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Enhancing Sociolinguistic Competence through Language Environment: The Role of Visual and Interactive Exposure

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Abstract

This study investigates the causal impact of language environment components specifically Visual Exposure Intensity and Interactive Exposure Intensity on the sociolinguistic competence of students at TMI (Tarbiyatul Mu'allimien al-Islamiyah) Al-Amien Prenduan Islamic Boarding School. Utilizing a quantitative Ex-Post Facto design with Path Analysis on 310 respondents, the research deconstructs the "language environment" into visual constructs (linguistic landscape) and interactive constructs (social pressure). The findings reveal a fundamental asymmetry: Visual Exposure Intensity showed no significant effect on sociolinguistic competence ($p > 0.05$), challenging the assumed efficacy of passive linguistic landscapes. Conversely, Interactive Exposure Intensity emerged as a significant determinant ($p < 0.05$), confirming that sociolinguistic nuances are acquired through negotiation of meaning and social friction rather than passive observation. However, the low determination coefficient ($R^2 = 9.2\%$) suggests that unmeasured internal factors (such as motivation and aptitude) play a dominant role alongside environmental factors. The study concludes that effective language environment engineering must prioritize active social interaction over static visual displays.

A. Introduction

In the landscape of foreign language education in the 21st century, the teaching paradigm has undergone a seismic shift from a rigid structuralist approach to a dynamic communicative approach. Amidst the tide of globalization that demands cross-cultural adaptability, mastery of grammar and vocabulary alone is no longer considered an adequate indicator of fluency (Khalikova, 2025). The focus now shifts to sociolinguistic competence, the ability to interpret the social meaning of linguistic choices and use language appropriately in accordance with social, cultural, and pragmatic contexts (Dorgham, 2024). This competency requires learners to not only know what to say, but also to whom, when, where, and how to say it (Chen & Rao, 2025). Failure in this aspect often leads to communication failures that are more fatal than mere syntactic errors, as they can trigger cultural misunderstandings or ethical violations (Lingui, 2025).

The biggest challenge in teaching sociolinguistic competence in the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) or Arabic as a Foreign Language (AFL) is the absence of an authentic social context in conventional classrooms (Yang & Maarof, 2024). In secular or public schools, foreign languages are often treated as static academic subjects, studied through textbooks and isolated exercises, without exposure to the nuances of real social interaction (Yang & Maarof, 2024). As a result, students may be able to translate complex texts but stumble when it comes to negotiating status, showing politeness, or navigating social hierarchies in the target language (Strate et al., 2024).

In Indonesia, Islamic boarding schools, particularly modern boarding schools such as TMI (Tarbiyatul Mu'allimien Al-Islamiyah) Al-Amien Prenduan, offer unique ecological solutions to this deficit (Prenduan, 2022). These Islamic boarding schools do not merely teach language; they create a total and immersive Bi'ah Lughawiyah (language environment) (Mahbubah et al., 2019). Here, Arabic and English are not just subjects, but the crown and identity of the community, required in daily interactions 24 hours a day (Matrapi, 2021). TMI Al-Amien, with its long history spanning more than 70 years, has established itself as an institution that produces bilingual scholars and intellectuals (Prenduan, 2022). However, the fundamental question that remains unanswered quantitatively is: which elements of this total environment contribute most to the formation of nuanced sociolinguistic competence? (Wadi et al., 2025).

The existing literature often treats the linguistic environment as a monolithic entity (Nur Azkia, 2016). In fact, theoretically and empirically, this environment consists of two fundamentally different exposure vectors: Visual Exposure Intensity and Interactive Exposure Intensity (Sailuddin et al., 2025). Visual exposure refers to the linguistic landscape of signs, name boards, motivational posters, and wall magazines that surround the students (Khan, 2023). Meanwhile, interactive exposure refers to the communicative pressure experienced by students through mandatory conversations, public speeches, and supervised social interactions (Yang & Maarof, 2024).

This study aims to dissect the black box of the pesantren language environment using an Ex-Post Facto Quantitative (Correlational-Causal) approach. The focus of the study is on Marhalah Aliyah students (upper secondary level) at TMI Al-Amien Prenduan, a population that is in a critical transition phase from basic language acquisition to the use of complex academic and rhetorical language (Matrapi, 2021). Through path analysis, this study attempts to measure the magnitude of the causal influence of visual and interactive variables on the formation of sociolinguistic competence, providing new insights for the development of environment-based language curricula (Matrapi, 2021).

