

## **DRAMA-BASED IMMERSIVE LEARNING IN ISLAMIC BOARDING SCHOOLS: A NOVEL APPROACH TO ARABIC LANGUAGE ACQUISITION**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This study investigates the implementation of drama-based immersive learning as an innovative approach to Arabic language acquisition in an Islamic boarding school context. Employing a qualitative case study design, the research explores how the “Gebyar Seni Darussalam (Pra Drama Arena)” program facilitates students’ communicative competence through performance-based activities. Data were collected through observations, interviews, and document analysis involving Grade 3 intensive and Grade 4 students. The findings reveal that drama-based immersive learning significantly enhances students’ Arabic speaking proficiency, integrates four language skills, increases learner engagement, and strengthens confidence and willingness to communicate. More importantly, the study demonstrates that language acquisition occurs most effectively within an immersive environment where learners actively use language in meaningful social interactions. The study proposes a novel conceptual model, Institutionalized Drama-Based Immersive Learning (IDIL), which integrates performative pedagogy, continuous language exposure, and institutional support into a holistic learning ecosystem. This model offers both theoretical and practical contributions to Arabic language education by shifting the focus from instruction to experience and from classroom practice to institutionalized immersion. The findings suggest that drama-based immersion can serve as a scalable and sustainable model for enhancing language proficiency in similar educational settings.

**Keyword:** *Drama-Based Learning; Immersive Learning; Arabic Language Acquisition; Islamic Boarding School; Communicative Competence.*

### **A. INTRODUCTION**

Arabic as a foreign language (AFL) requires not only structural mastery but also the ability to communicate meaningfully in authentic contexts. However, in many educational settings, including Islamic boarding schools (pesantren), Arabic instruction

often remains dominated by traditional approaches that emphasize grammatical memorization and textual comprehension. Such approaches tend to limit students’ opportunities to actively use the language in real communicative situations, resulting in low speaking proficiency, limited confidence, and

minimal engagement in language learning processes.

In response to these challenges, recent developments in language pedagogy have highlighted the importance of experiential and student-centered approaches. One promising approach is drama-based learning, which enables learners to engage in meaningful language use through performance, interaction, and emotional involvement. Drama-based pedagogy situates language within realistic and socially constructed contexts, thereby fostering communicative competence rather than mere linguistic knowledge. Empirical studies have demonstrated that drama-based language instruction significantly improves learners' oral proficiency, interactional skills, and expressive abilities (Humaira et al., 2022). Furthermore, drama activities have been found to enhance learners' motivation, self-confidence, and willingness to communicate in the target language (Aladini & Jalambo, 2021).

In addition, drama-based learning can be effectively integrated with Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL), which combines content mastery with language acquisition. This integration allows learners to develop both linguistic competence and contextual understanding simultaneously. Research indicates that the incorporation of drama within CLIL frameworks promotes deeper

engagement and improves speaking performance, as learners actively construct meaning through collaborative and performative tasks (Aladini et al., 2021). More recent studies also emphasize that drama-based pedagogy represents a transformative approach in language education, as it enhances learner engagement and supports the development of communicative competence across multiple language skills (Mahayanti et al., 2025).

Within the context of Arabic language learning, drama and theatrical performance offer particularly significant pedagogical potential. Drama activities inherently integrate the four language skills—listening, speaking, reading, and writing—while simultaneously fostering creativity, cultural awareness, and linguistic sensitivity (dhawq lughawi). Recent studies in Arabic language education highlight that drama-based strategies can improve fluency, expand vocabulary, and create meaningful and memorable learning experiences for students (Habib & Hanifansyah, 2025). Despite these promising findings, most existing research has primarily focused on English as a Foreign Language (EFL), leaving Arabic language contexts—especially within Islamic boarding schools—underexplored.

Moreover, although drama-based learning has been widely acknowledged, the concept of immersive learning through structured institutional programs

remains insufficiently examined. In many cases, drama is treated as a supplementary activity rather than a systematically designed pedagogical model. This gap indicates the need to explore how drama can function as an immersive language learning environment, where learners are continuously exposed to and engaged in the target language through authentic, performance-based experiences.

