



Improving Students' Public Speaking Skills Through Religious Literacy Classes at Darussa'adah 3 in Jepara

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Abstract

This study is motivated by the addresses the scarcity of research examining the role of literacy classes in strengthening santri's public speaking skills in Islamic boarding schools, despite the importance of these skills for santri as future preachers and agents of social change. This study aims to describe the implementation of religious literacy classes and analyze their role in enhancing santri's public speaking skills at Pondok Pesantren Darussa'adah 3 Bugel, Jepara. The study employed a qualitative, field-based design. The participants, selected through purposive sampling, included the pesantren leader, the literacy class teacher, and student supervisors of khitobah activities, and santri involved in the literacy program, selected through purposive sampling. Data were collected through interviews, observations, and documentation, and analyzed using thematic analysis. The results indicate that religious literacy classes play a strategic role in improving santri's confidence, courage, and readiness for communication through the integration of literacy activities and khitobah practice. This study concludes that religious literacy classes can serve as an effective model for developing public speaking skills in Islamic boarding schools. These findings suggest that literacy-based learning can be adopted as a practical strategy to enhance students' communication competence in similar educational contexts.

Keywords: Islamic boarding school, religious literacy class, santri, public speaking

Abstrak

Penelitian ini dilatarbelakangi oleh masih terbatasnya kajian yang secara khusus membahas peran kelas literasi dalam penguatan kemampuan public speaking santri di pesantren, padahal keterampilan ini penting bagi santri sebagai calon dai dan agen perubahan sosial. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mendeskripsikan pelaksanaan kelas literasi keagamaan serta menganalisis perannya dalam memperkuat kemampuan public speaking santri di Pondok Pesantren Darussa'adah 3 Bugel, Jepara. Penelitian menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan desain studi lapangan. Subjek penelitian meliputi pengasuh pesantren, guru kelas literasi, dan beberapa santri yang juga membina kegiatan khitobah, serta santri yang mengikuti kelas literasi, dengan teknik purposive sampling. Data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara, observasi, dan dokumentasi, kemudian dianalisis menggunakan analisis tematik. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa kelas literasi keagamaan berperan strategis dalam meningkatkan keberanian, kepercayaan diri, dan kesiapan komunikasi santri melalui integrasi literasi dan praktik khitobah. Penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa kelas literasi keagamaan berpotensi menjadi model pembinaan public speaking santri di pesantren. Implikasi penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa pembelajaran berbasis literasi dapat diterapkan sebagai strategi praktis dalam meningkatkan kompetensi komunikasi peserta didik di berbagai konteks pendidikan.

Kata kunci: kelas literasi keagamaan, pesantren, public speaking, santri



A. INTRODUCTION

Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*) are Islamic educational institutions that play a vital role in fostering students' academic knowledge, character, and skills. As institutions that have evolved within society, these schools not only focus on the mastery of religious knowledge but also prepare students to interact in broader social contexts. In the context of contemporary education, Islamic boarding schools face the challenge of preparing students who are not only well-versed in religious doctrines but also possess communication skills necessary for *da'wah* foundation (spreading the message of Islam). In their evolution, these schools continue to adapt to evolving societal demands by integrating innovative educational models as a strategy to address the Society 5.0 era (Aliyah & Saefudin, 2025), thereby fostering the development of skills relevant to the needs of modern society.

Public speaking is an increasingly critical skill for supporting students' roles in society. This proficiency is a vital asset for students in conveying Islamic values, leading religious activities, and participating in academic and social forums. However, in practice, not all students possess the necessary confidence and communicative competence. A lack of practice, limited opportunities for expression, and predominantly teacher-centered learning approaches often pose obstacles to the development of students' public speaking skills in Islamic boarding schools. This underscores how heavily structured practice within the learning environment influence students' actual speaking outcomes (Sukadi et al., 2025).

The development of public speaking skills in the *pesantren* environment can be achieved through an integrated and sustainable literacy approach. Literacy. In the modern sense, literacy extends beyond basic reading and writing to encompass information processing, conceptual synthesis, and articulate, argumentative oral expression (Tantangan & Amalia, 2024). From a contemporary educational perspective, literacy is understood as part of lifelong learning that serves as a means of empowerment to support active participation and strengthen oral communication skills (Benavot & Odora, 2022). Thus, literacy serves as a crucial foundation for the development of robust public speaking skills.

