengthened students' Arabic communication, public speaking and da'wah skills (Aminata & Khohar, 2025). The fixed allocation of genres to languages at Al-Fattah thus gives each language a clear communicative purpose, which helps explain why santri experience the activity as meaningful rather than as an artificial exercise.

Taken together, the tiered progression and the three-language format contribute to the learning process in complementary ways. The tiered progression regulates the demand placed on the speaker. Reading a text frees first-year santri from formulating language while they learn to tolerate an audience, and reducing and then removing the text adds the demand of composing speech in real time only after the first demand has become manageable. Each completed stage thus provides a mastery experience, the strongest source of self-efficacy (Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2021), while repeated performance with decreasing support is the

condition for fluency development (Newton & Nation, 2021). The three-language format, in turn, increases the amount and variety of practice. Because santri speak in different languages and genres on a rotating basis, delivery skills such as voice control, gesture and the organisation of an opening, body and closing are practised repeatedly across codes, and confidence gained in one language may support performance in another in which linguistic resources are more limited. This interpretation extends studies that report muhadharah mainly as Arabic language practice (Maimun, 2024; Mutia & Hasaniyah, 2024; Shofa et al., 2025), although the transfer of confidence across languages was inferred from informants' accounts and should be examined in further research.

How Muhadharah Develops Speaking Skills

These findings show that muhadharah develops speaking skills through what second language pedagogy calls fluency development: repeated, meaning-focused performance of material that is already partly familiar, under some pressure to perform faster or with less support (Newton & Nation, 2021). Santri R's remark that he no longer translates in his head points to a shift from controlled to more automatic language use, which is the goal of such practice. The results are consistent with studies reporting gains in vocabulary, grammar and fluency through muhadharah (Maimun, 2024; Shofa et al., 2025) and with research showing that a rich Arabic-speaking environment helps santri use the language in everyday communication (Setiyadi et al., 2023). The improvements in breathing, stress and intonation also mirror the gains in vocal delivery, facial expression, eye contact and gesture reported for *khitobiyah* activities in Grobogan (Ratnawati et al., 2025), and the dimensions in the Al-Fattah rubric correspond to aspects that students in other contexts identify as needing work when they review recordings of their own presentations, such as body language, intonation, pauses and emphasis (Hoang et al., 2025).

The development of argument construction deserves particular attention. In the impromptu stage, santri must decide quickly what to say and how to order it, which requires both linguistic and cognitive resources. This finding supports the view that muhadharah trains the logical structure of santri's thinking and not only their language. Studies of muhadharah at the junior secondary level likewise report gains in message organisation and expression (Zain et al., 2025), and research on co-regulation in collaborative presentations indicates that planning, monitoring and evaluating with peers predict self-efficacy for the topic, language, organisation and delivery of a speech (Hao & Chen, 2024). At Al-Fattah, the question-and-answer sessions and the peer audience appear to serve a similar function by requiring speakers to justify and organise their ideas before others.

The assessment rubric plays a quieter but equally important role in this development. Because its four criteria are known in advance, santri can prepare with a clear picture of what a good speech looks like, and supervisors can give feedback that refers to shared standards rather than to personal impressions. Making success criteria explicit in this way is regarded as a condition for feedback to be understood and used by learners (Hattie & Clarke, 2019). The

rubric also signals that speaking well involves more than correct language: by giving weight to gestures, body language and stage presence, it treats the speaker as a whole person addressing an audience, which is consistent with frameworks of oral presentation competence that combine content knowledge, attitude, and verbal and non-verbal skills (Mohamed et al., 2023).

How Self-Confidence Is Formed

The account of Santri F reported above follows the pattern described in research on exposure: anxiety is highest at first contact with the feared situation and declines as the person repeatedly faces it without the feared consequence occurring (Premkumar et al., 2021). The santri's realisation that friends "do not eat me alive" corresponds to the reduction in fear of negative evaluation that accompanied the decline of public speaking anxiety in that study. The twice-weekly schedule turns this exposure into a habit. Habits form when behaviour is repeated in a stable context with consistent cues (Wood, 2019), and the fixed times after the Isha and Fajr prayers provide exactly such a context. The change from fear to eagerness, expressed in the statement of Santri F about now looking forward to going up, also suggests that enjoyment may begin to replace anxiety; a meta-analysis found that foreign language enjoyment correlates negatively with anxiety and positively with willingness to communicate (Botes et al., 2022).

