

The Chemistry of the English Environment: An Ethnographic Study of Language Practices in an Islamic Boarding School

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the development of an English language environment in an Islamic boarding school context where learners often had limited opportunities to use English beyond the classroom. Previous studies tended to examine language learning factors separately, leaving a gap in understanding how environmental elements functioned as an integrated system. To address this gap, this research proposed the concept of the “chemistry” of the English environment, referring to the dynamic interaction between institutional policy, teaching practices, and social communication. The study employed a qualitative ethnographic design conducted at the Modern Islamic Boarding School Darussalam Gontor, involving school leaders, teachers, and students as participants. Data were collected through observation, interviews, questionnaires, and document analysis, and analysed using an interactive model of data reduction, display, and verification. The findings revealed that the English environment was successfully constructed through the integration of formal instruction and informal daily interaction supported by strict discipline and continuous exposure. It was also found that institutional control played a significant role in shaping language habits, although a gap remained between external motivation and consistent language use. Furthermore, peer interaction and student organisations contributed to sustaining communicative practices in natural settings. These findings suggested that a structured and immersive environment could effectively support second language acquisition when supported by consistent policy and social engagement. This study contributed to the field by offering an integrated model of language environment development and provided practical implications for designing sustainable English learning ecosystems in similar educational context.

Keywords: Language Environment, Second Language Acquisition, Ethnographic Study, Islamic Boarding School, Language Supervisor

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PENDAHULUAN

. Language learning is influenced by a combination of internal and external factors. Internal factors include learners' intelligence, motivation, attitude, and aptitude, while external factors refer to social and environmental aspects such as teacher quality, instructional methods, and learning context (Li, 2025; Qiangfu et al., 2025). Among these, the language environment plays a crucial role in shaping second language acquisition (SLA), as it provides learners with exposure to linguistic input and opportunities for meaningful interaction (Howard, 2024).

The concept of language environment encompasses everything that learners hear and see in the target language, including classroom instruction, daily communication, media exposure, and social interaction. Previous studies conducted by Piccione et al. (2024) have emphasized that both formal and informal linguistic environments contribute to language acquisition. However, informal environments, where language is used naturally in communication, are

often considered more influential in developing communicative competence (Kusyk et al., 2025). According to Zadorozhnyy & Lee (2025), input-based theories, learners acquire a second language when they are exposed to comprehensible input within meaningful contexts, suggesting that continuous exposure to the target language is essential for successful acquisition.

In the context of English as a foreign language (EFL) in Indonesia, creating an effective language environment remains a significant challenge. English is primarily taught as a subject in schools, and learners often have limited opportunities to use the language in real-life communication. As a result, many students achieve only passive knowledge of English without developing active communicative skills (Apoko & Waluyo, 2025; Muttaqin et al., 2025). This gap highlights the importance of designing learning environments that extend beyond formal classroom instruction and provide sustained exposure to the target language.

One educational setting that attempts to address this issue is the Islamic boarding school system, particularly Modern Islamic Boarding School Darussalam Gontor (also known as Kulliyatul Muallimin Al-Islamiyah or KMI). This institution implements a structured bilingual environment where English and Arabic are used as compulsory languages for daily communication. The use of these languages is not limited to classroom activities but extends to all aspects of campus life, including dormitories, social interactions, and extracurricular activities. The institution also enforces language discipline through specific programs such as English Week and Arabic Week, along with various language-related activities designed to enhance students' communicative competence.

The success of such an environment suggests that language acquisition is not solely the result of formal instruction but emerges from the interaction of multiple elements within the learning environment. These elements include institutional policies, teacher involvement, student interaction, and the availability of continuous language input. In this study, this interaction is conceptualized as the "chemistry" of the English environment, denoting a dynamic and interdependent relationship among pedagogical practices, social interactions, institutional policies, and environmental exposure that jointly sustain and enhance language acquisition processes (Atkinson et al., 2024; Carhill-Poza & Kurata, 2020; Deussen-Scholl & Charitos, 2021).

Despite the importance of language environment in SLA, there is still limited research that examines how these elements interact in a real educational setting, particularly within Islamic boarding schools. Most previous studies tend to focus on individual factors rather than viewing the environment as an integrated system. Therefore, this study aims to fill this gap by providing an in-depth ethnographic analysis of language practices within a structured English environment.

This study investigates how the English environment is implemented within the Islamic boarding school, with particular attention to the ways in which institutional policies and daily routines shape students' language use. It examines the language practices that occur in students' everyday activities, including academic, social, and extracurricular domains, in order to understand how English functions as a medium of communication in a structured environment. The study also explores the factors that influence the development and sustainability of this English environment, such as administrative regulations, teacher involvement, peer interaction, and the availability of language input. Through this ethnographic analysis, the research aims to provide a nuanced account of how a structured English environment operates in practice and to offer both theoretical and practical insights into the role of language environment in second language acquisition within immersive educational contexts.

1. Literature Review

2.1 Understanding Language Environment

The concept of environment is closely associated with learners' experiences, as these experiences are significantly shaped by the surrounding context in which learning occurs. Through interaction with their environment, learners acquire fundamental skills necessary to meet their needs (Afianti et al., 2025). This process may generate both positive and negative

influences. Additionally, learners gradually develop an understanding of environmental features, engage in various activities, and build the capacity to interact effectively with their surroundings. Participation in a social group further contributes to the emergence of additional needs, which are not only related to survival and environmental adaptation but also play a crucial role in sustaining social life.

Various statement has proposed definitions of the learning environment, which, although differing in wording, convey similar underlying meanings. Closs et al., (2022) defines the learning environment as a deliberately constructed setting that provides learners with opportunities for development and learning. In such an environment, learners are exposed to positive and structured information, enabling them to avoid confusion and to learn more effectively and efficiently. The use of cues within the learning environment serves as guidance, offering learners information about appropriate actions that lead to positive outcomes (Nurhikmah et al., 2025). Therefore, educators and other stakeholders involved in enhancing learners' knowledge are responsible for designing environments that facilitate appropriate and meaningful learner responses.

