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FROM KNOWING TO SPEAKING: DEVELOPING ARABIC COMMUNICATIVE BEHAVIOR THROUGH BI'AH LUGHAWIYAH FROM A SKINNERIAN BEHAVIORIST PERSPECTIVE

FROM KNOWING TO SPEAKING: PEMBENTUKAN PERILAKU KOMUNIKASI BAHASA ARAB MELALUI BI'AH LUGHAWIYAH DALAM PERSPEKTIF BEHAVIORISME SKINNER

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Abstract

Arabic language proficiency does not necessarily translate into a willingness to speak or actual communicative practice, suggesting that success in teaching maharah al-kalam (Arabic speaking skills) cannot be adequately explained by linguistic competence or the implementation of bi'ah lughawiyah (an Arabic-speaking environment) programs alone. This discrepancy calls for a distinction between linguistic knowledge, willingness to communicate, actual verbal behavior, and the mechanisms supporting its sustained occurrence. This study aims to examine the knowing–speaking gap, interpret the contribution of bi'ah lughawiyah through Skinnerian operant conditioning, and critically assess the explanatory and evidentiary limits of communicative behavior formation. Employing a qualitative, critical-conceptual literature review, the study synthesizes theories of verbal behavior and research findings on Arabic language learning, language environments, and willingness to communicate (WTC). The synthesis indicates that linguistic competence, WTC, and actual communicative behavior are distinct constructs that do not necessarily follow an automatic causal sequence. Bi'ah lughawiyah may support communication by structuring interactional conditions and social consequences; however, program implementation, repeated practice, or rewards do not, in themselves, establish operant reinforcement. The study contributes a contingency-sensitive interpretive orientation that distinguishes program implementation, observable verbal responses, and evidence of their functional relationships. This orientation also identifies maintenance and generalization as essential dimensions for evaluating the sustainability of communicative behavior. Accordingly, the success of bi'ah lughawiyah should be interpreted in light of evidence of actual, functional, and sustained language use rather than the intensity of habituation alone. This interpretive orientation requires further empirical examination.

Keywords : Bi'ah Lughawiyah, Skinnerian Behaviorism, Maharah Al-Kalam, Arabic Communicative Behavior, Willingness to Communicate.

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Abstrak

Kemahiran berbahasa Arab tidak selalu terwujud dalam kesiapan untuk berbicara maupun praktik komunikasi aktual. Hal ini menunjukkan bahwa keberhasilan pembelajaran *maharah al-kalam* (keterampilan berbicara bahasa Arab) tidak dapat dijelaskan secara memadai hanya berdasarkan kompetensi linguistik atau pelaksanaan program *bi'ah lughawiyah* (lingkungan berbahasa Arab). Kesenjangan tersebut menuntut pembedaan antara pengetahuan linguistik, kesiapan berkomunikasi, perilaku verbal aktual, dan mekanisme yang mendukung keberlangsungannya. Penelitian ini bertujuan mengkaji kesenjangan antara penguasaan bahasa dan praktik berbicara (*knowing–speaking gap*), menafsirkan kontribusi *bi'ah lughawiyah* melalui perspektif pengondisian operan Skinner, serta menelaah secara kritis batas penjelasan teoretis dan bukti empiris dalam pembentukan perilaku komunikasi. Penelitian menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif melalui kajian literatur konseptual-kritis dengan menyintesiskan teori perilaku verbal dan temuan penelitian mengenai pembelajaran bahasa Arab, lingkungan kebahasaan, serta kesiapan berkomunikasi (*willingness to communicate*/WTC). Hasil sintesis menunjukkan bahwa kompetensi linguistik, WTC, dan perilaku komunikasi aktual merupakan konstruk yang berbeda dan tidak selalu membentuk hubungan sebab-akibat yang berlangsung secara otomatis. *Bi'ah lughawiyah* berpotensi mendukung komunikasi melalui penataan kondisi interaksi dan konsekuensi sosial. Namun, pelaksanaan program, pengulangan praktik, maupun pemberian penghargaan tidak dengan sendirinya membuktikan terjadinya penguatan operan. Penelitian ini memberikan kontribusi berupa orientasi interpretatif yang peka terhadap kontingensi (*contingency-sensitive interpretive orientation*), dengan membedakan pelaksanaan program, respons verbal yang dapat diamati, dan bukti hubungan fungsional di antara keduanya. Orientasi ini juga menempatkan pemeliharaan (*maintenance*) dan generalisasi (*generalization*) sebagai dimensi penting dalam mengevaluasi keberlanjutan perilaku komunikasi. Dengan demikian, keberhasilan *bi'ah lughawiyah* perlu ditafsirkan berdasarkan bukti penggunaan bahasa yang aktual, memiliki hubungan fungsional yang dapat ditunjukkan, dan berkelanjutan, bukan semata-mata berdasarkan intensitas pembiasaan. Orientasi interpretatif ini masih memerlukan pengujian empiris lebih lanjut.

Kata Kunci : *Bi'ah Lughawiyah*, Behaviorisme Skinner, *Maharah Al-Kalam*, Perilaku Komunikasi Bahasa Arab, Kesiapan Berkomunikasi.

1. INTRODUCTION

Arabic language education in Islamic educational institutions, particularly Islamic boarding schools (*pesantren*), faces challenges that extend beyond vocabulary acquisition, grammatical knowledge, and the ability to produce utterances in instructional settings. Linguistic achievement demonstrated by learners in structured situations does not necessarily reflect their use of Arabic in everyday communication. This issue calls for a distinction between linguistic competence as a resource for language use, *willingness to communicate* (WTC) as readiness to engage in communication, and actual speaking behavior as communicative action occurring in social interaction. (Kholis et al., 2023) demonstrate that Arabic learners' WTC varies across communicative contexts, while (Kirkpatrick et al., 2024) emphasize the need for conceptual and methodological precision in interpreting the WTC construct. Together, these studies underscore the importance of caution when linguistic achievement or willingness to communicate is used to infer communicative practices that actually occur. In residential educational settings, this distinction is particularly relevant because interactions in classrooms, dormitories, and everyday social encounters take place under differing

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social conditions, communicative demands, and patterns of supervision. Accordingly, the *knowing–speaking gap* should be understood as a challenge of translating linguistic competence into observable communicative behavior rather than merely as a deficiency in language knowledge or learner motivation.

