
Strengthening Santri Communication Competence through Khitobiyah Activities at Miftahul Huda Islamic Boarding School

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Abstract

This study aims to describe the implementation of khitobiyah activities, identify the communication competencies developed, and analyze their role in strengthening the communication competence of santri at Miftahul Huda Islamic Boarding School, Ngroto, Gubug, Grobogan. The study employed a qualitative approach with a case study design. Data sources included the boarding school leader, supervising teachers, and santri who actively participated in khitobiyah activities. Data were collected through observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation. Data analysis followed the Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña model, consisting of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. Data validity was ensured through source and technique triangulation. The findings reveal that khitobiyah activities are implemented systematically through the stages of material preparation, speech delivery, and regular evaluation. The communication competencies developed include verbal, nonverbal, interpersonal, and psychological aspects. Santri demonstrated improvements in organizing and delivering materials systematically, using intonation, facial expressions, eye contact, and gestures more effectively, as well as increased self-confidence and courage in public speaking. Khitobiyah activities play a significant role in strengthening communication competence through habituation, practical experience, social interaction, and continuous evaluation. The study concludes that khitobiyah serves as a communication learning model based on pesantren culture that holistically integrates communication knowledge, skills, motivation, and attitudes.

Keywords

Khitobiyah; communication competence; santri, Islamic boarding school; soft skills

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1. INTRODUCTION

Communication competence is one of the important skills that must be possessed by every individual in facing the challenges of life in the modern era (Aliwan, 2024). This ability is not only related to speaking activities but also includes the ability to convey ideas clearly, effectively, and



persuasively according to the social context. Communication competence is regarded as one of the 21st-century skills that plays an important role in developing critical thinking, collaboration, problem-solving abilities, as well as students' adaptation to various social and professional contexts (Touloumakos, 2022).

In the perspective of modern communication studies, communication competence is understood as an individual's ability to integrate knowledge, skills, attitudes, and motivation to interact effectively in various social situations. Communication competence includes the ability to understand messages, manage interactions, and adjust verbal and nonverbal communication according to the context encountered. This competence requires individuals to use communication knowledge, skills, and motivation appropriately so that the interactions they engage in can take place effectively and in accordance with prevailing social norms. Thus, competent communication enables a person to achieve communication goals while simultaneously building positive interpersonal relationships in various social and professional situations (Neiroukh et al., 2024).

In addition, effective communication requires the ability to build interpersonal relationships through openness, empathy, positive attitudes, support, and equality in interaction (DeVito, 2019). Recent studies indicate that communication competence is a multidimensional construct that includes cognitive, affective, and behavioral aspects that interact with one another in determining the effectiveness of a person's communication. This competence is not only related to the ability to convey messages but also involves self-confidence, emotional intelligence, interpersonal abilities, and skills in adapting communication to various social situations (Cong & Li, 2022).

In the context of education, communication competence is not only a necessity for students but also a competence that must be possessed by educators in creating an effective learning process. Research by Larhzizer et al. shows that the communication strategies of Islamic Religious Education teachers make a significant contribution to improving the quality of teaching and learning activities. Teachers who are able to implement communication that is clear, persuasive, interactive, and adaptive to students' characteristics have been proven to enhance participation, motivation, and learning effectiveness in madrasahs. These findings emphasize that communication is a fundamental element in the educational process because it functions as a means of knowledge transfer, character formation, and strengthening interpersonal relationships between educators and students ((Larhzizer et al., 2025).

In the context of Islamic education, particularly in Islamic boarding schools, communication competence plays a strategic role because students are not only prepared to master religious knowledge but also to become future preachers and agents of change in society. The educational process in pesantren, which takes place through habituation, role modeling, and social interaction, is in line with

social learning theory, which emphasizes that individuals learn through observation, imitation, and social experiences gained from their surrounding environment (Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2020).

One of the activities used in developing students' communication competence is khitobiyah. Pedagogically, this activity is aligned with experiential learning theory, which places direct experience as the primary source of learning and skill development. Through experiences of performing, reflecting, evaluating, and repeated practice, students gain opportunities to continuously develop their communication competence (Morris, 2020). In its implementation, students receive evaluations and feedback from supervisors as well as peers. This process demonstrates reinforcement, which plays a role in gradually shaping communication behavior through continuous practice (Slavin, 2020).