Similarly, Dulay et al. (1982) conceptualizes the language environment as encompassing all linguistic input that learners hear and see in the target language. This includes a broad range of communicative contexts, such as interactions in public places (e.g., restaurants and stores), conversations with peers, exposure to media (e.g., television), and engagement with written texts (e.g., newspapers). In addition, classroom activities also form an integral part of the language environment. However, in certain contexts, the language environment may be limited, consisting only of classroom instruction and minimal exposure to supplementary learning materials.

Based on these perspectives, it can be inferred that the environment comprises all elements and factors that influence and support individual development toward achieving an optimal level of personal growth. In the context of English language learning, the language environment refers to all forms of linguistic input that learners receive, both auditory and visual, within structured and limited settings specifically designed to support English language acquisition. Such an environment plays a significant role in determining learners' success in mastering the language.

2.2 Formal and Informal Linguistic Environment

The linguistic environment is a key factor that influences the quality and rate of second language acquisition (SLA). In general, this environment is classified into the macro-environment and the micro-environment. The macro-environment includes contextual aspects such as the naturalness of the language, the learner's role in communication, the presence of concrete referents, and models of the target language. Meanwhile, the micro-environment encompasses characteristics of input such as salience, feedback, and frequency, all of which play a role in the process of language internalization (Dulay et al., 1982; Utami et al., 2024). This classification shows that the linguistic environment is not only related to the social context but also to the quality of input received by learners. From a more functional perspective, the linguistic environment is further divided into formal and informal linguistic environments. This distinction is based on the difference between conscious learning (learning) and subconscious acquisition (acquisition) in a second language.

The formal linguistic environment refers to a language learning setting that focuses on the conscious mastery of linguistic rules and forms (Judijanto, 2025). This environment is typically realized through formal classroom instruction, where learners are guided to explicitly understand grammatical structures and the language system. In terms of its characteristics, the formal environment is artificial in nature because it is deliberately designed by instructors to facilitate learning. Learning activities usually involve structured exercises, error correction, and an emphasis on the accuracy of language forms. In addition, communication in this environment tends to be one-way, with the teacher playing a dominant role as the primary source of linguistic input.

The main role of the formal linguistic environment lies in the development of explicit linguistic knowledge. In the context of SLA, this environment contributes to increasing

grammatical awareness (metalinguistic awareness) and helps learners monitor their language use (Andringa, 2020). However, various studies have shown that formal environments have limitations in producing natural and spontaneous communicative ability. Ellis in Purnama (2021) states that formal instruction allows learners to focus on particular grammatical features, either through deductive or inductive approaches. Nevertheless, the order of acquiring language structures does not always follow the order of instruction, indicating that the acquisition process has internal mechanisms that are relatively independent of formal instruction.

In contrast to the formal environment, the informal linguistic environment refers to a setting that provides natural communicative contexts for learners (Dulay et al., 1982). This environment enables learners to engage in authentic, two-way interactions without an explicit focus on language rules. An informal environment may include various sources of linguistic input, such as interactions with peers, family, and social communities, as well as mass media like books, radio, and television. A key characteristic of this environment is the dominance of linguistic discourse over linguistic code, meaning that language is used as a tool for communication rather than as an object of analysis.

The primary role of the informal linguistic environment is as a source of input that supports implicit language acquisition. Within the framework proposed by Stephen Krashen in Mammadova (2024), effective input is comprehensible input that is slightly above the learner's current level of competence. Such input enables the transformation of input into intake, which is then internalized as subconscious linguistic knowledge. In addition, the informal environment plays an important role in developing communicative competence, including fluency, interactional skills, and the ability to understand pragmatic context. Natural interactions, such as foreigner talk, teacher talk, and interlanguage talk, demonstrate that linguistic modifications in communication can enhance comprehensibility and the effectiveness of input for learners. Krashen also emphasizes that the success of language learning programs largely depends on the intensity and quality of language exposure in informal environments. Therefore, approaches such as immersion and the natural approach are considered effective because they provide learners with maximum opportunities to acquire language through real communication (Flavia & C H, 2024).

2.3 Development of Language Teaching Environment

Language teaching is a systematic and intentional activity aimed at facilitating effective learning processes. It encompasses a range of pedagogical practices designed to support learners in acquiring a target language. In this context, language teaching should not be limited to formal classroom instruction but should also extend to learning experiences beyond the classroom. A comprehensive language learning environment integrates both formal and informal contexts to optimize language acquisition (Inayati et al., 2025).

The quality of the language environment is widely recognized as a critical factor influencing the success of second language acquisition. Contemporary perspectives in language education and educational psychology highlight that an effective learning environment must support cognitive, social, and affective dimensions of learning. Several key strategies can be employed to develop such an environment:

1. **Enhancing Learners' Motivation**

Motivation remains a central determinant of successful language learning. It refers to learners' willingness and sustained effort to achieve proficiency in the target language, often driven by integrative and instrumental goals. Raja & Silalahi (2025) explained that teachers play a crucial role in fostering motivation by creating engaging, meaningful, and supportive learning conditions that encourage active participation.

2. **Providing Exposure to Authentic Language Input**

Access to authentic language input is essential for developing communicative competence. Learners benefit from exposure to real-life language use through multimedia resources such as digital platforms, audiovisual materials, and interactive technologies. These tools provide rich linguistic input and serve as models for pronunciation, vocabulary, and discourse patterns (Lytvyenko et al., 2025).