The establishment of *bi'ah lughawiyah* (an Arabic-speaking environment) is one pedagogical approach used to expand opportunities for Arabic language use through structured activities and everyday interactions. (Rahmi et al., 2024) document learners' experiences of how formal and informal language environments contribute to the development of speaking skills in modern Islamic boarding schools. Their study provides a basis for understanding the importance of language environments; however, evaluating their contribution requires distinguishing between the existence of programs, learners' experiences, and demonstrable changes in communicative behavior. Regular conversation activities, language-use regulations, and designated spaces for interaction indicate efforts to organize the learning environment, but their implementation does not automatically establish that learners increasingly use Arabic independently. Similarly, the ability to produce utterances during teacher-directed activities is insufficient to establish whether comparable responses will persist when supervision decreases or communicative situations change. The effectiveness of *bi'ah lughawiyah* must therefore be examined in relation to the conditions that enable communication, the verbal behavior that emerges, and evidence of its sustained use. This distinction is essential to ensure that the success of a language environment is interpreted not merely in terms of program intensity but also in terms of the correspondence between claimed outcomes and the nature of the supporting evidence.

B. F. Skinner's behaviorism offers an analytical perspective for examining how environmental conditions relate to the development and repetition of communicative behavior. Through the principles of operant conditioning, behavior is understood in relation to antecedent conditions, emitted responses, and consequences that influence the likelihood of subsequent responses (Skinner, 1953). In *Verbal Behavior*, (Skinner, 1957) develops a functional analysis of verbal behavior that places the relationships among speakers, listeners, and the verbal community at the center of the conditions surrounding communication. This perspective allows *bi'ah lughawiyah* to be examined not merely as a setting for habituation but as a socio-pedagogical environment that provides opportunities to speak, generates responses to utterances, and may support the recurrence of verbal behavior. The relevance of this approach has been demonstrated in studies by (Sukadi et al., 2025) on the development of speaking skills through a language environment informed by Skinner's theory, (Khofifah et al., 2025) on the application of behaviorism in the language environment of Islamic boarding schools, and (Indayati et al., 2025) on the integration of operant conditioning into Arabic oral language instruction. These studies establish that applying behaviorist principles to Arabic language education is not a new area of inquiry. Nevertheless, interpreting habituation practices requires theoretical precision: repeated practice does not necessarily constitute *shaping*, just as praise, rewards, corrections, or sanctions cannot automatically be classified as *reinforcement* or *punishment* without considering how the consequences affect the likelihood of subsequent responses (Skinner, 1953). Descriptions of language-learning activities and their apparent alignment with behaviorist principles must therefore be distinguished from evidence of the functional relationships underlying changes in communicative behavior.

The explanatory adequacy of Skinner's perspective also warrants examination when successful speaking instruction encompasses not only the occurrence of responses during structured activities but also the capacity to use language flexibly and sustainably. The analysis of verbal behavior provides a framework for understanding the relationships between utterances, environmental conditions, and social consequences, whereas (Chomsky, 1959) questioned the adequacy of behaviorist explanations of the productivity and complexity of human language. This debate highlights theoretical differences relevant to language education, but it does not justify concluding that behaviorism inherently disregards all internal processes or is incapable of addressing behavioral changes across situations. The more fundamental issue is to determine which aspects of communication can be explained through

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operant analysis, which require complementary perspectives, and what forms of evidence are needed to assess the adequacy of these explanations. In this context, WTC research helps clarify the dimension of communicative readiness, which is not equivalent to the frequency or persistence of actual verbal behavior (Kholis et al., 2023; Kirkpatrick et al., 2024). Meanwhile, the concepts of maintenance and generalization allow the outcomes of habituation to be examined beyond the occurrence of responses in a single situation: maintenance concerns the persistence of behavior over time, whereas generalization concerns the occurrence of behavior under different conditions. Both can be analyzed within an operant framework, but each requires specific evidence that cannot be replaced by reports of program implementation or short-term success in practice activities. Evaluating Skinner's perspective therefore requires distinguishing the limits of its theoretical explanatory scope from the limitations of the empirical evidence available in studies applying the theory.

Against this background, the issue requiring further examination is not whether *bi'ah lughawiyah* can be associated with Skinnerian behaviorism, but how the relationships among language proficiency, environmental organization, the development of verbal responses, and sustained communication can be explained without conflating distinct constructs or exceeding the available evidence. (Indayati et al., 2025; Khofifah et al., 2025; Sukadi et al., 2025) have examined the contributions of language environments and the application of behaviorist principles, while (Rahmi et al., 2024) have highlighted the relevance of learners' experiences of language use in formal and informal contexts. WTC research, meanwhile, addresses communicative readiness alongside conceptual and measurement-related concerns (Khofifah et al., 2025; Kholis et al., 2023). Although these bodies of literature provide complementary foundations, further analytical refinement is needed to explicitly distinguish the implementation of habituation practices, evidence of reinforcement contingencies, actual communicative behavior, and the maintenance and generalization of verbal responses. This need defines the research gap addressed in the present study: not an absence of research on language environments or Skinner's theory, but the need for an interpretive framework that clarifies the relationships among these concepts and the limits of conclusions concerning communicative success. Consistent with (Jaakkola, 2020) principles for developing conceptual articles, this study seeks to contribute through theoretical synthesis that clarifies the explanatory roles, interrelationships, and inferential limits of the concepts employed. Its intended contribution therefore lies in a critical interpretation of the process *from knowing to speaking*, positioning linguistic competence, communicative readiness, actual verbal behavior, and sustained communication as related dimensions that nevertheless require distinct explanatory grounds and assessment indicators.