At Pondok Pesantren Miftahul Huda Ngroto Gubug Grobogan, khitobiyah activities are conducted regularly as part of the students' development program. In practice, students are given opportunities in turn to deliver sermon materials and subsequently receive evaluations from supervisors and peers. This process not only trains speaking abilities but also builds students' confidence and mental readiness for public communication. Through these activities, students' communication competence develops in various aspects, such as the ability to organize materials, speak systematically, use language appropriately, and employ nonverbal communication skills such as facial expressions, intonation, and gestures. This is in line with studies explaining that effective communication is an integration of verbal and nonverbal aspects that work simultaneously in conveying meaning and building understanding in social interactions (Purba & Siahaan, 2022).

Several previous studies indicate that public speaking-based activities have a positive influence on improving students' communication skills. Research by Arifin shows that presentation-based learning in the classroom can increase students' confidence in expressing opinions systematically (Arifin & Abduh, 2021). Furthermore, research by Nurhayati found that structured speech training significantly contributes to improving students' self-confidence and rhetorical abilities (Nurhayati, 2022). In addition, research by Pratama revealed that regular discussion and public speaking activities can strengthen critical thinking abilities as well as students' oral communication skills (Pratama, 2023).

These findings confirm that public speaking activities not only play a role in mastering speaking skills but also contribute to the development of self-confidence and structured thinking abilities among students. Based on these conditions, there remains a research gap, namely the lack of comprehensive studies discussing the role of khitobiyah activities in strengthening students' communication competence from the perspectives of implementation, competencies developed, and contributions within the pesantren environment. The novelty of this research lies in its specific focus on analyzing the role of khitobiyah activities in strengthening students' communication competence at Pondok Pesantren Miftahul Huda Ngroto Gubug Grobogan through a contextual approach and pesantren-based practices.

The urgency of this research lies in the importance of strengthening students' communication competence as a primary provision for da'wah and social life. In the current digital era, students are required not only to master religious knowledge but also to be able to convey messages effectively to the wider community. Therefore, studying khitobiyah activities is important to examine the extent to which pesantren are able to develop students' communication skills systematically and sustainably. Based on the above, this research is important to comprehensively describe the role of khitobiyah activities in strengthening students' communication competence at Pondok Pesantren Miftahul Huda Ngroto Gubug Grobogan. The findings of this research are expected to contribute to the development of learning in pesantren, particularly in enhancing students' soft skills as provisions for da'wah and social life.

2. METHODS

This study employed a qualitative approach with a case study research design. The qualitative approach was selected because the study aimed to gain an in-depth understanding of a naturally occurring social phenomenon, namely the role of khitobiyah activities in strengthening the communication competence of students at Pondok Pesantren Miftahul Huda Ngroto Gubug Grobogan. Qualitative research focuses on meaning, processes, and the perspectives of participants within a specific context (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

This research was conducted at Pondok Pesantren Miftahul Huda Ngroto Gubug Grobogan, located in Grobogan Regency, Central Java, Indonesia. The research site was selected purposively because the pesantren has a structured and regularly implemented khitobiyah program that serves as a means of developing students' communication competence. Furthermore, this site was considered representative of the implementation of khitobiyah activities within the pesantren environment. The study was conducted during a period determined by the requirements of field data collection.

The data sources in this study consisted of primary and secondary data. Primary data were obtained directly from research informants, including the pesantren leader, ustadz or supervisors of khitobiyah activities, and students who actively participated in these activities. The informants were selected using purposive sampling, a technique that involves selecting participants based on their relevance and competence concerning the research focus (Sugiyono, 2022). Secondary data were obtained from various supporting documents, including archives of khitobiyah activities, activity schedules, evaluation records, and literature relevant to the research focus. These secondary data were used to strengthen and complement the primary data collected in the field.

Data collection was carried out through three main techniques: observation, interviews, and documentation. The observation technique employed in this study was participatory observation, in

which the researcher was directly involved in observing the implementation of khitobiyah activities to gain a comprehensive understanding of the processes, interactions, and communication dynamics of students within the pesantren environment (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Furthermore, in-depth interviews were conducted with the research informants. These interviews aimed to obtain detailed information regarding the implementation of khitobiyah activities, the communication competencies developed through these activities, and their contribution to strengthening students' communication skills. In addition, documentation techniques were used to collect supporting data in the form of written and visual documents, such as photographs of activities, evaluation records, and archives related to khitobiyah activities in the pesantren.

Data analysis in this study followed the interactive model proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña and was conducted continuously until data saturation was achieved. The analysis process consisted of three main stages. First, data condensation, which involved selecting, focusing, simplifying, and abstracting the data obtained from the field to ensure their relevance to the research focus. Second, data display, which involved organizing the data into descriptive narratives to facilitate interpretation and analysis. Third, conclusion drawing and verification, which involved interpreting the data to identify meaningful patterns and systematically answer the research questions (Miles & Huberman, 2014).