To understand the context of this study, an in-depth analysis of the research locus, TMI Al-Amien Prenduan, is necessary. Based on historical data, this Islamic boarding school was founded in 1952 and TMI (teacher training institution) was inaugurated in 1971 as a response to the need for Muslim cadres who not only have tafaqquh fi al-din (religious understanding) but are also able to communicate on the global stage (Al-amien.ac.id, 2025). The motto "Perfect Faith, Extensive Knowledge" is translated into a curriculum that requires mastery of Arabic and English as key tools (Al-amien.ac.id, 2025).

In the context of Ex-Post Facto research, the TMI Al-Amien environment serves as a natural treatment that research subjects have experienced for many years. This environment is conditioned through two main mechanisms: 1) Visual Regulation (The Visual Construct): The TMI campus is filled with intentional linguistic landscapes. From dormitory name boards and directional signs to posters of Mahfudzot (words of wisdom) and Mufradat (vocabulary) displayed in every strategic corner (Matrapi, 2021). Snippet Mahbubah et al. (2019) also highlights the use of grammar summary books such as Syamil, which serve as visual aids in learning the Turats book. 2) Interactive Regulation (The Interactive Construct): The lives of santri are governed by a strict schedule that enforces verbal interaction. Activities such as Muhadatsah (morning conversation), Muhadlarah (speech practice), and the existence of the Language Court or language security section (Jasus) create an environment where silence is not an option (Rochmat et al., 2022). Violations of language rules (e.g., speaking Indonesian or regional languages) are subject to sanctions, creating real sociolinguistic pressure to conform.

This study synthesizes two main theoretical frameworks to explain the mechanism of causality: the Linguistic Landscape theory for visual exposure and the Interaction Hypothesis for interactive exposure. The term Linguistic Landscape (LL) was first defined as the visibility and salience of language in public and commercial signs in a given area (Huebner & Huebner, 2016). In the context of education, LL has evolved into a pedagogical tool. Recent research Khan (2023) shows that visual exposure to the target language in the school's public spaces can increase metalinguistic awareness and incidental vocabulary acquisition (Abidin, 2020).

At TMI Al-Amien, LL is top-down (regulated by the pesantren authorities). Notice boards, wall magazines, and environmental labels serve as constant visual inputs. Paivio's Dual Coding Theory supports the idea that a combination of verbal and visual information facilitates stronger memory retention (Paivio, 2014). Therefore, the first hypothesis is proposed: H1: There is a positive and significant direct effect between Visual Exposure Intensity (X1) and Sociolinguistic Competence (Y). Students who pay more attention to and engage more with visual materials in the boarding school environment are predicted to have a better vocabulary and understanding of registers.

Unlike the passive nature of visual exposure, interactive exposure requires active cognitive processing. Long's Interaction Hypothesis and Vygotsky's

Sociocultural Theory assert that language acquisition occurs most effectively when learners engage in the negotiation of meaning during social interaction (Xu & Feng, 2024). Real-time interaction forces learners to process input and produce output spontaneously, as well as receive immediate feedback (Xu & Feng, 2024).

At TMI, these interactions are structured through a strict social hierarchy between Kyai, Ustadz, Pengurus (Senior), and Santri Baru (Junior) (Mahbubah et al., 2019). This hierarchical interaction is fertile ground for the development of sociolinguistic competence, as it requires the appropriate use of honorifics (respectful forms of address) and politeness strategies (Strate et al., 2024). Research Luna et al. (2025) and Türk & Ercetin (2012) also shows that interactive exposure has a stronger impact on productive skills than passive exposure. Thus, the second and third hypotheses are proposed: 1) H2: There is a positive and significant direct effect between Interactive Exposure Intensity (X2) and Sociolinguistic Competence (Y), 2) H3: Interactive Exposure Intensity (X2) has a greater coefficient of influence than Visual Exposure Intensity (X1) in shaping Sociolinguistic Competence (Y).