Building on these considerations, this study aims to analyze the conceptual relationship between Arabic language proficiency and the actualization of communicative behavior, examine the role of *bi'ah lughawiyah* through the relationships among antecedent conditions, verbal responses, and social consequences within Skinnerian behaviorism, and evaluate the explanatory adequacy and limitations of this perspective in accounting for sustained language use. Specifically, the analysis addresses how linguistic competence, WTC, and actual speaking behavior are distinguished in the literature; how *bi'ah lughawiyah* practices can be interpreted through operant conditioning without equating the implementation of activities with evidence of reinforcement; and how the maintenance and generalization of communicative behavior can inform a more rigorous evaluation of success in teaching *maharah al-kalam*. The study adopts a critical-conceptual literature review approach, using Skinnerian behaviorism as its primary analytical framework and WTC research as a complementary perspective. Through critical comparison and synthesis of theoretical works and previous studies, it seeks to develop an interpretive basis for understanding the formation of Arabic communicative behavior with greater attention to underlying mechanisms and supporting evidence. As the study does not involve field data collection, it does not seek to establish the effectiveness of any particular program or demonstrate causal relationships. Instead, it aims to formulate conceptual propositions that can be critically examined and empirically tested in subsequent research.

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2. RESEARCH METHOD

This study adopts a qualitative approach through a conceptual-critical literature study oriented toward theory synthesis. This approach was selected to examine the *knowing–speaking gap* as a problem concerning the relationships among concepts and the adequacy of theoretical explanations, rather than as a direct assessment of the effectiveness of instructional programs. In conceptual research, scholarly contributions are developed by identifying theoretical problems, specifying the explanatory roles of individual concepts, and constructing arguments that clarify their interrelationships and explanatory boundaries (Jaakkola, 2020). Accordingly, B. F. Skinner's theories of operant conditioning and verbal behavior serve as the primary analytical framework for examining the relationships among environmental conditions, communicative responses, and social consequences (Skinner, 1953, 1957). Research on *willingness to communicate* (WTC) is employed as a complementary perspective to distinguish communicative readiness from linguistic competence and actual speaking behavior. This theory-synthesis orientation enables the study to move beyond descriptive summaries toward a critical examination of the compatibility, differences, and explanatory limitations of the perspectives considered, consistent with the principles of integrative literature reviews and conceptual article development (Jaakkola, 2020; Torraco, 2016).

The materials examined comprise academic literature, including foundational theoretical works, empirical research articles, conceptual studies, and review articles relevant to Arabic language education, *bi'ah lughawiyah*, *maharah al-kalam*, operant conditioning, verbal behavior, and WTC. The literature search focused on the relationships among these concepts, using search terms such as *Arabic speaking skills*, *Arabic language environment*, *bi'ah lughawiyah*, *operant conditioning*, *verbal behavior*, *willingness to communicate*, *behavior maintenance*, and *generalization*, together with relevant equivalent terms. Publications from 2020 to 2026 were prioritized to reflect contemporary developments, while foundational works were included where necessary to preserve conceptual accuracy and trace key theoretical arguments. Literature was selected based on its substantive relevance to the research questions, the clarity of its context and methodological approach, the traceability of publication details, and the relevance of its findings or arguments to the synthesis. Particular attention was given to studies directly examining Arabic language environments from the perspective of Skinnerian behaviorism, as these sources were essential for identifying the position and distinctive contribution of the present study. In accordance with the purpose-driven approach to literature reviews discussed by (Snyder, 2019), source selection was not determined solely by a predetermined publication count. This study is neither a systematic literature review nor a meta-analysis and therefore makes no claim to exhaustive literature coverage or statistical estimates of effectiveness derived from pooled findings.

The analysis was conducted through critical reading, comparative examination of arguments, and thematic-conceptual synthesis organized around three research foci. The first examined the distinctions among linguistic competence, WTC, and actual communicative behavior, including the limitations of using each construct as an indicator of successful speaking instruction. The second interpreted *bi'ah lughawiyah* through antecedent–behavior–consequence relationships, distinguishing conditions that enable verbal responses, the communicative behaviors exhibited, and consequences that may functionally influence the likelihood of subsequent responses. The third evaluated the explanatory adequacy and limitations of Skinner's perspective in accounting for communicative flexibility, the maintenance of language behavior, and its generalization across contexts. Within each focus, concepts and arguments from relevant sources were compared to identify areas of convergence, differences in theoretical orientation, conceptual tensions, and issues that remained insufficiently explained. The comparisons were then integrated into a synthesis that distinguished the explanatory roles of the respective perspectives without assuming that competence, readiness, and communicative behavior constitute linear stages or empirically established causal relationships. Thus, the synthesis was designed to address the research questions through explicit conceptual reasoning rather than merely grouping findings by thematic similarity (Jaakkola, 2020; Torraco, 2016).