Therefore, this study aims to investigate the implementation of drama-based immersive learning through the “Gebyar Seni Darussalam (Pra Drama Arena)” program at an Islamic boarding school context. By examining this program as an institutionalized and structured learning model, this study seeks to contribute to the development of performative pedagogy in Arabic language education. The findings are expected to provide both theoretical insights into immersive language learning and practical implications for designing innovative and effective Arabic language instruction in similar educational settings.

## **B. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

This study employed a qualitative case study design to explore the implementation of drama-based immersive learning in Arabic language acquisition within an Islamic boarding school context. A qualitative approach was considered appropriate as it allows

for an in-depth understanding of participants’ experiences, interactions, and meaning-making processes within natural learning settings. In immersive learning research, qualitative inquiry is widely used to capture learners’ perceptions, engagement, and behavioral patterns that cannot be fully represented through quantitative measures (Weng et al., 2024). Furthermore, qualitative case studies are particularly relevant in examining context-bound educational phenomena, especially when the goal is to investigate how pedagogical models are enacted in real-life institutional environments.

The research was conducted at an Islamic boarding school implementing the “Gebyar Seni Darussalam (Pra Drama Arena)” program as a structured drama-based language activity. The participants consisted of female students from intensive Grade 3 and Grade 4, who were actively involved in the drama performances. Purposive sampling was employed to select participants who had direct experience with the immersive learning process, ensuring the relevance and richness of the data. This sampling strategy is commonly used in qualitative educational research to obtain information-rich cases that illuminate the phenomenon under study.

**Table 1. Research Participants and Demographic Profile**

<b>N o.</b>	<b>Grade Level</b>	<b>Number of Participants</b>	<b>Age Range</b>	<b>Role in Drama Activities</b>
<b>1</b>	Intensive Grade 3	15	14–15	Actors, Scriptwriters, Supporting Crew
<b>2</b>	Grade 4	20	15–17	Main Actors, Directors, Stage Coordinators
	<b>Total</b>	<b>35</b>	14–17	Multi-role participation

Data were collected through multiple techniques, including classroom observations, in-depth interviews, and document analysis. Observations were conducted during rehearsals and performances to examine students' language use, interaction patterns, and engagement in the immersive environment. Semi-structured interviews were carried out with students and teachers to explore their perceptions of the learning process, challenges, and perceived outcomes. In addition, supporting documents such as scripts, learning materials, and institutional reports were analyzed to triangulate the findings. Previous studies on immersive learning emphasize the importance of combining observations, interviews, and reflective data to obtain a comprehensive understanding of learners' experiences

(Feng et al., 2023; Maghool et al., 2018 as cited in recent immersive learning research) .

The data were analyzed using thematic analysis, following systematic procedures of data reduction, coding, categorization, and interpretation. This method enables the identification of recurring patterns and themes related to language acquisition, engagement, and immersive learning processes. Thematic analysis is widely applied in qualitative studies of language learning as it allows researchers to interpret complex social and pedagogical interactions within authentic contexts. To ensure the trustworthiness of the data, this study applied triangulation, member checking, and prolonged engagement, which are considered essential strategies in qualitative research to enhance credibility and validity.

Overall, this methodological approach provides a comprehensive framework for examining how drama-based immersive learning operates as a pedagogical model and how it contributes to Arabic language acquisition in a real educational setting. By combining in-depth qualitative inquiry with multiple data sources, this study aims to generate rich, contextualized insights into the effectiveness and pedagogical value of immersive language learning.

## RESULTS

The findings of this study demonstrate that the implementation of drama-based immersive learning in the “Gebyar Seni Darussalam (Pra Drama Arena)” program resulted in significant improvements across linguistic, behavioral, and participatory dimensions of Arabic language acquisition. The results are organized into four key empirical findings.