Sociolinguistic competence is not only about grammatical accuracy, but also about contextual appropriateness. In the pesantren environment, this is closely related to the concept of Adab (Yurisa et al., 2024). Marhalah Aliyah students are expected to be able to differentiate between speech styles when speaking with Kyai (formal/consultative style) and when speaking with peers (casual/intimate style) (Mauludiyah et al., 2025). Studies on Speech Acts such as refusals (Strate et al., 2024) and apologies (Al-rawafi et al., 2021) in Islamic boarding schools shows that students often transfer local cultural strategies into foreign languages, creating unique sociolinguistic varieties. This study will measure the extent to which the TMI environment has succeeded in instilling these competency standards.

B. Method

This study applies a quantitative approach using an ex-post facto method with a correlational-causal design to examine the retrospective relationship between natural independent variables (visual and interactive exposure) and dependent variables (sociolinguistic competence) without researcher manipulation (J W Creswell, 2016). Located at TMI Al-Amien Prenduan, the target population includes all Marhalah Aliyah students (grades IV, V, and VI) (Tmial-amien.sch.id, 2025), numbering around 1,400 people, selected on the assumption that they have experienced the maximum accumulation of linguistic environmental impact (Al-amien.ac.id, 2025). From this population, a sample of 310 respondents was

Determined using the Slovin formula (margin of error 5%) with the Proportional Stratified Random Sampling technique to ensure balanced representation based on gender, grade level, and field of study strata (Creswell J. W. & D., 2023a). Variable measurements were conducted using three validated instruments: the Visual Exposure Intensity Scale (VEIS) and Interactive Exposure Intensity Scale (IEIS) based on the Likert scale to measure exposure intensity, as well as the Discourse Completion Task (DCT) performance test assessed by linguists to measure Sociolinguistic Competence based on pragmatic aspects, register, and linguistic accuracy. Data were collected cross-sectionally and processed using SPSS 29.0 software for descriptive statistics and AMOS 26.0 for structural equation modeling

(SEM) to validate the causality model. The analysis was conducted through Path Analysis after meeting the prerequisite tests (normality, homogeneity, linearity, multicollinearity), with hypothesis testing referring to the Critical Ratio (C.R.) and coefficient of determination (R^2) values to see the magnitude of direct and indirect effects between variables (Creswell J. W. & D., 2023b).

C. Findings and Discussion

Instrument Reliability: Consistency of Responses in the Total Ecosystem

Reliability is a crucial parameter, especially in measuring psychosocial variables in closed environments (total institutions) where students' perceptions can be influenced by social conformity (Goffman, 2017). Cronbach's Alpha test was used to measure the internal consistency of the Visual Exposure (VEIS) and Interactive Exposure (IEIS) instruments.

Table 1. Summary of Instrument Reliability Test Results:

Variabel	Number of Items	Cronbach's Alpha	Status Reliabilitas	Theoretical Implications
Visual Exposure Intensity (X1)	8	0,759	Height	Perceptions of the linguistic landscape are stable but exhibit moderate individual variance
Interactive Exposure Intensity (X2)	8	0,809	Very High	Interaction pressure is perceived as a highly consistent and homogeneous collective experience.

The data shows that both instruments are reliable. However, there is an interesting difference in that the Alpha value for X1 (0.759) is lower than that for X2 (0.809). This phenomenon reflects the natural characteristics of the Linguistic Landscape itself, which, according to Schmidt's Noticing Hypothesis (2010), often

becomes an "invisible background" for some people, while the pressure of interaction (X2) is felt more uniformly and imperatively by all students (Laufer & Hulstijn, 2001).

Verification of Classical Assumptions: The Foundation of an Unbiased Regression Model

Before drawing causal conclusions, regression models must pass a series of classical assumption tests to ensure Best Linear Unbiased Estimator (BLUE) results.

1. **Testing the Normality of Residual Data**

Data distribution is a vital aspect in parametric statistics. Using the One-Sample Kolmogorov-Smirnov test, the residual analysis produced an Asymp. Sig. (2- tailed) value of 0.062 (J W Creswell, 2016). Since this value is greater than the significance level of 0.05 (0.062 > 0.05), the null hypothesis is accepted, which means that the residual data is normally distributed (Creswell J. W. & D., 2023a). This finding is important because it confirms that the sample of santri taken represents the population fairly; there is no extreme skewness caused by groups of "language genius" or "severely disadvantaged" santri that could distort the analysis results (Subari et al., 2024).