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Analytical rigor was maintained by distinguishing among empirical findings reported in the literature, the theoretical interpretations advanced by the original authors, and the conceptual inferences developed in the present study. Claims concerning the contribution or effectiveness of *bi'ah lughawiyah* were examined in relation to the types of evidence supporting them, ensuring that program implementation, learners' perceptions, speaking proficiency outcomes, and changes in communicative behavior were not treated as interchangeable indicators. In applying Skinnerian concepts, the presence of rewards, corrective feedback, or pedagogical consequences was not automatically regarded as evidence of reinforcement or punishment without sufficient information about their functional effects on subsequent behavior. Similarly, the occurrence of verbal responses during structured activities was distinguished from evidence of behavioral maintenance over time and generalization to different communicative situations. The traceability of the analysis was supported by linking each synthesized conclusion to its underlying sources and types of evidence, while explicitly acknowledging interpretive limitations where the available information was insufficient to justify stronger conclusions. These principles of transparency and interpretive consistency are consistent with (Snyder, 2019) emphasis on procedural clarity in literature reviews and the principles of analytical traceability discussed by (Nowell et al., 2017), without implying that the procedures employed here are equivalent to thematic analysis of primary field data. As the study did not involve primary empirical data collection, its conclusions are limited to conceptual synthesis and critical evaluation of the literature rather than the demonstration of causal relationships, direct measurement of the effectiveness of *bi'ah lughawiyah*, or empirical validation of a model of communicative behavior development.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The Gap Between Linguistic Competence, Willingness to Communicate, and Actual Communicative Behavior

A critical synthesis of the literature indicates that the *knowing–speaking gap* in Arabic language learning requires a clear distinction among linguistic competence, willingness to communicate (WTC), and actual communicative behavior. Although these constructs are interrelated, they differ in their explanatory focus and the evidence required to assess them. Linguistic competence refers to the knowledge and language abilities that enable learners to understand and produce utterances, whereas WTC concerns an individual's readiness to engage in communication in a particular situation. Actual communicative behavior, by contrast, refers to language use that takes place in social interaction. This distinction is important because the ability to produce utterances during instructional activities does not necessarily indicate language use in everyday life, just as communicative readiness cannot be treated as direct evidence of speaking behavior. Studies by (Kholis et al., 2023) and (Kirkpatrick et al., 2024) provide a basis for recognizing the importance of communicative context and conceptual precision in WTC research. Based on this comparative analysis, the gap between language proficiency and communicative practice cannot be adequately reduced to insufficient knowledge or motivation. Instead, it must be examined through the relationships among linguistic ability, communicative readiness, opportunities for interaction, and the verbal responses that learners actually produce.

(Kholis et al., 2023), in a study involving 213 students enrolled in Arabic language education and Arabic literature programs, identified variations in WTC across three communicative contexts: inside the classroom, outside the classroom, and in digital environments. Their findings indicated that Arabic literature students reported higher WTC than Arabic language education students across all three contexts, with the highest levels of readiness observed in classroom interactions. These variations were associated with environmental conditions, perceived language competence, anxiety, and self-confidence. The findings suggest that readiness to use Arabic cannot be separated from the characteristics of communicative situations and individual learner conditions. Meanwhile, (Maryani et al., 2024), in a quantitative study involving 33 Arabic language learners, examined WTC as an important construct in understanding second-language learning achievement. Together, these studies support the relevance of psychological and contextual dimensions in Arabic communicative learning.

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However, information about WTC levels or their associations with learning outcomes does not, in itself, provide evidence of the frequency, independence, or sustained use of Arabic in everyday interactions. Conclusions about actual communicative behavior require data that specifically capture speaking actions rather than learners' readiness or perceived language abilities alone.

The importance of conceptual precision is further reinforced by (Kirkpatrick et al., 2024), who conducted a scoping review of 47 studies on WTC in language education. Their review identified variations in the conceptualization and operationalization of WTC, communicative contexts, and methodological approaches. This diversity underscores the importance of distinguishing the construct being measured from the communicative phenomenon being explained. In the present synthesis, WTC is positioned as situational readiness to engage in communication, whereas actual communicative behavior is understood as identifiable verbal responses occurring during interaction. Their relationship is not assumed to be deterministic. Learners with high communicative readiness may not necessarily use Arabic whenever opportunities arise, while utterances produced in response to compulsory activities do not, by themselves, demonstrate a willingness to communicate voluntarily in other situations. These possibilities are conceptual implications of the distinction between constructs, not empirical findings concerning learners' behavior in the present study. Accordingly, evaluating the success of speaking instruction requires alignment between the construct claimed to have developed and the evidence used to support that claim.

Within the context of *bi'ah lughawiyah*, distinguishing these constructs has important analytical implications for interpreting the contribution of the language environment. Such an environment may provide opportunities for interaction, establish expectations for language use, and create social conditions conducive to verbal responses. Nevertheless, the availability of opportunities is not equivalent to actual participation, just as participation in structured activities does not necessarily demonstrate independent language use beyond those activities. The success of *bi'ah lughawiyah* must therefore be interpreted according to different levels and types of evidence: competence assessments indicate language ability, WTC measures reflect communicative readiness, and observation or documentation of interactions is needed to evaluate actual communicative behavior. Where success is understood to include sustained communication, evidence of behavioral maintenance over time and generalization across communicative conditions is also required. Neither dimension can be inferred solely from the successful production of utterances during a single activity. This conceptual organization is summarized in Table 1.

Table 1. Conceptual Synthesis Matrix of Linguistic Competence, Communicative Readiness, and Arabic Communicative Behavior

Analytical dimension	Conceptual focus	Relevant evidence	Interpretive limitation
Linguistic competence	Knowledge and ability to understand and produce Arabic utterances	Assessments of linguistic knowledge and language proficiency	Language proficiency does not necessarily indicate language use in everyday interaction
Willingness to communicate (WTC)	Individual readiness to engage in communication in a particular context	WTC measures and relevant situational information	Readiness is not equivalent to actual communicative action
Actual communicative behavior	Arabic language use that actually occurs during interaction	Observation, recordings, or documentation of communicative events	The occurrence of isolated utterances does not establish sustained behavior
Maintenance	Persistence of communicative behavior over time	Repeated observations over a relevant period	Success in a single activity does not establish behavioral

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			maintenance
Generalization	Occurrence of communicative behavior across different conditions, interlocutors, or situations	Evidence of language use across contexts	Success in one situation does not establish generalization

Source: Authors' conceptual synthesis based on (Kholis et al., 2023), (Kirkpatrick et al., 2024), and (Maryani et al., 2024), with the analytical categories of maintenance and generalization further developed for the purposes of this study. The table presents an interpretive framework rather than empirical measurement results.