**Table 2. Thematic Findings of Drama-Based Immersive Learning**

No.	Theme	Description	Key Evidence from Data
1	Improvement in Speaking Proficiency	Students demonstrated increased fluency, pronunciation, and expressive ability in Arabic communication.	Longer utterances, varied vocabulary, natural intonation observed during performances.
2	Integrated Language Skills Development	Drama activities facilitated the integration of listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills.	Script writing, rehearsal listening, dialogue reading, and live performance.
3	Increased Learner Engagement	Students showed high levels of active participation and involvement in all stages of the program.	Participation as actors, scriptwriters, and stage coordinators.

4	Enhanced Confidence and Willingness to Communicate	Learners became more confident and willing to use Arabic in public and interactive settings.	Reduced anxiety, increased spontaneous interaction during rehearsals and performances.
5	Emergence of Immersive Language Environment	The program created continuous exposure to Arabic through formal and informal communication.	Use of Arabic beyond scripts, including spontaneous peer interaction.

As presented in Table 3, five major themes emerged from the data, highlighting the multidimensional impact of drama-based immersive learning on Arabic language acquisition, encompassing linguistic, affective, and environmental dimensions.

### Improvement in Arabic Speaking Proficiency (Maharah Kalam)

The data indicate a substantial improvement in students’ Arabic speaking proficiency, particularly in terms of fluency, pronunciation, and expressive communication. Observations during rehearsals and final performances revealed that students were able to produce longer utterances, use more varied vocabulary, and demonstrate more natural intonation patterns

compared to their initial performance stages.

Interview data further confirmed that students experienced a shift from memorized speech to spontaneous language production. This finding aligns with previous studies indicating that drama-based instruction enhances oral language skills by providing authentic communicative contexts and repeated exposure to meaningful interaction (Humaira et al., 2022; Komul, 2023). Drama activities enable learners to practice pronunciation, intonation, and real-time interaction, which are essential components of communicative competence.

**Table 4. Indicators of Language Development in Drama Activities**

N o.	Language Aspect	Before Program (Initial Stage)	During Processes (Rehearsal Stage)	After Performance (Final Stage)
1	Fluency	Short, fragmented utterances; frequent pauses	Increasing sentence length; reduced hesitation	Smooth, continuous speech with minimal pauses
2	Vocabulary Usage	Limited vocabulary; repetitive word use	Expanded vocabulary through script exposure and interaction	Varied and contextually appropriate vocabulary usage

3	Pronunciation	Inconsistent pronunciation; influence of L1 accent	Gradual improvement through repetition and correction	Clear and more accurate pronunciation with natural intonation
4	Interaction Skills	Minimal interaction; reliance on memorization	Active participation in dialogue and rehearsal interaction	Spontaneous and responsive communication in real-time interaction
5	Confidence	Hesitant and anxious in speaking situations	Increasing willingness to participate in group activities	High confidence in public speaking and performance

Table 4 illustrates the progressive development of students' language abilities across three stages of the drama-based immersive learning process. The data indicate a clear transition from limited and hesitant language use toward fluent, confident, and contextually appropriate communication.

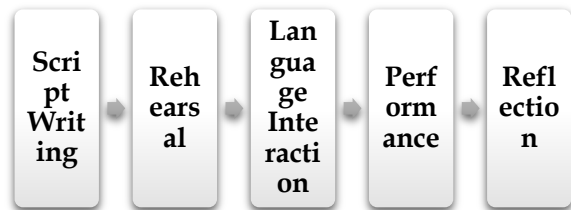
### **Development of Integrated Language Skills**

The findings also reveal that drama-based immersive learning facilitated the integration of four language skills: listening, speaking, reading, and

writing. Students engaged in script reading (reading skill), script adaptation and dialogue writing (writing skill), rehearsal listening (listening skill), and live performance (speaking skill).

Document analysis of student scripts shows increasing linguistic complexity and creativity over time. This supports existing research suggesting that drama-based pedagogy enhances overall language proficiency by integrating multiple skills in a single learning process. Moreover, process drama approaches have been shown to positively influence holistic language development and learning outcomes in foreign language education (Luo et al., 2024; Komul, 2023).