3. **Optimizing External Learning Factors**
External factors, including social interaction, learning opportunities, and access to resources, significantly influence language development. Although these factors may not directly determine proficiency, they shape the conditions under which learning occurs. A supportive sociocultural environment enhances learners' opportunities to engage in meaningful communication and practice (Helandri & Supriadi, 2024; Kuvač-Kraljević et al., 2021).
4. **Ensuring Sufficient and Meaningful Language Input**
Rodrigo et al., (2004) stated that language acquisition is strongly influenced by the quantity and quality of input received by learners. Interaction with teachers and peers provides opportunities to encounter and practice linguistic forms. Input should be comprehensible, contextually meaningful, and slightly above the learners' current proficiency level to facilitate acquisition.
5. **Creating a Supportive Linguistic Environment**
An effective linguistic environment offers ample opportunities for learners to use the target language in meaningful contexts. This includes collaborative activities, communicative tasks, and immersive experiences that promote interaction and language use. Such environments encourage learners to practice, experiment, and internalize language structures in a natural way (Samorodova & Merzouk, 2025).
6. **Applying Constructive Feedback and Reinforcement**
Feedback plays an important role in guiding learners' progress. Instead of relying solely on traditional notions of praise and punishment, current approaches emphasize constructive feedback that supports learning and development. Positive reinforcement, along with corrective feedback, helps learners recognize errors, improve performance, and maintain motivation (Nakata et al., 2025).

The development of an informal linguistic environment follows similar principles to formal instruction but tends to rely more on natural exposure, social interaction, and intrinsic motivation rather than structured reinforcement mechanisms. Informal environments, such as peer communication, digital interaction, and community engagement, provide valuable opportunities for authentic language use.

2.4 Supporting Factors of Language Environment Development

The development of a language learning environment is closely related to language teaching practices and significantly influences second language acquisition. A well-structured environment provides learners with opportunities to receive input, interact, and actively use the target language. Previous frameworks have identified multiple interrelated factors that contribute to the effectiveness of a language environment, including teachers, instructional methods, input, sociocultural context, and learner-related variables (Qiao, 2024; Zheng et al., 2025). These factors remain relevant but can be further refined in light of contemporary theories in second language acquisition.

In formal learning contexts, several key factors support the development of an effective linguistic environment:

1. **Teacher**
The teacher plays a central role in shaping the language learning environment. In contrast to natural settings, classroom environments are intentionally designed through planning, pedagogical considerations, and specific learning objectives. Teachers are responsible not only for delivering instruction but also for facilitating learning, guiding student development, and creating supportive learning conditions. Current perspectives emphasize that effective language teachers demonstrate pedagogical competence, reflective practice, intercultural awareness, and a commitment to continuous professional development (Milal et al., 2021). Additionally, teachers act as facilitators who encourage interaction and learner autonomy rather than merely transmitting knowledge.
2. **Instructional Methods**
Instructional methods refer to the approaches and techniques employed by teachers to present language material. These methods vary depending on learning objectives, learner

characteristics, and contextual factors. Contemporary language teaching favors communicative and task-based approaches that prioritize meaningful interaction and real-world language use over rote memorization. The selection of appropriate instructional methods is crucial in creating an engaging and effective learning environment.

3. Language Input

Input is a fundamental component of language acquisition, as it provides the linguistic data that learners process and internalize. It includes all language exposure received by learners, whether from teachers, peers, or authentic sources. Effective input should be comprehensible, meaningful, and sufficiently challenging to promote learning. Interaction also plays a key role in making input more accessible and facilitating language development.

4. Sociocultural Context

The sociocultural environment provides the context in which language learning occurs. It includes opportunities for interaction, cultural exposure, and social engagement using the target language. From a sociocultural perspective, learning is mediated through social interaction and collaboration. Therefore, a supportive sociocultural environment enables learners to practice, negotiate meaning, and gradually develop communicative competence (Su, 2026).

In addition to formal settings, the development of an informal linguistic environment is supported by several interconnected factors. Language input plays a central role, as informal environments provide exposure to authentic and spontaneous language use through everyday communication, media, and digital platforms. Furthermore, the linguistic environment for language use enables learners to actively engage with the target language in natural interactions, such as conversations with peers, participation in communities, or online communication. Alongside these aspects, external factors also contribute significantly, including social support, access to resources, and technological tools, which together help motivate learners and sustain their engagement with the target language (Inayati et al., 2025; Kusk et al., 2025).

From a behaviorist perspective, the teacher has traditionally been viewed as the central organizer of learning activities, responsible for providing stimuli and reinforcement to shape learner behavior (Agarkar, 2019). However, contemporary approaches place greater emphasis on the dynamic interaction between teachers, learners, and the environment, highlighting the importance of learner agency, social interaction, and contextual factors in language development.

METHOD

3.1 Research Design

This study employed a qualitative research design with an observational ethnographic approach. An ethnographic study is a research design aimed at describing the activities of a specific group and identifying the shared patterns of behavior that develop within that group over time (Mau & Naibili, 2022). The primary goal was to comprehensively describe the cultural system and phenomena within an English-speaking environment. The research focused on fact-finding and understanding the causes of behaviors through empirical and scientific strategies without applying any artificial treatments or statistical calculations. By utilizing a wholistic and eclectic method, the study captured the reality of the observers' phenomena within specific ecological settings, including classrooms, mosques, squares, teacher's rooms, offices, cafeterias, kitchens, and dormitories.

3.2 Data Source

The research was conducted at the Modern Islamic Boarding School Darussalam Gontor in Ponorogo, East Java. The population and primary sources of data encompassed all components of the school. The participants purposefully included the Heads of the institution, directors, teachers, and the learners. These individuals were selected as they were directly involved in the daily language activities and the overall development of the English environment within the boarding school.