Overall, the principal finding of this subsection is that linguistic competence, WTC, and actual communicative behavior must be treated as distinct analytical dimensions when evaluating the success of *maharah al-kalam* instruction. This distinction is not intended to establish a linear model of developmental stages but to clarify the relationships among what learners are capable of doing, their readiness to communicate, and the communicative actions that actually occur. Within this framework, maintenance and generalization are introduced as additional dimensions for evaluating behavioral sustainability rather than as inevitable consequences of initial speaking responses. This synthesis also establishes the analytical boundaries for applying Skinnerian behaviorism in the following subsection: operant conditioning principles are used to examine functional relationships among environmental conditions, verbal responses, and social consequences, while linguistic competence and WTC remain distinct constructs with their own explanatory roles. Thus, the analytical contribution of this subsection lies in providing a more differentiated interpretive basis for assessing how *bi'ah lughawiyah* may support the transition from language proficiency to communicative practice without conflating program implementation, willingness to speak, and evidence of sustained communicative behavior.

The Mechanisms of *Bi'ah Lughawiyah* from an Antecedent–Behavior–Consequence Perspective

A synthesis of previous studies indicates that the contribution of *bi'ah lughawiyah* to the development of Arabic communicative behavior can be examined through the organization of interactional conditions, the occurrence of verbal responses, and their associated social consequences. (Sukadi et al., 2025) examined the development of speaking skills through language-related activities from a Skinnerian perspective, while (Khofifah et al., 2025) documented the application of behaviorist principles through daily conversations, vocabulary memorization, public speaking activities, and language-use regulations in Islamic boarding schools. (Indayati et al., 2025) also reported the application of operant conditioning in Arabic speaking instruction. Together, these studies demonstrate the relevance of language environments as contexts for habituation and communicative practice. However, findings concerning program implementation and improvements in language skills must be distinguished from evidence demonstrating how specific environmental conditions and consequences are functionally related to changes in verbal behavior. This distinction provides a basis for interpreting the contribution of *bi'ah lughawiyah* more precisely than merely identifying the presence of language-learning activities or regulations.

From an operant conditioning perspective, an antecedent refers to a condition preceding a response, whereas behavior refers to identifiable verbal actions occurring during interaction, such as asking questions, answering, responding to others, or sustaining conversations in Arabic. Conversational situations, the presence of interlocutors, and language-related instructions may provide opportunities for responses to occur, but they cannot all be classified as discriminative stimuli without evidence of their stimulus functions within a history of reinforcement. Consequences, meanwhile, include events following utterances, such as interlocutors' responses, teachers' feedback, rewards, and disciplinary measures. According to (Skinner, 1953), a consequence functions as reinforcement when it increases the likelihood of subsequent responses under relevant conditions. Thus, praise does not

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automatically constitute reinforcement, just as a fine cannot be classified as reinforcement merely because it is intended to regulate behavior. Similarly, gradual practice does not necessarily constitute shaping unless it involves differential reinforcement of successive approximations toward a target behavior. In the analysis of verbal behavior, these functional relationships also involve listeners and the practices of the verbal community, which provide consequences for speakers' utterances (Skinner, 1957). Accordingly, the mechanisms underlying habituation must be explained in terms of the functions of environmental conditions and consequences in relation to verbal responses, rather than solely in terms of the forms of pedagogical activities.

Table 2. Conceptual Synthesis Matrix of Communicative Behavior Development Mechanisms in *Bi'ah Lughawiyah*

Dimension	Manifestation in the language environment	Analytical function	Interpretive limitation
Antecedent	Opportunities for interaction, questions, instructions, and communicative situations	Conditions that precede and enable verbal responses	Their presence does not necessarily establish a discriminative stimulus function
Behavior	Asking questions, answering, responding, and sustaining conversations in Arabic	Communicative actions that are actually performed	Responses during compulsory activities do not establish independent language use
Consequence	Interlocutors' responses, feedback, rewards, corrections, and disciplinary measures	Consequences that may influence subsequent responses	Reinforcement or punishment functions require evidence of behavioral change
Maintenance and generalization	Language use that persists over time and occurs in different situations	Dimensions for evaluating behavioral sustainability	Require evidence across time and contexts

Source: Author's conceptual synthesis based on (Skinner, 1953, 1957), (Sukadi et al., 2025), (Khofifah et al., 2025), and (Indayati et al., 2025). The matrix serves as a theoretical interpretive tool rather than presenting findings from a functional analysis of learners' behavior.

The matrix illustrates that the contribution of *bi'ah lughawiyah* must be distinguished across three levels of analysis: the provision of communicative conditions, the occurrence of verbal behavior, and the sustainability of language use. Previous studies provide evidence of the implementation of language-learning activities and report their contributions to the development of Arabic language skills. Nevertheless, conclusions regarding effectiveness must account for the nature and scope of the supporting evidence. Reported improvements in speaking skills do not, in themselves, identify the consequences functioning as reinforcers, while successful performance during structured activities does not establish that communication persists without supervision or occurs under different conditions. Maintenance and generalization are therefore positioned as further evaluative dimensions rather than outcomes demonstrated by the present synthesis. The principal finding of this subsection is that *bi'ah lughawiyah* can be understood as an environment that organizes the conditions under which communicative behavior may occur, whereas explaining the development and sustainability of such behavior requires a more rigorous analysis of functional relationships. This synthesis clarifies the potential contribution of language environments while restricting claims of effectiveness to what the available evidence can substantiate.