**Figure 1. Process of Drama-Based Immersive Learning Implementation**



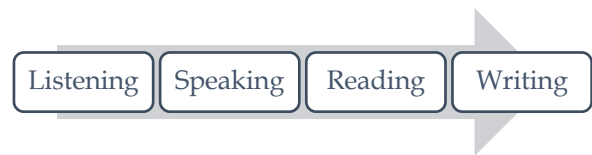
### **Increased Learner Engagement and Active Participation**

Another major finding is the significant increase in student engagement and participation. Observational data indicate that nearly all students were actively involved in the learning process, whether as performers, scriptwriters, stage coordinators, or supporting teams. This contrasts with

traditional classroom settings, where participation is often limited to a small number of active students.

Students reported that the drama activities were enjoyable, meaningful, and motivating, leading to sustained engagement throughout the program. This finding is consistent with recent research highlighting that drama-based pedagogy enhances student engagement, creativity, and collaborative learning behaviors. The performative nature of drama creates a participatory learning environment where students are required to actively use language rather than passively receive it (Mahayanti et al., 2025).

**Figure 3. Integrated Language Skills in Drama Activities**



### **Enhancement of Confidence and Willingness to Communicate**

The results further show a notable improvement in students' confidence and willingness to communicate in Arabic. Interview data reveal that students who initially felt anxious or hesitant to speak Arabic became more confident after participating in drama performances.

This affective transformation is reflected in their increased readiness to speak in public, interact with peers, and take linguistic risks. Drama provides a

supportive environment where learners can experiment with language through role-play, reducing fear of making mistakes. This finding is in line with previous studies indicating that drama-based learning fosters confidence, motivation, and communicative willingness among language learners (Humaira et al., 2022; Mahayanti et al., 2025).

### **Emergence of an Immersive Language Environment**

Finally, the study found that the program created a natural immersive Arabic language environment. During the preparation and performance phases, Arabic was used as the primary medium of communication, both formally and informally. Students interacted using Arabic beyond scripted dialogues, including spontaneous conversations during rehearsals.

This immersive exposure allowed students to internalize language patterns more effectively, as they were continuously engaged in meaningful language use. Immersive learning environments are known to enhance language acquisition by providing continuous input and interaction opportunities within authentic contexts (Gerkens, 2024; Weng et al., 2024).

### **DISCUSSION**

The findings of this study confirm that drama-based immersive learning

constitutes a transformative shift from traditional language instruction toward a performative, experiential, and ecosystem-based model of language acquisition. Unlike conventional approaches that separate language form from use, this model situates Arabic as a lived communicative practice embedded in social interaction, performance, and institutional culture.

**Table 5. Components of Institutionalized Drama-Based Immersive Learning (IDIL)**

<b>N o.</b>	<b>Compo nent</b>	<b>Descri ption</b>	<b>Pedago gical Functio n</b>	<b>Evidenc e from Findings</b>
<b>1</b>	Perfor mative Pedagogy	Learnin g is conduct ed through drama perform ance, role-play, and scripted interacti on.	Facilitat es active languag e use, expressi on, and commun icative practice.	Students actively engaged in acting, dialogue delivery, and script interpret ation.
<b>2</b>	Immers ive Environ ment	Continu ous exposu re to Arabic through formal and informa l interacti ons within the progra m.	Enhance s natural languag e acquisiti on through sustaine d input and interacti on.	Use of Arabic beyond scripts, including spontane ous peer communi cation.

<b>3</b>	Institutional Support	Structured and recurring program embedded within the boarding school system.	Ensures sustainability, scalability, and consistency of learning experiences.	Program implemented collectively with organized stages and institutional backing.
<b>4</b>	Collaborative Learning	Students work together in groups as actors, scriptwriters, and production teams.	Promotes peer interaction, negotiation of meaning, and social learning.	High levels of participation and teamwork observed throughout the process.
<b>5</b>	Authentic Performance Goal	Final drama performance presented before an audience.	Provides real communicative purpose and increases motivation.	Students demonstrated high engagement and responsibility toward performance outcomes.