3.3 Data Collection Instruments

The primary instrument in this qualitative study was the researcher, acting as a human instrument and participant observer to elicit deep, qualitative data that could not be gained through other means (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). Data collection was further supported by four main secondary instruments, including observation, interviews, questionnaires, and document analysis. Observation, serving as the principal technique, included both structured methods (using schedules and behavioral lists) and unstructured, non-participant observations to document teaching processes and daily language activities (Fetters & Rubinstein, 2019). Then, the interview refers to a structured conversation designed to obtain information, usually involving two participants but occasionally including more (Roberts, 2020). Purposeful interviews were conducted with the school's Heads, directors, and teachers to explore their perspectives on developing the English environment, while students were interviewed regarding language use and learning materials. Additionally, a 15-item questionnaire was administered to the learners to investigate their attitudes, motivation, and perceptions toward teaching, language activities, discipline, language courts, and language effects. Finally, official documents, books, magazines, and papers were reviewed to provide further contextual information relevant to the research.

3.4 Data Analysis

Data analysis followed an interactive model comprising data collection, data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing (Miles et al., 2019). The process involved systematically searching and arranging interview transcripts and observational data. Initially, observational data were transcribed and coded in accordance with the investigated research problems, then cross-checked against field notes. This reduced data was classified, systematically organized on separate pieces of paper, and reclassified during the presentation phase. Verification was subsequently conducted by comparing the findings against established theories regarding language activities, teaching English, and factors supporting the English environment. To ensure validity and reliability, the study utilized data triangulation by comparing direct observations with questionnaire results, alongside peer discussions to minimize subjective errors in transcription, qualification, and identification.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

4.1 The Institutional Construction of the English Environment

The language environment at the Modern Islamic Boarding School Darussalam Gontor is established through a systematic institutional architecture, where regulations, supervision, and student organizations are integrated to create an intensive foreign language atmosphere. This environment does not merely focus on formal classroom instruction but encompasses all activities outside the classroom that are intentionally designed to assist language acquisition. The success of this construction lies in the synergy between the formal linguistic environment, which emphasizes rules and language forms, and the informal linguistic environment, which prioritizes natural communication.

The governance of language in this institution is executed through specialized units with clearly defined roles, such as:

1. Central Language Improvement (CLI)

As the central unit, Central Language Improvement (CLI) is fully responsible for expanding language use, enforcing discipline, and publishing language media (such as wall magazines). CLI coordinates various language-related activities, ranging from English Fortnight and drama competitions to the management of language courses.

2. Language Supervisors and Dormitory Managers

Language supervisors are responsible for overseeing the activities of CLI and dormitory managers, as well as handling language violations committed by fifth- and sixth-grade students. Meanwhile, dormitory managers act as daily supervisors who provide new vocabulary every morning, monitor morning conversations, and enforce discipline at the dormitory level. They also function as role models for junior students.

3. The Involvement of the Student Organization (OPPM)

This organization serves as a platform for students' leadership development. With 21 departments managed by 130 personnel, OPPM coordinates with 19 dormitory, 36 consulates, language courses, handicrafts courses and sport clubs. It becomes a key instrument in training students to manage themselves and others within a language-rich environment.

The language policy at the Modern Islamic Boarding School Gontor is mandatory and binding, focusing on habit formation through strict discipline. All students are obligated to use the official language (English during "English week" and Arabic during "Arabic week") anywhere and everywhere within the boarding school environment. This obligation covers all areas, including classrooms, dormitories, canteens, and sports fields. Staff members and student organization managers are required to act as role models, using the target language in formal correspondence, announcements, and daily interactions to motivate students to imitate and practice the language.

To maintain compliance with these policies, the school implements preventive and repressive enforcement mechanisms. The "Language Court" functions as a disciplinary body for students who violate language rules, operating on three levels: the Dormitory Language Court, the CLI Court, and the Language Supervisor Court. Students who confess to their mistakes in court receive educational punishments, such as translating texts, memorizing vocabulary or verses of the Holy Quran, composing essays, or standing in front of the mosque or dormitory as a form of social sanction. Additionally, the school employs a "spy system" where designated students monitor their peers. Names of offenders are recorded on "spy papers" and reported to the CLI or supervisors for further action. This system ensures that supervision is continuous, creating a pervasive sense among students that they are being observed at all times, which encourages them to maintain discipline regardless of their location.

4.2 Formal Language Practices: Inside and Outside Classroom Activities

Classroom learning constitutes a fundamental pillar in building English language competence within the environment of Pondok Modern Darussalam Gontor. As the foundation of the formal linguistic environment, instructional practices go beyond merely transferring linguistic knowledge; they also integrate theory into active communicative practice. The primary focus of these practices is to create extensive and meaningful interaction through teaching methods that are oriented toward the consistent use of the target language.

The pedagogical orientation of English language teaching in the classroom predominantly adopts the Direct Method, which emphasizes the direct use of the target language without the mediation of the learners' first language (Qizi, 2025). This method is considered effective in building a direct association between meaning and linguistic form. First, the use of the target language itself becomes the primary characteristic of the learning process. Teachers use English as the main medium of instruction, both in delivering material and in classroom interaction. This is intended to habituate students to think and respond naturally in the target language. Second, learning takes place without translation (meaning through context). The meaning of vocabulary or language structures is conveyed through context, such as the use of real objects (realia), images, gestures (pantomime), and communicative situations. In this way, students construct meaning contextually rather than relying on their first language equivalents. Third, grammar instruction is conducted inductively. Students are not given explicit rules at the outset; instead, they are guided to generalize language patterns from the examples provided. This process encourages students' cognitive engagement in discovering linguistic rules independently and meaningfully.

The instructional practices observed in the classroom reflect the implementation of a comprehensive language teaching approach through a variety of structured activities. The learning process does not merely emphasize theoretical understanding but also prioritizes the active use of language in meaningful contexts. In the teaching of English procedures, the teacher initiates the lesson by introducing the material through direct demonstration. This is subsequently followed by student imitation, question-and-answer exercises, and reinforcement

activities involving reading and writing. The overall process is gradual and systematic, progressing from initial exposure to language production.

The instruction integrates several key components of language learning, including:

1. Grammar, which is taught through pattern analysis and the generalization of examples
2. Dictation, aimed at improving writing accuracy and listening skills
3. Conversation, designed to develop speaking abilities and interactive competence
4. Composition, both oral and written, to foster the ability to express ideas comprehensively.