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The Explanatory Adequacy and Limitations of Skinnerian Behaviorism in Accounting for Sustained Arabic Communication

The critical synthesis indicates that the strength of Skinnerian behaviorism in explaining the development of communicative behavior lies in its analysis of the functional relationships among environmental conditions, verbal responses, and consequences that influence the likelihood of subsequent responses. Through the concepts of operant conditioning and verbal behavior, (Skinner, 1957) provides a foundation for understanding how communicative practices may develop and be maintained within a verbal community. In the context of *bi'ah lughawiyah*, this perspective enables an examination of the functions of speaking opportunities, interlocutors' responses, and social consequences in Arabic language use. However, the presence of habituation activities, rewards, or language-use regulations is insufficient to establish that behavioral changes occur through reinforcement mechanisms. A functional explanation requires evidence of the relationships among conditions preceding a response, the consequences that follow it, and changes in the likelihood of subsequent responses. Thus, the first limitation identified concerns not the theory's capacity to explain habit formation but the adequacy of the evidence used when behaviorist concepts are applied to interpret instructional practices.

A more fundamental issue concerns the explanatory scope of Skinnerian behaviorism in accounting for the complexity of human communication. (Skinner, 1957) conceptualizes verbal behavior in terms of functional relationships among speakers, listeners, and the social environment, whereas (Chomsky, 1959) challenged the adequacy of this approach in explaining linguistic productivity and creativity. This disagreement highlights that the analysis of behavioral contingencies is not equivalent to an explanation of every dimension of linguistic ability. Nevertheless, such criticism does not justify assuming that Skinner excluded internal events from consideration or lacked conceptual resources for explaining generalization. The need for a complementary perspective becomes particularly apparent when attention shifts to individuals' readiness to communicate. (Kirkpatrick et al., 2024) emphasize the importance of conceptual and measurement precision in research on willingness to communicate (WTC), while (Nakata et al., 2026), in a study involving 396 university students in Japan, found that classroom support was associated with WTC through the satisfaction of learners' psychological needs. As the latter study was conducted in an English language learning context, its relevance to Arabic language education is comparative rather than direct empirical evidence. Based on this synthesis, operant behavior analysis and the WTC perspective are more appropriately understood as approaches with distinct explanatory emphases: the former examines the functional relationships underlying verbal behavior, whereas the latter helps explain communicative readiness under particular psychological and situational conditions.

The sustainability of communication provides an important basis for assessing interpretations of success in *bi'ah lughawiyah*. From a behavioral perspective, maintenance refers to the persistence of responses over time, whereas generalization concerns the occurrence of responses under different stimulus conditions or in different situations. Both can be examined within a behaviorist framework, but neither necessarily follows from successful initial habituation (Skinner, 1953). For example, the use of Arabic during supervised activities does not establish that such behavior will persist when supervision is reduced or when interactions involve different interlocutors. This example serves as an analytical illustration rather than a field-based finding of the present study. Evidence of response occurrence, behavioral maintenance, and generalization must therefore be treated as distinct grounds for drawing conclusions. Without observations across time and contexts, claims of success should be limited to the communicative conditions actually investigated. The distinction between theoretical explanatory adequacy and evidentiary sufficiency is summarized in Table 3.

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Table 3. Conceptual Synthesis Matrix of Theoretical Explanatory Adequacy and Evidentiary Limitations in Communicative Behavior

Analytical focus	Skinnerian explanatory contribution	Explanatory or evidentiary limitation	Required perspective or evidence
Development of verbal responses	Explains functional relationships among antecedent conditions, responses, and consequences	Habituation activities do not necessarily establish operant reinforcement	Evidence of changes in response likelihood following consequences
Linguistic productivity	Explains the functions of utterances within speaker–listener relationships	Its adequacy in explaining linguistic creativity remains contested	Linguistic analysis appropriate to the language dimensions under investigation
Willingness to communicate	Examines conditions associated with the occurrence of responses	Analysis of actual responses does not substitute for WTC measurement	Psychological and situational evidence concerning communicative readiness
Maintenance	Explains the persistence of responses in relation to environmental conditions	Initial success does not establish sustained behavior	Behavioral observations over time
Generalization	Explains the occurrence of responses under different stimulus conditions	Success in one situation does not establish the transfer of language use	Observations of communication across situations and interlocutors

Source: Author's conceptual synthesis based on (Skinner, 1953, 1957), (Chomsky, 1959), (Kirkpatrick et al., 2024), and (Nakata et al., 2026). The matrix serves as a conceptual evaluation tool rather than presenting findings from empirical testing.

Overall, the principal finding of this subsection is the distinction among the limits of theoretical explanatory scope, the need for complementary conceptual perspectives, and the limitations of empirical evidence. Skinnerian behaviorism remains relevant to analyzing the development and maintenance of verbal responses, but this relevance does not justify equating program implementation with successful operant conditioning. The WTC perspective broadens the analysis to include communicative readiness without replacing the examination of actual behavior, while maintenance and generalization clarify why communicative success cannot be determined solely by the occurrence of utterances during a single activity. Accordingly, this synthesis provides a more proportionate interpretive basis for research on *bi'ah lughawiyah*: the contribution of language environments must be explained through theoretically defensible mechanisms, while conclusions about the development and sustainability of communicative behavior must remain consistent with the nature and extent of the available evidence.

DISCUSSION

From Language Proficiency to Communicative Practice: Interpreting the Knowing–Speaking Gap

The gap between Arabic language proficiency and its use in everyday interactions should be understood as a challenge of translating linguistic competence into communicative behavior rather than merely as a limitation in linguistic ability. The distinction among linguistic competence, willingness to communicate (WTC), and actual communicative behavior established in this study demonstrates that the ability to produce utterances, readiness to speak, and communicative action are

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interrelated dimensions that cannot be used interchangeably as indicators of learning success. The contextual variations in WTC reported by (Kholis et al., 2023), together with the conceptual and methodological issues identified by (Kirkpatrick et al., 2024), reinforce the importance of distinguishing communicative readiness from language use that actually occurs. Within this framework, the *knowing–speaking gap* cannot be reduced to a linear relationship between vocabulary or grammatical knowledge and the production of utterances. Linguistic competence may provide resources for communication, but its actualization must be understood in relation to opportunities for interaction, situational conditions, and the social responses accompanying language use. Accordingly, limited communicative practice should not automatically be interpreted as evidence of inadequate competence or motivation without examining the relevant communicative conditions.