As presented in Table 5, the IDIL model is composed of five interrelated components that collectively create a holistic and sustainable immersive learning ecosystem.

### **Beyond CLIL: From Dual-Focused Learning to High-Density Immersion**

Existing literature on Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) emphasizes the integration of language and content as a dual-focused pedagogy that enhances both linguistic competence and subject understanding (Sudarso et al., 2024; Fernandez-Alcocer & Belda-Medina, 2025). However, recent meta-analytical and longitudinal evidence suggests that the effectiveness of CLIL remains uneven, particularly in addressing affective engagement and sustained communicative practice (System, 2024a; System, 2024b).

In this regard, the present study demonstrates that drama-based immersive learning produces a higher intensity of language exposure and interaction, as students continuously engage in meaning-making through performance. While CLIL integrates language within content, this model transforms the entire learning environment into a communicative space where language is enacted rather than merely practiced.

Thus, the study advances a key theoretical proposition: immersion should be understood as a qualitatively distinct pedagogical condition characterized by continuous, embodied, and socially distributed language use, extending beyond the dual-focus principle of CLIL.

### **Drama as Embodied and Multimodal Language Acquisition**

Another critical contribution of this study lies in reconceptualizing drama as an embodied and multimodal process of language acquisition. Previous research has highlighted that drama-based pedagogy enhances communicative competence and learner engagement through interactive and expressive activities (Mahayanti et al., 2025). However, the findings of this study indicate that drama does not merely support language learning—it fundamentally reshapes how language is internalized and performed.

In this context, language learning becomes an embodied act involving voice, gesture, emotion, and spatial interaction, aligning with emerging perspectives on embodied learning that emphasize meaning-making through physical and social engagement (Ramírez-Aroca & Javadinejad, 2026). Furthermore, immersive learning research underscores that sustained interaction and contextual simulation significantly enhance language acquisition outcomes (Weng et al., 2024).

Importantly, this study extends these insights by demonstrating that drama naturally generates immersive conditions without technological mediation, thereby offering a pedagogically accessible yet highly effective model for language learning.

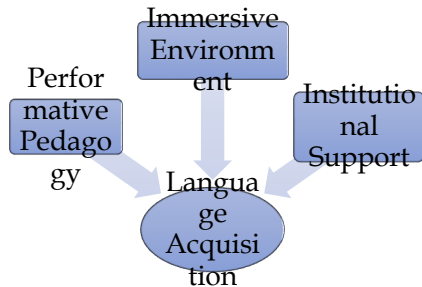
### **Affective Dimension: From Anxiety Reduction to Identity Transformation**

While prior studies indicate that CLIL and immersive approaches may reduce speaking anxiety and enhance motivation (Güngör, 2025), their long-term affective impact remains contested (System, 2024b). The findings of this study provide a more nuanced explanation by showing that drama-based immersion not only reduces anxiety but also transforms learners' linguistic identity.

Through role enactment, students shift from passive recipients of language input to active performers who embody language in meaningful contexts. This process fosters confidence not merely as a function of competence, but as a result of participation, social validation, and performative engagement. As also observed in drama-based pedagogical studies, learners develop stronger communicative confidence when language use is embedded in expressive and socially interactive contexts (Mahayanti et al., 2025).

This leads to a key conceptual contribution: language confidence emerges as an identity-mediated construct shaped by embodied performance and social interaction, rather than solely by linguistic mastery.

**Figure 5. Institutionalized Drama-Based Immersive Learning (IDIL) Model**



### **Institutionalization as the Missing Link in Immersive Learning Research**

A major contribution of this study lies in addressing a persistent gap in immersive learning research, namely the lack of scalable and sustainable implementation models in real educational contexts (Arantes Fernandes et al., 2022). While previous studies emphasize the effectiveness of immersive environments, they often rely on short-term interventions or technology-dependent settings.