The trustworthiness of the data was established through triangulation techniques, namely source triangulation and technique triangulation. Source triangulation was conducted by comparing data obtained from the pesantren leader, khitobiyah supervisors, and students. Meanwhile, technique triangulation was conducted by comparing findings derived from observations, interviews, and documentation. The use of triangulation aimed to ensure that the data possessed a high level of credibility, validity, and scientific trustworthiness (Sugiyono, 2022).

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

1. The Implementation of Khitobiyah Activities at Pondok Pesantren Miftahul Huda Ngroto Gubug Grobogan

The findings of this study indicate that khitobiyah activities at Pondok Pesantren Miftahul Huda Ngroto Gubug Grobogan are implemented in a structured and scheduled manner and have become an integral part of the students' development culture. These activities are not merely understood as speech practice but as a communication education process that fosters courage, speaking skills, and the ability to convey ideas systematically. The implementation of khitobiyah follows a rotation system in which each student is given the opportunity to deliver a sermon on Islamic themes such as morality, worship,

and motivation in student life. This system reflects the principle of equitable learning opportunities, ensuring that all students have equal chances to develop their public communication skills.

The preparation stage demonstrates a well-directed learning process. Students are required to prepare their speech materials independently or under the guidance of supervising ustadz. At this stage, students are trained to organize their speeches into logical and systematic structures consisting of an introduction, body, and conclusion. This process is consistent with Kolb's experiential learning theory, which emphasizes that effective learning occurs through a cycle of concrete experience, reflection, conceptualization, and repeated practice.

Furthermore, the mentoring process within *khitobiyah* activities can be associated with social learning theory, which explains that individuals learn through observation, imitation, and social experiences within a particular environment. In the *pesantren* context, students learn from the performances of their peers, imitate effective communication styles, and improve their own communication based on the feedback they receive. This process demonstrates that learning occurs through social interaction and observation of behavioral models perceived as effective (Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2020).

During the implementation stage, students perform before an audience consisting of fellow students in an environment that closely resembles real communication situations. They are expected not only to read prepared texts but also to deliver messages in a communicative, expressive, and persuasive manner. This practice contributes to the development of both verbal and nonverbal communication competencies, including voice intonation, facial expressions, eye contact, and body gestures.

The evaluation stage constitutes an essential component of the *khitobiyah* cycle. Supervising ustadz provide feedback regarding the content of the speech, delivery techniques, and nonverbal aspects of communication. This evaluation serves not only a corrective function but also a constructive one, helping students improve their performance in subsequent presentations. This finding is consistent with the concept of formative assessment, which aims to enhance the learning process continuously.

When related to previous studies, these findings reinforce research demonstrating that public speaking-based activities can improve speaking confidence, self-confidence, and students' ability to express ideas and opinions in a more structured manner. Continuous public speaking practice has been shown to help learners manage anxiety, increase self-confidence, and develop effective communication skills (Hasyim et al., 2025).

However, most of these studies have been conducted within the context of formal education in general schools. Therefore, studies focusing on strengthening communication competence through *khitobiyah* activities in *pesantren* settings remain limited and require further attention. This study

reveals that, within the pesantren context, particularly through khitobiyah activities, the strengthening of communication competence occurs not only through formal training but also through a culture of habituation that is continuously practiced and embedded in the daily lives of students.

Therefore, this study offers a novel contribution by not only describing khitobiyah as a speech-training activity but also emphasizing that it represents a communication learning system based on experiential learning, habituation, and social interaction within the pesantren environment. This aspect has received limited attention in previous literature, particularly in the context of Pondok Pesantren Miftahul Huda Ngroto Gubug Grobogan. The results obtained from the research have to be supported by sufficient data. The research results and the discovery must be the answers, or the research hypothesis stated previously in the introduction part.

2. Communication Competencies Developed through Khitobiyah Activities among Students at Pondok Pesantren Miftahul Huda Ngroto Gubug Grobogan

The findings of this study indicate that khitobiyah activities make a significant contribution to the development of students' communication competencies at Pondok Pesantren Miftahul Huda Ngroto Gubug Grobogan. The communication competencies developed are not limited to public speaking skills but also encompass verbal, nonverbal, interpersonal, and psychological aspects that are integrated within the students' communication process.