Empirical evidence demonstrates that literacy programs structured as formal classes, group discussions, and presentation exercises significantly enhance students' confidence in public speaking and communicative competence. (Fatoni, 2024) notes that literacy practices based on dialogue and presentations provide students with opportunities to express their opinions, construct arguments, and convey ideas systematically. Research on literacy in educational settings indicates that participatory literacy activities contribute to improving students' communication skills and interest in learning. Engagement in reading, discussing, and conveying ideas fosters the courage to speak, making literacy as a foundational pillar for strengthening public speaking (Anita et al., 2024). Collectively, these insights demonstrate that literacy not only contributes to cognitive aspects but also plays a pivotal role in the development of social skills and public speaking.

Within the specific context of Islamic boarding schools, research highlights that public speaking proficiency is predominantly cultivated through structured practice activities, such as the *mumarasah* (speech practice) program. This activity serves as a space for oral communication practice, providing students with opportunities to express their ideas, build confidence, and develop independence when speaking in front of an audience (Saini et al., 2024). Additionally, systematic public speaking training has been shown to help students reduce nervousness and boost self-confidence (Zarkasyi et al., 2018). Hence, the literature underscores that students' rhetorical skills evolve through a continuous, iterative process of communicative practice.

While scholarly attention has been directed toward literacy and the development of public speaking skills within pesantren settings, the majority of studies remain confined to conventional reading and writing competencies or general character development. Research specifically examining the integration of literacy classes as a systematic strategy for enhancing students' public speaking skills remains scarce. To address this gap, this study introduces a novel approach by conducting an integrative analysis of religious literacy classes and public speaking practices (specifically *khitobah*) thereby establishing an experiential learning model for rhetorical training within the pesantren environment.

Darussa'adah 3 Bugel Islamic Boarding School in Jepara serves as an ideal case study, having integrated structured literacy classes as part of its student development program. The literacy classes at this boarding school are designed as active learning spaces that encourage students to read, comprehend, discuss, and present ideas orally. Through these activities, the program aims to incrementally and sustainably bolster the students' public speaking skills.

Beyond academic enhancement, these literacy classes function as a practical mechanism for cultivating students' self-confidence, psychological readiness, and collaborative communication competencies. Students are encouraged to speak in front of their peers, express their opinions, and respond constructively to others' viewpoints.

Premised on this background, this study aims to investigate the implementation of religious literacy classes and analyze their role in improving the public speaking skills of students at Pondok Pesantren Darussa'adah 3 Bugel, Jepara.

B. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative approach utilizing a case study design. This methodology was selected to gain an in-depth understanding of the implementation of religious literacy classes and their role in strengthening the public speaking skills of students in the Islamic boarding school setting. Qualitative research allows researchers to comprehensively explore the meanings, processes, and experiences of research subjects within their natural context (Isik, 2025). This study was conducted from December 2025 to January 2026.

A single-case study design was adopted, focusing on a single research site: Darussa'adah 3 Bugel Islamic Boarding School in Jepara. This research intensively examines a single educational program—the religious literacy class—which possesses unique characteristics and practices for enhancing students' public speaking skills (Yin, 2023).

In alignment with the qualitative paradigms, the researcher served as the primary instrument, executing the research design, data collection, thematic analysis, and interpretative drawing of conclusions. To support data collection, auxiliary instruments

were used, including a semi-structured interview guide, an observation sheet, and documentation. The interview guide was operationalized to elicit information regarding the objectives, implementation, and impact of the religious literacy class on the students' public speaking skills.

Data collection was triangulated through in-depth interviews, direct observation, and document analysis. Interviews were conducted with the boarding school supervisor, classroom teachers, and several students as research informants. The supervisor oversees literacy programs and also leads khutbah activities, while the students participate in literacy classes. Informants were selected via purposive sampling based on their direct involvement in the program. Comprising of 1 boarding school caretaker, 1 classroom teacher, and 10 students, The selection of research subjects was based on the principle of data saturation, which occurs when the data obtained has shown recurring patterns and no new significant information is found.

Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña dalam (Schoch, 2020) explain that the data obtained was then analyzed using interactive qualitative data analysis techniques, which include the stages of data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions/verification. Interview data were transcribed, categorized based on research themes, and then analyzed to identify patterns and relationships among concepts. This systematic process grouped qualitative data into core thematic categories emerging from the field.