In contrast, this study demonstrates that the effectiveness of drama-based immersion is significantly enhanced through its institutionalization within the pesantren system. The “Gebyar Seni Darussalam” program functions as a structured and recurring activity that embeds language learning within the broader educational culture.

Three key elements support this model: (1) collective participation, ensuring broad engagement; (2) authentic performance goals, providing meaningful motivation; and (3) extended

exposure, enabling continuous language use. These findings reinforce the argument that immersion becomes pedagogically powerful when it is systemically embedded rather than episodically applied.

### **Toward a New Model: Institutionalized Drama-Based Immersive Learning (IDIL)**

Based on these findings, this study proposes a new conceptual model Institutionalized Drama-Based Immersive Learning (IDIL). This model integrates three interrelated dimensions: (1) performative pedagogy (drama as the core learning mechanism), (2) immersive environment (continuous language exposure), and (3) institutional support (structured and scalable implementation).

While previous studies have examined drama and immersion as separate constructs, this study synthesizes them into a unified framework, conceptualizing language learning as a holistic ecosystem. This aligns with recent calls in language education research to move beyond fragmented pedagogies toward integrated, experience-based learning systems (Weng et al., 2024; Mahayanti et al., 2025).

Overall, this study advances the field of language education in three fundamental ways. First, it shifts the focus from language instruction to

language experience, emphasizing authentic engagement over formal teaching. Second, it reconceptualizes learning from a cognitive process to an embodied and performative practice. Third, it reframes pedagogy from a classroom-bound method to an institutionalized learning ecology.

Accordingly, the central argument of this study can be articulated as follows that Drama-based immersive learning is not merely an instructional strategy, but a comprehensive language acquisition ecosystem that integrates cognitive, affective, and social dimensions within a structured institutional framework. This conceptualization represents the core novelty of the study and provides a foundation for future research on immersive and performative approaches in Arabic language education.

#### **D. CONCLUSION**

This study concludes that drama-based immersive learning fundamentally reconfigures Arabic language acquisition from a form-centered instructional process into a performative, experience-driven, and socially embedded practice. The findings demonstrate that language proficiency develops most effectively when learners are continuously engaged in meaningful interaction, rather than isolated linguistic exercises. Through the “Gebyar Seni Darussalam” program, Arabic emerges not merely as a subject of study but as a medium of expression,

collaboration, and performance. This confirms that sustained immersion within authentic communicative environments significantly enhances learners’ fluency, confidence, and overall communicative competence, reinforcing the argument that language is best acquired through use rather than instruction alone.

More importantly, this study advances a critical theoretical contribution by proposing that language acquisition should be conceptualized as an “immersive language ecology”, in which cognitive, affective, and social dimensions operate simultaneously. Unlike traditional CLIL or drama-based approaches that are often implemented as partial or supplementary strategies, the model examined in this study demonstrates how immersion becomes pedagogically powerful when it is embodied, continuous, and institutionally structured. The introduction of the Institutionalized Drama-Based Immersive Learning (IDIL) model provides a new framework that extends beyond existing paradigms by integrating performative pedagogy, environmental immersion, and systemic support into a unified learning ecosystem.

From a pedagogical perspective, the implications of this study suggest that language educators should move beyond classroom-bound methodologies and begin designing holistic learning environments that enable authentic language use. Drama-based immersion

offers a practical and scalable approach, particularly in contexts with limited access to advanced technological tools. By leveraging performance, collaboration, and real communicative goals, educators can foster deeper engagement and more sustainable language development. Additionally, curriculum designers are encouraged to institutionalize such programs as part of formal language policy, ensuring that immersion is not episodic but embedded within the educational structure.

Finally, this study opens several directions for future research. Further investigations are needed to examine the long-term impact of drama-based immersive learning across different proficiency levels and educational contexts, as well as its potential integration with digital immersive technologies. Quantitative and mixed-method studies could also complement these findings by measuring the extent of linguistic gains and affective transformation. Ultimately, this study argues that the future of language education lies not in refining instructional techniques alone, but in reimagining learning environments as immersive ecosystems where language naturally emerges through performance, interaction, and institutional design.

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