Theoretically, these findings are consistent with the concept of communication competence, which identifies knowledge, skills, and motivation as the primary components that determine the effectiveness of communication in various social contexts. Communication competence develops through learning processes, experiences, social interactions, and continuous practice, enabling individuals to communicate effectively and appropriately according to situational demands (Noh & Kang, 2024). Within the context of khitobiyah activities, these three components develop simultaneously through practice, direct experience, and ongoing evaluation.

In terms of verbal competence, students demonstrated improvements in their ability to organize sermon materials systematically, logically, and coherently. They became increasingly capable of structuring ideas into well-organized speeches consisting of an introduction, body, and conclusion. Furthermore, their language use improved in terms of both diction accuracy and appropriateness for da'wah contexts. These findings indicate that khitobiyah functions as a medium for oral communication learning that enhances structured thinking and rhetorical skills (Noh & Kang, 2024).

Regarding nonverbal competence, students showed development in the use of facial expressions, voice intonation, eye contact, and body gestures. Initially, many students appeared rigid and lacked confidence; however, through repeated practice, their nonverbal communication skills became more natural and communicative. This finding supports DeVito's view that communication effectiveness is

strongly influenced by the complementary interaction between verbal and nonverbal elements (DeVito, 2019)

From a psychological perspective, *khitobiyah* activities contribute to enhancing students' self-confidence, reducing communication apprehension, and increasing their willingness to express ideas publicly. These changes demonstrate that *khitobiyah* not only develops technical communication skills but also strengthens students' psychological readiness for communication (Cong & Li, 2022).

These findings can also be analyzed through DeVito's interpersonal communication theory, which emphasizes that communication competence includes openness, empathy, positiveness, supportiveness, and equality. Through *khitobiyah* activities, students not only learn to speak in public but also learn to accept criticism, provide feedback, and cultivate mutual respect during the evaluation process. (DeVito, 2019) Furthermore, the improvement of students' communication competence can be explained through Bandura's social learning theory, which emphasizes observational learning and self-efficacy. Students learn by observing their peers' performances, then imitating and refining their own communication practices. Repeated speaking experiences enhance both self-confidence and adaptability in public communication settings (Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2020).

In addition, the process of developing communication competence through *khitobiyah* activities is consistent with Skinner's behaviorist theory, which emphasizes that behavior is shaped through stimulus, response, and reinforcement. Regular practice, corrective feedback from *ustadz*, and ongoing evaluations serve as forms of reinforcement that gradually improve students' communication abilities (Slavin, 2020).

When related to previous studies, these findings reinforce research demonstrating that public speaking-based activities can enhance speaking confidence, self-confidence, and students' ability to express ideas and opinions in a more structured manner. Continuous public speaking practice has been shown to help learners manage anxiety, increase self-confidence, and develop effective communication skills (Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2020). However, most of these studies were conducted within formal educational settings, particularly general schools. Consequently, research on strengthening communication competence through *khitobiyah* activities in *pesantren* environments remains relatively limited and warrants further investigation.

In contrast, this study reveals that within the *pesantren* context, the development of communication competence through *khitobiyah* occurs through a combination of experiential learning, habituation, and a collective learning culture that is integrated into students' daily lives (Nata, 2020). Therefore, the novelty of this study lies in its understanding of *khitobiyah* as more than a speech-training activity. Rather, it represents a holistic communication learning system within the *pesantren*

context that integrates cognitive, affective, psychomotor, interpersonal, and motivational dimensions in the development of students' communication competence

3. The Role of Khitobiyah Activities in Strengthening Students' Communication Competence at Pondok Pesantren Miftahul Huda Ngroto Gubug Grobogan

The findings of this study indicate that khitobiyah activities play a highly strategic role in strengthening students' communication competence at Pondok Pesantren Miftahul Huda Ngroto Gubug Grobogan. This role extends beyond public speaking practice and functions as an experiential communication learning system aimed at developing twenty-first-century skills, including self-confidence, critical thinking, and public communication skills (UNESCO, 2021).

Theoretically, this role can be explained through Hargie's communication competence theory, which emphasizes that communication competence results from the integration of knowledge, skills, and motivation in effective interactions (Hargie, 2021). Within the context of khitobiyah activities, the program provides an authentic learning environment that enables students to develop these three dimensions simultaneously through direct experience, reflection, and continuous evaluation. This process is consistent with the experiential learning approach in modern education (Kolb & Kolb, 2015).