To construct a comprehensive narrative, interview and observation data were cross-examined across sources (caregivers, teachers, and students) to gain a comprehensive understanding. The performance of the literacy class in enhancing students' public speaking skills was assessed based on indicators such as confidence in speaking, clarity in conveying ideas, self-confidence, and student engagement in public speaking activities. These indicators were observed through the students' behavior during the activities, such as their courage to appear before an audience, fluency in conveying ideas, use of clear and structured language, and active participation in discussions and *khutbah* activities.

To ensure data trustworthiness, validity was tested through source and technique triangulation, namely by comparing the results of interviews, observations, and documentation. Moleong describes that data credibility is strengthened through member

checking with key informants, while reliability and validity in this qualitative study refer to the consistency of findings remained and the accuracy of data interpretation in accordance with the research context (Husna et al., 2024).

C. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Results

The empirical findings of this study were obtained through interviews with the boarding school's caretaker, the literacy teacher who also oversees public speaking activities, and several students enrolled in the literacy class, and were supplemented by observation and documentation. The findings indicate that the literacy class serves as a means of developing students' oral communication skills, specifically targeting psychological resilience, structural discipline, and readiness to speak in public.

The literacy classes are conducted in a structured manner through textual reading activities, peer discussions, idea development, and practice speaking in front of peers. Teachers act as facilitators who guides students in managing nervousness, structuring their speech flow, and improving the clarity of their delivery. Crucially the literacy classes are systematically integrated with *khitobah* activities as an advanced stage in public speaking practice. "The literacy class serves as initial practice before students participate in *khitobah* activities, so they are better prepared when they have to speak in front of an audience," (Class Teacher, 2026).

Triangulated based on observations and interviews data indicated that, students who participated in the literacy class demonstrated heightened courage, self-confidence, and readiness in public speaking. Students have become more willing to participate in *khitobah* events as well as other activities that require speaking skills. "After taking the literacy class, I've become more willing to step forward and speak in front of my friends, even though I was still nervous at first," (Student, 2026).

Overall, the literacy classes transcend mere technical speaking improvements by fostering holistic mental readiness and communicative self-efficacy, thereby supporting their participation in religious and social activities within the pesantren. As the program supervisor articulated "These literacy classes are not just about reading, but also train students to understand a text and effectively convey an idea in front of their peers;

essentially, they also train students mentally so they are ready to speak in public," (Supervisor, 2026).

Discussion

The findings of this study indicate that religious literacy classes serve not only as academic activities but also as spaces for communication practice that gradually build students' courage and confidence in public speaking. Unlike one-way instruction, literacy classes provide a space for interaction that allows students to actively engage in the learning process through reading, discussion, and the expression of ideas. This process demonstrates that public speaking skills do not develop instantly but through repeated practice in a supportive environment. This aligns with the view that literacy encompasses not only the ability to read and write but also the ability to communicate ideas orally (Tantangan & Amalia, 2024).

While prior research has predominantly emphasized isolated speaking exercises as the primary catalyst for rhetorical improvement (Fatoni, 2024; Takac et al., 2019), the findings of this study indicate that the learning environment plays an equally important role. A non-pressured literacy classroom environment allows students to experiment, make mistakes, and gradually refine their speaking skills. Active engagement in reading, discussing, and presenting ideas also encourages students to organize their thoughts systematically before presenting them (Anita et al., 2024; Luthfi et al., 2023). This reinforces the finding that a reduction in communication apprehension is influenced not only by the frequency of practice but also by a sense of safety in the learning process (Muhammad et al., 2025; Sc, 2007). This is evident from a student's statement: "After joining the literacy class, I became braver to step forward and speak in front of my peers, even though I still felt nervous at first" (Literacy class participant, 2026).

Other findings indicate that literacy classes are closely linked to *khitobah* activities as a space for the development of speaking skills. Unlike previous studies, which tended to separate speaking practice from religious practice, this study found that the two are integrated into a single learning process. Literacy classes serve as a preparatory stage, while *khitobah* serves as the application stage. This pattern indicates a step-by-step learning process that aligns with the concept of experiential learning (Naqiyah, 2022) and scaffolding in the development of communication skills (Nurhayati et al., 2017). *Khitobah*

activities are not only a means of public speaking practice but also require rhetorical skills to effectively convey religious messages to the audience (Muliawan et al., 2025). Other studies also indicate that public speaking training integrated with religious practice can enhance students' performance readiness and communication effectiveness (Amaliyah & Saleh, 2022; Arif et al., 2025; Iyah & Gresik, 2025).