These conceptual implications shift the evaluation of *bi'ah lughawiyah* from the mere existence of habituation programs toward the quality of interactions that enable learners to use Arabic for communicative purposes. Conversation activities, language-use requirements, and environmental arrangements may create conditions conducive to verbal responses, but their presence does not establish whether learners use the language actively, independently, and responsively in interaction with others. In (Skinner, 1957) analysis of verbal behavior, the function of an utterance is related to the conditions controlling it and the consequences mediated by listeners. This perspective helps explain why opportunities to speak must be distinguished from verbal responses that actually occur and why repeated activities do not necessarily establish the development of sustained communicative behavior. However, contingency analysis does not replace WTC as a construct addressing individuals' readiness to communicate in particular situations. By preserving their distinct explanatory emphases, this study positions *bi'ah lughawiyah* as a social context in which linguistic competence, communicative readiness, and verbal behavior may be interrelated, without assuming that any one of these dimensions necessarily constitutes a direct cause of another.

The interpretive contribution of this discussion lies in emphasizing that the success of *maharah al-kalam* instruction must be evaluated in accordance with the dimensions being assessed and the types of evidence available. Assessments of linguistic knowledge provide evidence of competence, WTC measures offer information about communicative readiness, and claims concerning the development of speaking behavior require evidence of language use in actual interactions. This distinction is not intended to separate the three dimensions absolutely but to prevent conclusions that exceed what the evidence can support. The *knowing–speaking gap* can therefore be understood more precisely: the challenge of Arabic language education lies not only in developing linguistic abilities but also in understanding the conditions under which those abilities are translated into communicative practice. This interpretation sharpens the analytical focus of the study and provides a foundation for the subsequent examination of how *bi'ah lughawiyah* organizes environmental conditions and social consequences that may support the development of verbal behavior.

Bi'ah Lughawiyah as an Ecology of Communicative Contingencies: Implications and Limitations of the Skinnerian Approach

The findings presented in Section 3.2 indicate that the contribution of *bi'ah lughawiyah* to the development of Arabic communicative behavior should be interpreted through the mechanisms of interaction rather than merely through the existence of habituation programs. Studies by (Indayati et al., 2025; Khofifah et al., 2025; Sukadi et al., 2025) demonstrate the relevance of language-learning activities and behaviorist principles to the development of speaking skills. However, reports of program implementation or improvements in language proficiency do not, in themselves, explain the functional relationships underlying behavioral change. From (Skinner, 1953, 1957) perspective, environmental conditions acquire analytical significance when examined in relation to verbal responses and the consequences that influence the likelihood of subsequent responses. Accordingly, the success of *bi'ah lughawiyah* cannot be adequately assessed solely through the intensity of practice, the enforcement of language-use regulations, or the provision of rewards. Instead, it must be examined in relation to the communicative actions that occur and the functions of their associated social

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consequences. This distinction clarifies that program implementation, the development of verbal behavior, and evidence of conditioning mechanisms represent different levels of inference.

From this perspective, *bi'ah lughawiyah* can be understood as an ecology of communicative contingencies: a configuration of social conditions that provides opportunities to speak, elicits responses from interlocutors, and allows particular consequences to influence Arabic language use. This formulation represents an interpretive synthesis developed in the present study rather than a newly validated theoretical model. In Islamic boarding schools, interactions among students, communication with dormitory supervisors, and structured language-learning activities may create contexts of language use characterized by different communicative demands and consequences. However, the diversity of these activities becomes analytically meaningful within an operant framework only when the relationships among antecedent conditions, responses, and consequences can be identified. (Skinner, 1957) emphasizes that verbal behavior occurs within social relationships in which listeners mediate consequences. Thus, responses to learners' questions, requests, or explanations should be analyzed in terms of their functions within interaction rather than merely the forms of feedback provided. Praise, correction, and disciplinary measures do not automatically constitute reinforcement or punishment in the functional sense; their classification requires evidence of changes in the likelihood of subsequent behavior. This perspective prevents *bi'ah lughawiyah* from being reduced to a system of rewards and sanctions.

These distinctions have implications for interpreting communicative habituation. Compliance with requirements to use Arabic during compulsory activities constitutes observable behavior, but it is not equivalent to the ability to initiate, develop, and sustain interactions across different situations. Likewise, repeated practice cannot automatically be characterized as *shaping* without evidence of differential reinforcement of successive approximations toward a target behavior. Pedagogical analysis must therefore consider whether the environment provides opportunities for learners to use language for its communicative functions, receive relevant responses, and extend interactions beyond responses prescribed by instructions. This emphasis does not imply that structured activities or language-use regulations are unnecessary. Both may establish initial conditions for communicative practice, but their contributions must be assessed in relation to the behavior actually produced. At the same time, the variations in communicative readiness discussed by (Kholis et al., 2023) and (Kirkpatrick et al., 2024) highlight the importance of considering psychological and situational dimensions as complementary perspectives. Operant analysis and willingness to communicate are thus employed to explain different aspects of communication without assuming causal relationships that have not been empirically tested.

The conceptual contribution of this discussion lies in advancing a contingency-sensitive interpretation of *bi'ah lughawiyah*. This orientation shifts the evaluative question from whether language programs have been implemented to how interactional conditions relate to the occurrence of verbal responses and their subsequent social consequences. This shift is not intended to place program management in opposition to behavioral analysis but to distinguish their respective explanatory levels: programs establish environmental arrangements, whereas functional analysis requires evidence of relationships between environmental conditions and behavior. Accordingly, this study does not conclude that *bi'ah lughawiyah* has been demonstrated to be effective through operant conditioning mechanisms. Rather, it develops an interpretive basis for distinguishing the potential contributions of language environments from demonstrable behavioral outcomes. This position preserves the relevance of Skinnerian behaviorism while avoiding claims of effectiveness that exceed the available evidence. It also provides a foundation for examining maintenance and generalization as dimensions of sustained communication.