Classroom interaction occurs dynamically through various patterns, such as teacher-student interaction, which is manifested in explanations, question-and-answer sessions, and corrective feedback. Additionally, student-student interaction takes place through pair work, group discussions, and conversational practice. These interaction patterns highlight that the learning process is not unidirectional but participatory and communicative in nature, encouraging active engagement among learners.

Afterwards, there are several outside-class activities that have been systematically developed as language learning programs, including:

1. **Afternoon Additional Course**
Organized by the Guidance and Counseling Department, is designed to enhance the academic experience of learners in classes one through four. Held from 13:50 to 14:30, the course aims to optimize students' time and improve proficiency in subjects offered by the ITTC curriculum, including reading comprehension, Arabic grammar and morphology, English reading, and the study of the Holy Quran. Led by eight teachers and assisted by ten class six students, the program engages a total of 96 learners and 64 ITTC teachers. It emphasizes punctuality, teaching preparation, and observation to ensure maximum learning achievement. Weekly evaluation meetings are held on Wednesdays for teachers and course managers, and on Fridays for learner representatives at Santineketan building, room four. To monitor teaching progress, a rigorous exam marking system is implemented with the help of 40 senior teachers, ensuring comprehensive assessment and the attainment of learning objectives.
2. **Presenting Vocabulary**
Presenting Vocabulary is a daily activity conducted by the Central Language Improvement (CLI) for all learners, assisted by the dormitory managers from class five. The process begins with CLI staff preparing 10 new vocabulary words and idioms each week, which are then distributed to the dormitory managers. Every day, except Thursday and Friday, the dormitory managers introduce two new vocabulary words to the learners. Using the direct method, managers explain the words without translating them into Indonesian. Learners are then instructed to use the words in complete sentences. They write these words in their notebooks, which are collected by the dormitory managers for correction every Saturday afternoon. Additionally, CLI organizes a vocabulary exercise for all dormitories at the end of the semester. The goal of this program is to expand learners' vocabulary, enabling them to engage in daily conversations more effectively.
3. **Public Speaking Skill Training**
This program is an extracurricular activity offered at the Modern Pesantren, aimed at learners from class one to class four. In this program, students are grouped into various clubs, and each learner is required to practice speaking in front of an audience. The speeches are delivered in three languages: Arabic, English, and Indonesian. The primary objective of the program is not only to improve language skills but also to strengthen the learners' mentality and boost their confidence. Each participant is expected to write the speech text, which is then corrected and supervised by a designated supervisor. The training sessions take place three times a week: English speeches are held on Sunday nights, Arabic speeches on Thursday afternoons, and Indonesian speeches on Thursday nights. The program is supervised by learners from class six in the first semester and class five in the second semester, typically following the ceremony where the manager hands

over the learners' organization at the Modern Islamic Boarding School. This program is designed to enhance both speaking and writing skills among the students.

4. **Language Encouragement**
Language Encouragement is an initiative implemented by the Central Language Improvement (CLI) to enhance English language skills among learners at the Modern Pesantren. This program takes place every Friday morning, following the morning conversation and sports activities, or on other designated days. The focus of this program is to improve learners' English skills, including conversation, sentence structure, idioms, and even watching films. The program primarily targets classes I and II, as these learners are beginners who are still learning to use words and sentences correctly in real contexts.
5. **Wall Magazine**
Wall Magazine is an effective way for learners to express their thoughts, ideas, and creativity. It serves as a tool for improving writing and reading skills by allowing students to present their work in a public format. Recognizing its importance, the Central Language Improvement (CLI) requires every dormitory or class to create a wall magazine, which is placed in strategic locations such as in front of the classroom, dormitory, or mosque. These wall magazines are updated at certain times, such as at the beginning of each new month, during Islamic months, and around major religious events like Eid al-Fitr and Eid al-Adha.
6. **Language Course**
Language Courses offered by the Central Language Improvement (CLI) are designed for learners who wish to deepen their understanding of English in more specific and practical contexts. These courses are taught by class VI students and the language supervisor. The courses include the Spirit English Course, Virtue English Course, Showdown English Course, and ABA English Course. The Spirit English Course is specially designed for intensive learners in class III, while the Virtue English Course is for beginners, and the other two courses cater to all classes. The courses are held in the evening after the Ashar prayer and on holidays, ensuring flexibility for learners. The subjects taught go beyond the regular school curriculum, offering additional language knowledge to enhance learners' skills. These courses are conducted three times a week, providing consistent opportunities for learners to improve their English language abilities in a structured and supportive environment.
7. **Farewell Meeting and Result Declaration Ceremony**
This program is organized to provide learners of KMI an opportunity to express their gratitude and share their experiences in front of their peers, teachers, and the headmaster of the Darussalam Gontor Islamic Boarding School in Ponorogo. The program is structured so that all learners are divided into various groups, with each learner required to present a speech in front of their teachers and classmates. These farewell speeches are delivered in either English or Arabic. Following the farewell speeches, the graduation ceremony takes place in the evening at the meeting hall of the Modern Islamic Boarding School, Darussalam Gontor. This event is designed not only to celebrate the learners' achievements but also to enhance their reading and writing skills. By preparing and delivering speeches, learners practice and improve their language abilities, furthering their academic growth.
8. **Language Laboratory**
The language laboratory at the Modern Islamic Boarding School Darussalam Gontor is used to enhance listening and speaking skills, with sessions held twice a week under a rotating schedule managed by the language supervisor. Learning activities are not limited to the classroom but are also supported by various extracurricular activities such as additional courses, public speaking, conversation, dictation, composition writing, and a wall magazine. Consequently, the school adopts a holistic approach that addresses all four language skills, listening, speaking, reading, and writing, in a balanced manner.