Psychological safety helps explain why exposure at Al-Fattah reduces anxiety rather than reinforcing it. In organisations and classrooms, people are willing to take interpersonal risks when they believe they will not be humiliated for mistakes (Edmondson, 2019). Medical students in online classes participated more when tutor behaviour and peer familiarity reduced their worry about being judged (McLeod & Gupta, 2023), and among upper-secondary students, psychological safety was positively associated with classroom well-being, with fear of public evaluation and peer-respect norms emerging as key factors (Serikbayeva et al., 2026). The applause of the santri audience functions as social persuasion in Bandura's sense, one of the recognised sources of self-efficacy (Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2021). Experimental evidence supports this interpretation: speakers who practised before a supportive virtual audience later evaluated their own performance more positively and were rated as more confident in a real presentation (Krocze & Mühlberger, 2023), and a peer-supported practice strategy reduced public speaking anxiety among senior high school students (Ratumakin, 2026). A systematic review likewise concluded that collaborative and other interventions reduce speaking anxiety most reliably when teachers provide emotional support (Gunawan, 2026). The tone of the feedback culture therefore matters. At Al-Fattah, peer response takes the form of appreciation, while correction is the responsibility of supervisors who use the sandwich approach.

The third mechanism, identity and social roles, extends the explanation beyond the speaking event. When santri are entrusted with leading ceremonies or representing the pesantren, they receive recognition that confirms their competence and connects them with

the community. Self-determination theory holds that the satisfaction of basic psychological needs supports motivation, engagement and well-being; in one study the satisfaction of the need for competence had the strongest effect on students' engagement, while relatedness supported identified forms of motivation (Hofverberg et al., 2022), and a systematic review linked need satisfaction in higher education with motivation, well-being, engagement and achievement (Hutomo & Kurniawati, 2024). A review of classroom environments likewise found that teacher support and positive peer relationships reduce speaking anxiety and build learners' confidence and willingness to speak (Rofiif & Priyatmojo, 2026). Seen in this way, the social roles available to skilled speakers at Al-Fattah offer santri a future identity worth working towards.

The three mechanisms reinforce one another. Exposure alone could intensify fear if each appearance ended in ridicule; at Al-Fattah, however, psychological safety ensures that repeated appearances end in appreciation, and appreciation in turn makes the next appearance easier. Over time, the santri who persist become eligible for public roles, which convert private progress into public recognition. The process can be described as a natural form of exposure, but it differs from clinical exposure therapy in an important respect: it takes place within a community and is mediated by relationships with peers and supervisors rather than by a therapist. This communal character is consistent with the view that anxiety and confidence in language use are shaped by the social context of learning as much as by individual dispositions (Gunawan, 2026; Rofiif & Priyatmojo, 2026).

The findings also clarify how the two outcomes of muhadharah are connected. Gains in speaking skills and in self-confidence did not develop separately. Santri R linked greater fluency to the obligation to come forward every week, and Santri F attributed the shift from fear to eagerness to repeated appearances that ended in support rather than ridicule. Growing competence supplied the mastery experiences on which confidence could build, while growing confidence made santri willing to take the risks, such as reducing their reliance on the text, that further developed their skills. This reciprocal relationship is consistent with self-efficacy theory, in which successful performance strengthens efficacy beliefs and these beliefs in turn sustain effort and persistence (Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2021), and with evidence that peer co-regulation in oral presentations is associated with public speaking self-efficacy (Hao & Chen, 2024).