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Beyond Short-Term Habituation: Maintenance, Generalization, and the Evaluation of Communicative Success

The success of Arabic language habituation within *bi'ah lughawiyah* must be interpreted beyond the occurrence of utterances during structured instructional activities. The synthesis presented in Section 3.3 indicates that verbal responses occurring under particular conditions are insufficient to establish their persistence or extension to other contexts. Within operant behavior analysis, maintenance refers to the persistence of responses over time, whereas generalization concerns the occurrence of responses under different stimulus conditions (Skinner, 1953). These dimensions are not beyond the explanatory scope of behaviorism; rather, they clarify why the development of behavior cannot be equated with successful initial responses. In Arabic language education, this distinction has important implications: the implementation of conversation activities or increased participation under supervised conditions may represent relevant achievements, but neither provides sufficient grounds for concluding that communication has become a sustained practice extending to other situations. The success of *bi'ah lughawiyah* must therefore be understood as involving temporal and contextual dimensions rather than merely achievement within a single activity.

These implications call for a more rigorous evaluation of the relationship between learning environments and communicative behavior. Studies by (Sukadi et al., 2025) and (Khofifah et al., 2025) provide insights into the organization of language environments and speaking habituation practices in Islamic boarding schools. However, the scope of conclusions drawn from such studies must correspond to the indicators, situations, and observation periods actually employed. Conceptually, Arabic language use during scheduled conversations may provide evidence of verbal responses within that particular context; assessing maintenance requires repeated observations over time, whereas evaluating generalization requires examining language use across different situations, interlocutors, or communicative demands. A change in context does not necessarily entail the complete absence of environmental support, as communicative behavior continues to occur in relation to environmental conditions and social consequences. What must be examined is whether verbal responses occur and serve communicative functions under relevant new conditions. Accordingly, the evaluation of habituation should not be limited to recording compliance with language-use regulations or the frequency of activities. It should also consider the persistence and range of language use without assuming that every observed change results from operant conditioning.

The conceptual contribution of this discussion lies in strengthening a contingency-sensitive interpretation of the success of *bi'ah lughawiyah* that also accounts for temporal and contextual dimensions. While antecedent–behavior–consequence analysis helps identify the conditions and consequences associated with the occurrence of verbal responses, maintenance and generalization extend the evaluation to the persistence of those responses and their occurrence in different situations. These analytical dimensions do not constitute an inevitable developmental sequence; rather, each requires evidence appropriate to the research question being addressed. The pedagogical implications include the need to provide opportunities for communication that serve meaningful social functions, attend to the responses learners receive when speaking, and evaluate language use repeatedly across diverse interactional situations. These recommendations are derived from conceptual reasoning and have not been empirically tested for effectiveness in the present study. Accordingly, the success of *bi'ah lughawiyah* should not be inferred solely from program implementation or the occurrence of initial responses. Instead, it should be interpreted in relation to the alignment among instructional objectives, observable behavior, and evidence of its sustainability. This position clarifies the contribution of Skinnerian behaviorism to the analysis of Arabic communicative behavior while establishing defensible limits on the conclusions that can be drawn.

4. CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the gap between Arabic language proficiency and communicative practice (the *knowing–speaking gap*) cannot be understood solely as a problem of inadequate linguistic

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competence. Through a critical-conceptual synthesis, the study establishes a distinction among linguistic competence, willingness to communicate (WTC), and actual communicative behavior as interrelated but distinct constructs that do not necessarily form a causal sequence. Vocabulary and grammatical knowledge provide linguistic resources, communicative readiness reflects an individual's inclination to use language in particular situations, and actual communicative behavior refers to language use that takes place in interaction. This distinction indicates that the success of *maharah al-kalam* instruction cannot be inferred solely from linguistic knowledge or willingness to speak; rather, it requires evidence of language use that fulfills communicative purposes.

From a Skinnerian behaviorist perspective, *bi'ah lughawiyah* can be interpreted as an environment with the potential to support the development of communicative behavior through the organization of interactional conditions, the occurrence of verbal responses, and their associated social consequences. However, program implementation, the intensity of practice, compliance with language-use regulations, and the provision of rewards do not, in themselves, establish the occurrence of operant reinforcement or the effectiveness of behavioral development. The conceptual contribution of this study lies in articulating a contingency-sensitive interpretive orientation that distinguishes environmental arrangements, observable verbal behavior, and evidence of the functional relationships underlying that behavior. Skinner's approach thus provides an analytical basis for understanding the relationship between environmental conditions and communicative behavior, but it does not encompass every dimension of linguistic competence and communicative readiness. The WTC perspective is employed as a complementary approach to broaden this understanding without replacing the need for evidence of actual behavior.

The study further emphasizes that evaluating the success of *bi'ah lughawiyah* requires consideration not only of the occurrence of communicative responses but also of their persistence over time (maintenance) and their occurrence under different conditions (generalization). These dimensions clarify why successful habituation in a particular situation does not necessarily establish the development of sustained communicative behavior. Accordingly, the principal contribution of this study is to provide an interpretive basis that distinguishes linguistic competence, communicative readiness, actual behavior, contingency mechanisms, and communicative sustainability as dimensions requiring evidence appropriate to their respective characteristics. As this study is based on a critical-conceptual review of the literature, the proposed interpretive orientation has not been empirically tested and cannot establish the causal effectiveness of any particular program. Further research is needed to examine the functional relationships among interactional conditions, verbal responses, and social consequences, while also assessing maintenance and generalization through observations across time and contexts. Ultimately, the success of Arabic communicative education cannot be determined solely by what learners know about the language; it must be interpreted in terms of how the language is actually used, sustained, and employed in meaningful interactions.

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