From the perspective of DeVito's interpersonal communication theory, khitobiyah also contributes to the development of healthy communication relationships among students. Elements such as openness, empathy, positiveness, supportiveness, and equality are evident in the evaluation process and interactions that take place after each performance. These findings indicate that khitobiyah not only develops speaking abilities but also fosters communication ethics and social competence within the pesantren environment (DeVito, 2019)

Furthermore, from the perspective of Bandura's social learning theory, khitobiyah serves as an important medium for observational learning and the enhancement of self-efficacy. Students learn by observing the performances of their peers, then imitate, modify, and develop their own communication styles. Repeated speaking experiences further strengthen students' confidence in public speaking, which is a crucial indicator of communication competence development (Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2020).

In addition, according to Skinner's behaviorist theory, khitobiyah functions as a mechanism for shaping communication behavior through stimulus, response, and reinforcement. Consistent practice accompanied by feedback from supervising ustadz serves as positive reinforcement that facilitates the gradual and continuous development of students' communication skills (Slavin, 2020).

Empirically, the role of khitobiyah activities can be observed in several key aspects. First, as a practice-based communication learning medium, khitobiyah provides students with authentic opportunities to develop public speaking skills within controlled social situations. Second, as a means of strengthening psychological readiness and self-confidence, the activity helps students overcome

communication apprehension through repeated practice and habituation. Third, as a platform for character development in communication, khitobiyah instills values such as discipline, responsibility, courage, and ethical behavior in delivering religious messages.

When compared with previous studies, these findings reinforce the results of research conducted, which demonstrated that public speaking-based activities positively influence students' communication skills and self-confidence. However, these studies primarily focused on formal educational settings in general schools. In contrast, the present study demonstrates that within the pesantren context, khitobiyah plays a more comprehensive role because it functions not only as a skills-training activity but also as an educational culture system that is deeply internalized in students' daily lives. The strengthening of communication competence occurs not only through formal activities but also through habituation, social interaction, and the internalization of pesantren values that take place continuously (Nata, 2020).

Therefore, the novelty of this study lies in its finding that khitobiyah represents an experiential communication learning model grounded in habituation, behavioral reinforcement, and social interaction within the pesantren environment. This model holistically integrates cognitive, affective, psychomotor, interpersonal, and motivational dimensions in strengthening students' communication competence.

Table 1. Research Findings on the Role of Khitobiyah Activities in Strengthening Students' Communication Competence at Pondok Pesantren Miftahul Huda Ngroto Gubug Grobogan

Research Focus	Research Findings
Implementation of Khitobiyah Activities	Khitobiyah activities were conducted in a structured and systematic manner through stages of preparation, sermon delivery, evaluation, and follow-up. Students participated on a rotational basis, receiving guidance from ustadz and feedback from peers throughout the process.
Communication Competencies Developed	The competencies developed included verbal, nonverbal, interpersonal, and psychological communication competencies, reflected in students' ability to organize and deliver speeches systematically, use effective nonverbal communication, interact constructively with audiences, and demonstrate greater self-confidence in public speaking.

The Role of Khitobiyah Activities in Strengthening Students' Communication Competence	Khitobiyah activities functioned as a medium for public communication learning, character building, soft skills development, and da'wah preparation. Continuous practice and habituation strengthened students' communication competence in a holistic manner.
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4. CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of this study, several conclusions can be drawn, as follows :

First, khitobiyah activities at Pondok Pesantren Miftahul Huda Ngroto Gubug Grobogan are implemented in a structured, scheduled, and continuous manner as part of the students' development program. The activities consist of material preparation, sermon delivery, and evaluation conducted by supervisors and fellow students. These activities serve not only as a medium for public speaking practice but also as an experiential learning process that enables students to learn through direct practice, reflection, and continuous improvement.

Second, the communication competencies developed through khitobiyah activities encompass verbal, nonverbal, interpersonal, and psychological dimensions. In terms of verbal competence, students demonstrated improvements in organizing and delivering messages in a systematic, logical, and communicative manner. Regarding nonverbal competence, students showed development in the use of voice intonation, facial expressions, eye contact, and gestures that enhanced the effectiveness of message delivery. Furthermore, khitobiyah activities contributed to increased self-confidence, greater willingness to speak in public, improved ability to accept feedback and suggestions, and stronger interpersonal interaction skills.

Third, khitobiyah activities make a significant contribution to strengthening students' communication competence. Through continuous habituation, practical experience, social interaction, and ongoing evaluation, khitobiyah functions as a medium for public communication learning, character development, and soft skills enhancement. The findings indicate that khitobiyah serves not merely as speech or sermon practice but as a communication learning model rooted in pesantren culture that holistically integrates knowledge, skills, motivation, and communicative attitudes. Therefore, khitobiyah plays a strategic role in preparing students to become communicative, self-confident individuals who are ready to undertake da'wah responsibilities and actively participate in community life.

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