Supporting and Inhibiting Factors in Comparative Perspective

These factors resemble those reported in other pesantren. Mentor encouragement, administrative support, rewards for top performers and consistent scheduling were also found to support *khitobah* in Gresik, where obstacles included low courage and limited experience of facing an audience (Muttaqin et al., 2025). Limited facilities and uneven preparation were reported in Batanghari (Ramadon & Jamilah, 2026), nervousness and time constraints in a Qur'anic pesantren (Shofa et al., 2025), and a shortage of reference books in Malang (Mutia & Hasaniyah, 2024). The distinctive feature at Al-Fattah is the visible

involvement of the kyai, whose presence gives the activity religious authority and signals to santri that speaking well is part of their formation as Muslims. The finding that some santri with authoritarian family backgrounds or social trauma need longer adaptation is also important. It indicates that a uniform schedule of exposure is not equally effective for every learner and that individual mentoring is needed, a point that echoes the recommendation that the causes of anxiety and learners' proficiency should be understood before an intervention is chosen (Elahemer & Said, 2022) and with reviews showing that speaking anxiety arises from both personal factors and the learning environment (Gunawan, 2026; Rofiif & Priyatmojo, 2026).

Muhadharah as a Psychopedagogical Intervention

The findings at Al-Fattah offer a new perspective on the nature of muhadharah. Whereas earlier studies largely positioned muhadharah as a language drill (Maimun, 2024; Mutia & Hasaniyah, 2024), this study suggests that it can work as a psychopedagogical intervention in which linguistic, psychological and spiritual processes are intertwined. Three theoretical lenses help to explain this.

The first lens is Vygotskian scaffolding. Santri cannot become skilled speakers on their own at once; they need support from the language supervisors, guiding texts and their peers. The tiered system at Al-Fattah, from reading a text to impromptu speech, is a concrete form of fading, the gradual removal of support until santri reach independence in speaking (Lantolf et al., 2018). The second lens is the strengthening of self-efficacy through mastery experience, which self-efficacy theory regards as the most powerful source of efficacy beliefs (Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2021). At Al-Fattah, small successes, such as completing a three-minute speech without going blank, are celebrated as victories. The accumulation of these small successes changes santri's mindset from "I cannot" to "I can". This interpretation is consistent with findings that self-efficacy mediates the link between growth mindset, interpersonal communication and school well-being among Muslim students (Wihartati et al., 2026).

The third lens concerns the integration of spiritual values and communication, which distinguishes muhadharah in the pesantren from public speaking training in general schools. The intention to speak in order to convey goodness, expressed in the principle of *amar ma'rūf nahī munkar* (enjoining good and forbidding wrong), becomes an intrinsic motivation. When santri feel that their speech carries reward from God and benefit for the community, their fear of the audience decreases because they experience the act as worship rather than mere performance. This spiritual modality is not addressed in conventional communication theories, but it resonates with research in Islamic education. Studies of the Qur'an as an orally transmitted tradition describe how oral religious practice forms Muslims' habitus (Dweirj, 2023), which helps explain why repeated religious speech can become a settled disposition rather than an occasional performance. Al-Ghazālī's da'wah pedagogy emphasises sincerity (*ikhhlāṣ*) and the disciplining of the self (*riyāḍat al-naḥs*) (Fatmawati et al., 2026), and the da'wah programme studied by Ummah et al. (2025) developed self-confidence and communication

skills alongside religious character. Islamic religiosity has also been shown to strengthen the protective effect of social support against anxiety among Indonesian students (Nashori et al., 2025), and self-efficacy has been linked to the formation of students' religious character (Husniah et al., 2025). These relationships are synthesised in Figure 3.