4.3 Informal Language Practices: Everyday Linguistic Immersion

The informal linguistic environment at the Modern Islamic Boarding School Darussalam Gontor is intentionally designed to simulate natural communication, offering students

numerous opportunities for linguistic discourse rather than focusing solely on formal language usage. These informal practices are deeply embedded in the daily life of the boarding school, fostering second language acquisition through real-world interactions and experiences.

Informal language use is integrated into the routine activities of the boarding school, transforming everyday interactions into valuable language-learning opportunities. One such activity is the morning conversation routines, which are conducted twice a week on Tuesday and Friday mornings for 30 minutes. During these sessions, students are paired together and engage in conversation, with dormitory language managers acting as supervisors to assist with language difficulties. The Central Language Improvement (CLI) ensures participation by implementing potential sanctions for non-compliance.

Another key practice is the use of English in dormitory life, where daily chores, such as public sweeping, roll calls, and kitchen operations, are conducted entirely in English. For example, during "public sweeping," dormitory chiefs and managers give instructions and provide advice on hygiene and religious services in English, compelling students to listen and practice their language skills in real-life contexts.

The announcement and broadcasting system also plays a vital role in language exposure. The Information Department manages English-language broadcasts that include conversations, news, and stories from sources like the BBC and Voice of America, typically aired on Friday mornings. Furthermore, all formal announcements and summons within the mosque and dormitory are made in English, helping students enhance their listening and comprehension abilities.

The school creates an environment rich in English input, which supports both passive and active language learning. One aspect of this is the vocabulary display in public spaces, where essential vocabulary and terms sourced from newspapers and magazines are displayed on boards in strategic locations such as "elbow streets," kitchens, and areas in front of cooperatives. These materials are curated and checked by language supervisors to ensure accuracy, and their prominent placement encourages students to read and internalize new language items throughout their daily routines.

In addition, institutional communication at the school is conducted in English. Every section of the Student Organization of Pondok Modern (OPPM) and all school offices are required to use English for official correspondence and daily operations. This includes invitation letters, information letters, and permission letters. By doing so, the institution provides students with a practical model of English communication to emulate in their own interactions.

4.4 Learners' Perceptions toward the English Environment

The effectiveness of the English environment is inherently linked to how learners perceive the policies, activities, and disciplinary frameworks implemented by the institution. Quantitative and qualitative data reveal a complex relationship between structured enforcement and learner engagement.

Learner motivation in the Modern Islamic Boarding School is driven by a convergence of discipline, institutional reputation, and the influence of role models. Empirical findings indicate that the primary motivator for learning English is institutional discipline, which accounts for 60.10% (375 learners) of the student body. Other significant factors include the institution's reputation (7.53%), the language itself (24.52%), and social connectivity with peers (7.58%). Furthermore, English serves as a strong catalyst, motivating 60.90% of learners to improve their proficiency. These results suggest that learners largely acknowledge the intentional creation of an English environment as a critical component of their educational experience, even if they sometimes struggle with self-motivation. These data can be seen in the following table.

Table 4.4.1 Learner's Motivation Studying in Modern Islamic Boarding School Darussalam Gontor

No	Students Response	Frequency	Percentage
1	Yes	375	60.10%
2	No	47	7.53%

3	Sometimes	153	24.52%
4	Never	49	7.89%
Total		624	100

Next, the enforcement mechanisms, particularly the Language Court and the punishment system, are perceived by a majority of learners as effective drivers for language use. Data show that 52.72% of learners feel motivated to speak English specifically because of the existence of language courts. Additionally, the disciplinary framework, characterized by punishments for transgressions, is accepted by 64.42% of learners. However, these policies are not uniformly received; approximately 17.95% of learners report not being motivated by the existence of the language court, suggesting that while the system is effective for the majority, a minority remains resistant or indifferent to these disciplinary pressures. These data are presented in the following table.

Table 4.4.2 Lerner's Perception toward the Existence of Language Court

No	Students Response	Frequency	Percentage
1	Yes	329	52.72%
2	No	112	17.95%
3	Sometimes	144	23.08%
4	Never	39	6.25%
Total		624	100

Learner engagement demonstrates a notable variation depending on the specific activity and the context of language use. While 57.05% of learners believe that language activities generally help them learn English, active participation in these events fluctuates. Specifically:

1. Interest in Activities, only 21.15% of learners express a strong liking for joining language activities, while 43.59% do so only sporadically.
2. Contextual Language Use, in less formal settings, consistency drops. For instance, 45.83% of learners report "sometimes" speaking English during sports training, and 30.93% report "sometimes" using it during scout activities.
3. High-Constraint Environments, during the designated "English Week," engagement is higher, with 49.20% of learners consistently speaking English outside the classroom.

These findings illustrate that while learners understand the pedagogical value of these activities, the transition from "knowing" to "consistently doing" remains challenging in everyday social settings. The detailed data can be seen in the following tables.

Table 4.4.3 Learner's Perception toward Language Activities

No	Students Response	Frequency	Percentage
1	Yes	365	52.05%
2	No	89	14.26%
3	Sometimes	115	18.43%
4	Never	64	10.26%
Total		624	100

Table 4.4.4 Learner's Interest toward Language Activities

No	Students Response	Frequency	Percentage
1	Yes	132	21.15%
2	No	143	22.92%
3	Sometimes	272	43.59%
4	Never	77	12.43%
Total		624	100

Table 4.4.5 Learner's Interest toward Speaking English in Sport Activities

No	Students Response	Frequency	Percentage
1	Yes	101	16.19%

2	No	166	26.60%
3	Sometimes	286	45.83%
4	Never	71	11.38%
Total		624	100

Table 4.4.6 Learner's Interest Speaking English in Scout Activities

No	Students Response	Frequency	Percentage
1	Yes	94	15.06%
2	No	257	41.19%
3	Sometimes	193	30.93%
4	Never	80	13.82%
Total		624	100

Table 4.4.7 Learner's Interest in Speaking English During English Week

No	Students Response	Frequency	Percentage
1	Yes	307	49.20%
2	No	48	7.69%
3	Sometimes	222	35.58%
4	Never	47	7.53%
Total		624	100

Despite the overarching positive perception of the boarding school environment, there remains a notable disparity between the learners' acknowledgment of institutional support and their actual operational consistency in language usage. While a majority of the student body (51.92%) explicitly reports that the Gontor environment assists them in learning the English language, the data regarding disciplinary adherence reveals that full compliance is not universal. Only 36.22% of learners report consistently obeying language discipline, while a significant portion of the student body (35.42%) admits to only "sometimes" obeying these regulations, and 15.06% reports disobedience.