The *khitobah* activity itself serves as a strategic tool for developing students' religious communication skills, as it trains them to convey religious messages in a structured and responsible manner (Yusri, 2022). However, the findings of this study also reveal certain pedagogical challenges. Although the students' confidence has increased, not all of them are able to convey their ideas with linguistic precision and optimal clarity. Some students still face challenges in technical aspects, such as pronunciation and delivery structure. This indicates that public speaking training is not sufficient through practice alone but also requires more targeted technical guidance (Reza Fachrial Suhardi 1, 2024). This structural gap is corroborated by the classroom teacher, who noted that "this literacy class serves as an initial practice before students deliver a *khitobah*, so they are already prepared when they have to speak before a larger audience" (Teacher, 2026).

In addition to developing skills, literacy classes also contribute to the character development of the students. The process of discussion and the exchange of ideas encourages students to learn to respect others' opinions, take responsibility for speaking tasks, and maintain communication ethics. This indicates that the development of public speaking skills within the pesantren environment cannot be separated from Islamic values, which form the foundation of education (Abrori & Setiawan, 2023; Rachman, 2022). These findings are also consistent with research showing that a culture of literacy plays a role in shaping students' character and communication ethics (Luh et al., 2021; Maharani, 2020; Ramli & Sumiati, 2025). Furthermore, the teacher's role as a facilitator who guides the learning process through dialogue is a key factor in the success of learning (Nashihin, 2021). This is reinforced by the instructor's statement that "this literacy class not only trains students to speak but also shapes their mindset and sense of responsibility in conveying religious messages" (Instructor, 2026).

In a broader sociological context, santri's communication skills are also influenced by their understanding of the audience and the social context of da'wah; therefore, the

development of public speaking skills must be accompanied by social adaptability (Andrian, 2020). Departing from conventional studies that position literacy as the strengthening of reading and writing skills, the findings of this study indicate that religious literacy functions as a means of fostering oral communication that is integrated with da'wah practices. This integration points to the development of a pesantren learning model that is more contextual and adaptive to the evolving needs of modern students (Benavot & Odora, 2022; Imamuddin, 2025).

The uniqueness of this study lies in the integration of religious literacy classes and *khitobah* activities into a step-by-step learning system that focuses not only on speaking skills but also on the mental development, self-confidence, and communication readiness of students in the context of da'wah. Furthermore, this study also demonstrates that success in public speaking is not solely determined by the frequency of practice but by the presence of a supportive learning environment and the continuity between practice phases and real-world application.

The findings of this study also reinforce the notion that public speaking skills are not merely technical in nature but involve the integrated development of cognitive, affective, and social aspects (Pratama et al., 2024; Shiddiq et al., 2024). Furthermore, structured and sustained communication practice has been shown to be a key factor in improving students' speaking skills (Rohmah et al., 2025). Thus, the effectiveness of learning is determined not only by the method but also by the continuity of practice and a supportive learning context.

Theoretically, this study expands the conceptualization of literacy as a multidimensional approach that encompasses cognitive, affective, and psychomotor aspects. Practically, a literacy classroom model integrated with *khitobah* activities can serve as a strategy for developing students' public speaking skills in Islamic boarding schools. This model aligns with contemporary Islamic educational developments that emphasize strengthening communication competencies without compromising religious values (Arista, 2025; Osman et al., 2020; Rahmania & Khoiriyah, 2020).

D. CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that religious literacy classes systematically strengthen the public speaking skills of students at the Darussa'adah 3 Bugel Islamic Boarding School in Jepara through participatory and continuous learning. These literacy classes serve as a space for developing communication skills, encouraging students to become more courageous, confident, and prepared when conveying ideas verbally.

The enhancement of public speaking skills is influenced not only by the intensity of practice but also by a supportive learning environment and the continuity between literacy classes as a preparatory stage and *khitobah* activities as a stage of actualization. The integration of these two activities forms a step-by-step learning process that supports students' communication readiness in the context of *da'wah*.

The theoretical and practical distinctiveness of this study lies in the integration of religious literacy classes with *khitobah* practice as a single communication development system that not only develops speaking skills but also shapes the students' mental aspects, self-confidence, and communication ethics.

However, this heightened communicative confidence is not yet fully aligned with optimal delivery quality, underscoring a critical need for targeted pedagogical intervention in technical dimensions, such as elocution, pronunciation, and narrative structuring.

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