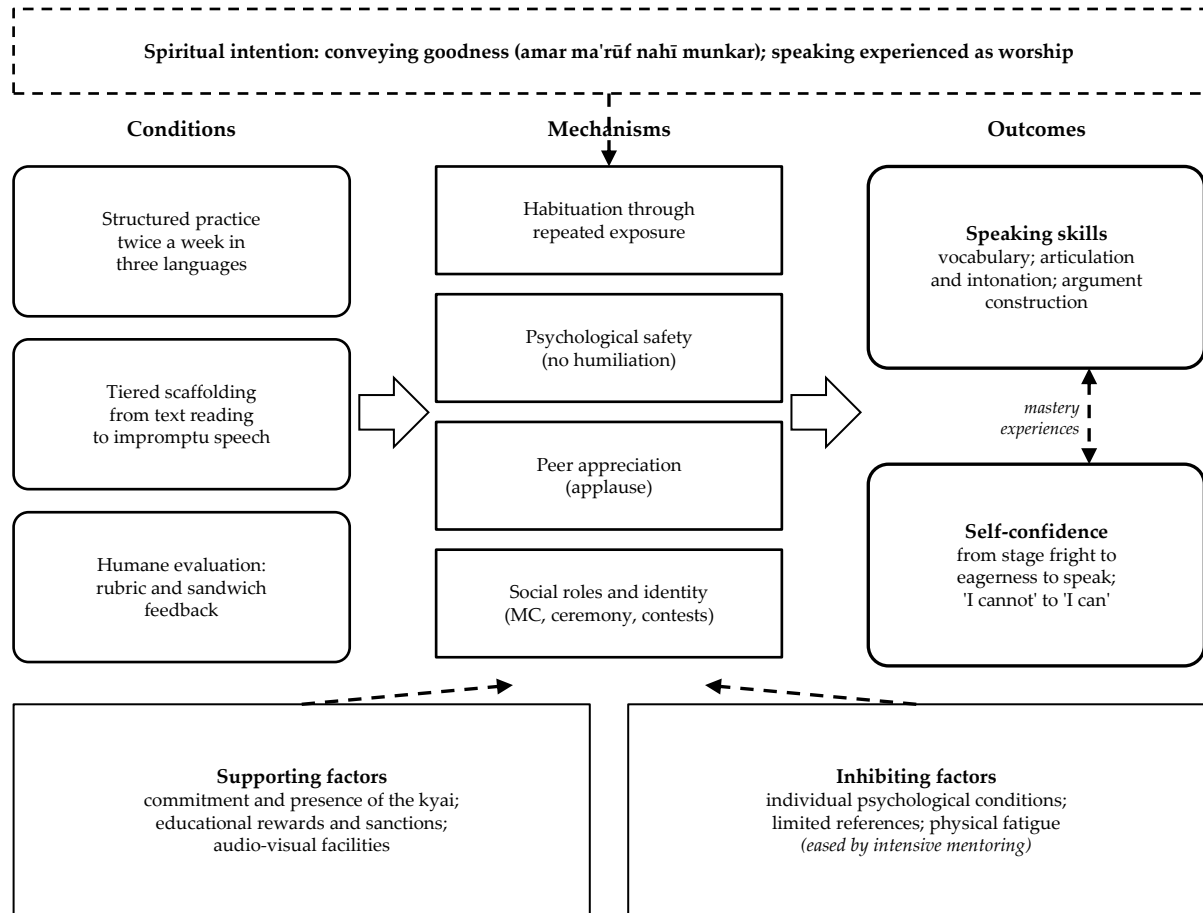


Figure 3. Model of how muhadharah develops santri's speaking skills and self-confidence

Source: Authors' elaboration based on research data (2025).

Figure 3 summarises the model derived from the findings. Structured, tiered practice and humane evaluation provide the conditions; habituation, psychological safety, peer appreciation and social roles act as mechanisms; and improved speaking skills and self-confidence are the outcomes. Spiritual intention runs through the whole process as a source of motivation, while the commitment of the kyai and the inhibiting factors shape how well the process works. The model contributes to theory in two ways. First, it extends the description of muhadharah in earlier studies by specifying the mechanisms through which confidence is formed. Second, it modifies the usual account of public speaking anxiety reduction, which classifies interventions by technique (Elahemer & Said, 2022) and often centres on exposure of the individual speaker (Premkumar et al., 2021), by showing that in a religious boarding-school context exposure is made tolerable by a community culture of appreciation and by a religious meaning that reframes speaking as service. In this sense, the study proposes that the effectiveness of muhadharah depends less on any single technique

than on the alignment of pedagogical structure, emotional climate and religious meaning. Where one of these elements is missing, for example where evaluation is harsh or where the activity is reduced to a formality, the same weekly schedule may produce compliance without confidence. The model therefore offers a framework that other pesantren can use to examine their own speech programmes, and it provides propositions that future studies can test, such as whether psychological safety moderates the effect of the frequency of practice on speaking anxiety.