Table 4.4.8 Learner's Perception toward Language Environment

No	Students Response	Frequency	Percentage
1	Yes	324	51.92%
2	No	60	9.62%
3	Sometimes	203	32.53%
4	Never	37	5.93%
Total		624	100

Table 4.4.9 Learner's Perception toward Language Discipline

No	Students Response	Frequency	Percentage
1	Yes	226	36.22%
2	No	94	15.06%
3	Sometimes	221	35.42%
4	Never	83	13.30%
Total		624	100

4.5 Development of Language Teaching Environment Method

The creation of an effective English environment is not a singular action but a comprehensive, multi-layered approach that integrates formal instruction with informal social interaction. The school deliberately designs these conditions to assist learners in achieving language proficiency while simultaneously shaping their character. The methodology encompasses several key pillars that ensure consistency and sustainability in language development.

The development of the language environment relies on seven interconnected methods used to create, sustain, and evaluate the language atmosphere:

1. Utilization of Language Motivators

The school identifies its leaders, specifically the Heads of the Pondok and the Director of the KMI, as the primary motivators. They act as the first examples in all activities,

including leading ritual prayers and modeling the usage of English in daily communication.

2. **Integration of Philosophy and Aqidah**
The school's philosophy and Aqidah (theological foundations) are planted in the learners to build character. Students are introduced to the "Five Spirits" of the Pondok, sincerity, simplicity, self-sufficiency, Islamic brotherhood, and freedom, which serve as internal motivations for academic and linguistic discipline.
3. **Modeling through Good Examples**
All activities, whether formal or informal, are presented by teachers, managers of the student organization (OPPM), and dormitory managers, who act as direct models for the learners to imitate.
4. **Performing Formal Courts**
Formal courts are held to observe and control all Pondok activities, including teaching, language usage, and the performance of managers and supervisors. This serves as a primary method to direct and evaluate all school operations.
5. **Public Evaluation, Correction, and Encouragement**
The institution conducts regular public evaluation and correction sessions to prevent the "language damage" that occurs when motivation wanes. These sessions are performed in groups (class or dormitory-based) to ensure learners remain conscious of their mistakes and motivated to improve.
6. **Straightening Language Discipline**
The school enforces a 24-hour discipline regime. This includes a robust "Language Court" system with different levels of authority (Dormitory, CLI, and Language Supervisor) and a range of punishments designed to motivate students to avoid future errors.
7. **Curriculum Development and Teacher Guidance**
This systematic program standardizes teaching skills and ensures the constant improvement of teaching methods. It involves monitoring all teaching activities and providing ongoing guidance and counseling to ensure high-quality instruction.

4.6 Supporting Factors in English Environment Development in Modern Islamic Boarding School Darussalam Gontor

There are six factors that contribute to the formation of a language environment, as stated by the director of the Modern Islamic Boarding School Darussalam Gontor, including:

1. **English Teacher**
The quality of learners' English proficiency is dependent on the quality of the teaching staff. To maintain high standards, the Department of Teacher's Career implements continuous development programs, including subject orientation, teaching preparation workshops, and pedagogical training. Teachers are required to draft detailed teaching preparations, which are subject to rigorous control by senior officers; failure to do so may result in the revocation of teaching licenses. Furthermore, a distinctive aspect of the teaching culture is the "characteristic of sincerity," where teachers provide guidance and supervision to students 24 hours a day, fostering a supportive environment that contributes significantly to the school's success.
2. **The Method of Teaching English**
The school predominantly utilizes the Direct Method, particularly for beginners, to ensure that students associate meaning directly with the target language without the intervention of translation. Often recognized as the "see and tell" method, it focuses on oral interaction, spontaneous language use, and inductive grammar instruction, where students learn rules by generalizing from examples rather than rote memorization. This method is adapted based on the situational needs of the classroom, ensuring that learners are actively engaged in communicating rather than merely analyzing linguistic structures.
3. **The Wide Place for Language Interaction**
Language is viewed as a social construct that flourishes through interplay. Therefore, the school mandates English usage in all activities, creating a "wide place" for genuine

personal interaction between teachers and learners. By forcing English usage in diverse contexts, ranging from morning conversations to sports and scouting, the school facilitates a complex network of relationships where language is realized through cooperative work. In this setting, teachers, dormitory managers, and senior students act as constant linguistic models whose actions and language are imitated by junior learners.

4. Many Materials of Teaching

To overcome the limitations of traditional classroom instruction, the institution incorporates a variety of visual and technological teaching aids to enhance the learning experience. The blackboard is used not only for formal teaching but also to write daily vocabulary, summons, and announcements in strategic public places, helping reinforce language exposure in everyday contexts. Technological aids such as tape recorders and films are employed to improve students' listening skills, offering models of native speech that are often accompanied by simplified commentaries to suit the learners' proficiency levels. Additionally, the library, which houses over 3,000 titles, provides a wealth of reading resources, while the implementation of "Language Boards" in areas like elbow streets and kitchens ensures students are consistently exposed to new vocabulary and idioms during their daily activities. Lastly, wall magazines act as a medium for students to express their ideas, fostering both reading and writing skills. These diverse materials create a comprehensive language learning environment that extends beyond the classroom.