Implications and Limitations

This study implies that pesantren should not allow muhadharah to become a dull routine carried out as a formality. Muhadharah can be revitalised in three ways: by adding debate sessions and impromptu speeches to train critical reasoning, by training language supervisors not only as language experts but also as facilitators of the psychology of communication, and by using technology, for example recording santri's speeches and playing them back for visual evaluation, without violating the privacy norms of the pesantren. Training supervisors as facilitators of the psychology of communication would mean preparing them to recognise signs of severe anxiety, to adjust the level of challenge for individual santri, and to give feedback that is specific, timely and encouraging. Such skills correspond to recommendations for developing oral presentation competence, which include timely corrective feedback, relaxation and breathing techniques and repeated practice, and to evidence that supporting students' basic psychological needs strengthens their engagement (Hutomo & Kurniawati, 2024; Mohamed et al., 2023). The last recommendation is supported by evidence that self-assessment of video recordings helped students improve their presentation skills and increased their confidence and independence (Hoang et al., 2025). Digital media also extend the reach of santri's speaking beyond the pesantren hall. Reviews of digital da'wah identify wider reach and youth engagement as benefits, together with obstacles that require guidance (Manaf, Rokimin, et al., 2026), and the digital transformation of santri calls for curriculum modernisation, digital capacity and system-based governance that preserve Islamic values (Manaf, Novita, et al., 2026). Digital media have likewise been associated with greater motivation in Islamic religious education (Saidah et al., 2024). A cross-tradition design that integrates understanding, feeling and doing, as in the TRINGO strategy for educators, also offers a reminder that technology-supported learning should attend to the affective dimension, which showed only minimal gains in that study (Sinaga et al., 2026). For muhadharah, this means that recording and digital practice should support the culture of appreciation rather than replace it.

The study has several limitations. It was conducted at a single pesantren with nine key informants over four months, so its findings are analytical rather than statistical generalisations. The improvements in speaking skills and self-confidence were identified through observation, interviews and documents rather than through standardised measurement, and the perspectives of female santri, parents and alumni were not examined

separately. These limitations suggest directions for further research. In addition, the development of santri's speaking skills and self-confidence cannot be attributed to muhadharah alone, because other activities of pesantren life and santri's maturation over time may also have contributed, and the effects of the programme may differ in pesantren with different resources, leadership and institutional cultures.

4. CONCLUSION

This study concludes that muhadharah at Pondok Pesantren Al-Fattah Bungo is a structured, systematic and influential practice, and its findings answer the three research questions as follows: (1) muhadharah is implemented through a fixed twice-weekly schedule on Friday nights and Sunday mornings, a rotation of Arabic, Indonesian and English with a distinct speech genre for each language, a tiered progression from reading a text to impromptu speech, and rubric-based evaluation delivered through supportive "sandwich" feedback; (2) the activity develops santri's speaking skills, as shown by richer vocabulary that is used without mental translation, better articulation, breathing and intonation, and a greater ability to construct arguments quickly and systematically; and (3) it builds santri's self-confidence through habituation produced by frequent exposure, psychological safety created by humane correction, appreciation from peers, and social roles entrusted to capable speakers, while the spiritual intention of conveying goodness reframes speaking as a form of worship. Although initial anxiety, individual psychological conditions, limited references and physical fatigue hinder the activity, the commitment of the kyai, an educational system of rewards and sanctions, adequate facilities and intensive mentoring help overcome these obstacles. In this setting, muhadharah can therefore be understood as a psychopedagogical intervention rather than merely a language-teaching method. The main contribution of the study lies in showing how the linguistic and psychological outcomes of muhadharah are linked through programme structure, feedback culture and religious meaning. Because the evidence comes from one pesantren and from qualitative data, these conclusions describe how muhadharah worked at Al-Fattah rather than establishing its effects elsewhere. Pondok Pesantren Al-Fattah is advised to integrate digital forms of muhadharah, such as video recordings for analysing body language, and to hold more open debate sessions, while other pesantren may consider adapting a structured and tiered model of muhadharah with a humane approach to evaluation, taking into account their own resources, leadership, santri characteristics and institutional culture, and examining its effects in their own settings. Future research could use experimental quantitative designs to measure the reduction of glossophobia statistically, compare muhadharah across pesantren and genders, or examine the effectiveness of virtual and digital muhadharah in the post-pandemic period.

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