5. The Instruction of Teaching by English

English is not treated as a discrete subject but as a medium of instruction. Beyond English-specific lessons, such as grammar, conversation, and dictation, the school utilizes English as a functional tool for acquiring general knowledge and Islamic literature. This approach enriches the learners' vocabulary, as the sentences and words encountered in lesson materials are immediately internalized and practiced in daily life, reinforcing the status of English as a key to scientific and religious success.

6. CLI and Language Manager of Dormitory

The Central Language Improvement (CLI) and dormitory language managers serve as the "machine" that propels all language activities. The CLI is responsible for firm enforcement of linguistic rules, including holding competitions, managing language courses, and administering the language court. The language managers within each dormitory act as the primary supervisors for daily practices, such as morning conversations, and are the first point of contact for language-related guidance. These structures, overseen by language supervisors who monitor and correct the activities of senior students, ensure that the language environment remains vibrant and disciplined at all times.

DISCUSSION

This study reveals that the success of the language environment development at Pondok Modern Darussalam Gontor is the result of systematically designed environmental engineering. Based on the theories of Krashen & Scarcella (1978) and Dulay et al. (1982), the findings demonstrate that Gontor has successfully integrated both formal and informal aspects into a cohesive system. The constructed language environment not only creates a structured learning system but also accommodates the need for natural communication, which supports effective second language acquisition.

Krashen (1978) distinguishes between the formal linguistic environment, which focuses on classroom instruction, and the informal linguistic environment, which emphasizes daily communication as a tool for language acquisition. This study reveals that, at Gontor, these two environments are not separated but rather interconnected. Language learning through the Direct Method in class constitutes the formal linguistic environment aimed at developing a learned system, conscious knowledge of language. However, Gontor's main strength lies in how the school creates an informal linguistic environment through dormitories and the santri organization (OPPM), which allows students to acquire the acquired system, subconscious knowledge, through constant social interaction.

The role of language supervisors and dormitory managers is also critical in transferring knowledge learned in the classroom to real-life communication situations. Their synergy creates a bridge between formal learning and language use in natural settings, thus fostering deeper language acquisition. This aligns with Krashen's argument that optimal second language performance (SL performance) requires a strong combination of formal learning and natural communication exposure. In this way, Gontor successfully creates an ecosystem that allows students to internalize language structures in more natural and contextual settings.

Furthermore, analyzing the language practices at Pondok Gontor through Dulay et al.'s (1982) perspective, which divides the linguistic environment into macro- and micro-environments, Gontor's approach stands out. In the macro-environment, Gontor emphasizes the role of language models, namely senior students and dormitory managers, who serve as constant linguistic models for junior students. This role is crucial in creating a natural environment where daily activities in the dormitories, kitchens, and sports facilities serve as means for students to confirm the meaning of words without relying on their native language. This generates concrete referents that help students understand words in contexts they directly experience.

On the micro-environmental level, Gontor employs the "spy system" to ensure that language rules are always upheld and visible. This mechanism controls micro-environmental elements proposed by Dulay, such as salience, feedback, and frequency. The system ensures that English remains salient in every activity by displaying vocabulary boards and making constant announcements throughout the school. Feedback, as Dulay suggests, is the response to learner speech, which in this case is not only given by teachers but also by peers. Peer corrections are more intense and sociolinguistic in nature, bringing students closer to the natural use of language.

The frequency of language exposure is also high due to the obligation to use English in all areas of the school. By ensuring a high frequency of language use, Gontor creates a language-rich environment, which is a key element in second language acquisition. This supports Dulay's theory that frequent exposure to language is crucial for effective learning. The strict surveillance system, which reminds students to use English at all times, increases the intensity and frequency of language exposure, becoming a major factor in effective language learning.

Despite the theoretically supportive environment for Second Language Acquisition (SLA) at Gontor, a paradox arises. The data shows a tension between external motivation driven by the obligation to comply with rules and internal motivation driven by the desire to communicate in English. In language acquisition theory, intrinsic motivation is considered more effective than extrinsic motivation. However, the findings suggest that in a closed community such as a boarding school, institutional control through strict discipline functions as an initial scaffolding for forming the habit of speaking English.

The mechanisms of sanctions and surveillance applied at Pondok Gontor serve as a driving force to keep students within a language-rich environment. Nevertheless, the remaining challenge is how to transform compliance based on fear of sanctions into more substantial involvement in everyday communication. Therefore, there is a need for a shift from extrinsic motivation, focused on discipline, to intrinsic motivation that encourages students to actively participate in English conversations.

These findings also align with recent perspectives on effective language environments. According to Afianti et al. (2025), a well-designed learning environment significantly influences the development of skills necessary for adapting to the social context. At Gontor, the integration of both formal and informal aspects not only develops language skills but also enhances the social competence of students in communicating in broader contexts. As stated by Inayati et al. (2025), the development of a learning environment that integrates meaningful input from various sources can enhance language proficiency more efficiently. Thus, Pondok Gontor has successfully created a well-integrated language learning model, allowing students to learn the language holistically through social interactions and real-life experiences outside the classroom.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the success of the English language environment at the Modern Islamic Boarding School Darussalam Gontor is driven by the integrated synergy between formal instruction and informal daily interaction, systematically reinforced through institutional policies, discipline, and continuous language exposure. By addressing the research gap that has largely treated language environment elements in isolation, this study demonstrates that second language acquisition is more effective when these elements operate as a unified system, conceptualized as the “chemistry” of the English environment. The novelty of this research lies in showing that a highly structured and controlled environment can effectively support language acquisition, not as a limitation but as a scaffold that fosters habit formation and reduces first language interference, while also revealing the need to transform extrinsic discipline into intrinsic motivation. This study contributes to SLA theory by offering an integrated environmental model that bridges formal and informal contexts, and provides practical implications for designing immersive language learning environments in EFL settings, emphasizing that sustainable language proficiency requires both institutional support and meaningful communicative engagement.

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