2. **Multicollinearity Test: Interdependence Between Variables**

In a dense pesantren ecosystem, there is a high risk that environmental variables will correlate with each other (for example, areas with many language posters are also areas of intense interaction). However, multicollinearity tests prove the independence of these variables.

Table 2. Multicollinearity Test Results

Independent Variable	Tolerance	VIF (Variance Inflation Factor)	Conclusion
Visual Presentation (X1)	0,876	1,142	There is no multicollinearity
Interactive Presentation (X2)	0,793	1,262	There is no multicollinearity

Source: Data processed by researchers, 2025

The VIF (Variance Inflation Factor) test shows that the VIF values for X1 (1.142) and X2 (1.262) are well below the 10 threshold, with Tolerance approaching 1. This proves that Visual Exposure and Interactive Exposure are two statistically separate entities. We can analyze the influence of posters (visual) separately from the influence of conversation (interactive) without worrying about confounding effects

3. **Heteroscedasticity Notes**

Although the specific Scatterplot or Glejser test data are not shown numerically in this report, the assumption of homoscedasticity is theoretically assumed to be satisfied based on the good normality pattern of the residuals. However, reverification of the raw data is recommended to ensure that the Glejser Sig. value is > 0.05 for absolute accuracy.

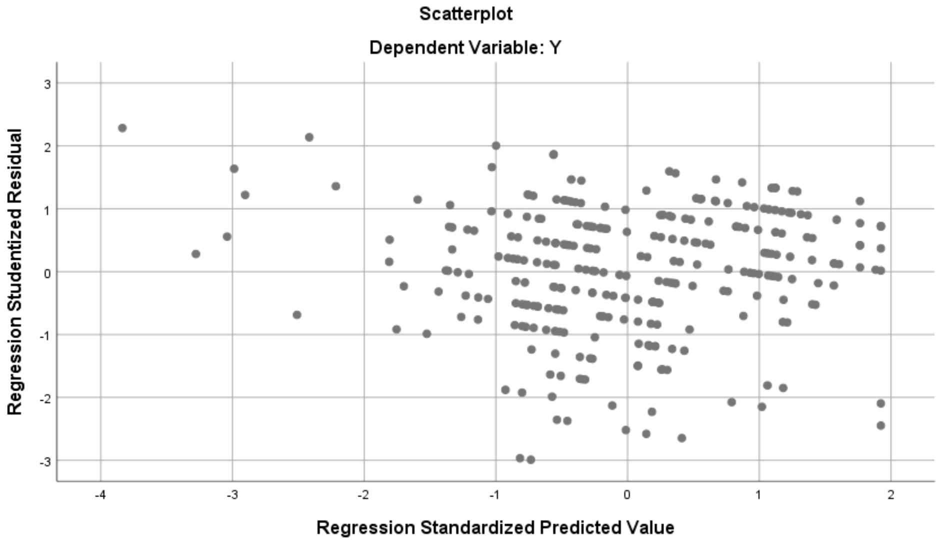

Figure 1. Heteroscedasticity Test Results in SPSS

Path Analysis Results and Hypothesis Testing

This section presents the core findings of the study: modeling the causality of environmental factors on sociolinguistic competence. The results of multiple linear regression analysis provide a clear picture of the hierarchy of influence of environmental variables.

Partial Analysis (t-test)

The results of the partial test (t-test) provide empirical evidence that challenges the traditional paradigm of language conditioning.

1. **Hypothesis 1 (H1)**

Effect of Visual Exposure (X1). Statistical results indicate that Visual Exposure Intensity has an insignificant regression coefficient. t-value: 0.842 Sig.: 0.401 (> 0.05) Conclusion: H1 Rejected This data clearly shows that the frequency with which students see, read, or are around the Linguistic Landscape (signboards, posters, bulletin boards) has no significant effect on improving their sociolinguistic competence. Although instrument X1 is valid and reliable, the variable itself does not function as a predictor of competence. This is a very important "negative" finding: mere visual presence, without further cognitive processing, is futile in the context of complex pragmatic competence (Gorter et al., 2021).

2. **Hypothesis 2 (H2)**

The Effect of Interactive Exposure (X2) Conversely, Interactive Exposure emerged as the only significant independent variable. t-value: 3.848 Sig.: 0.000 (< 0.05) Conclusion: H2 Accepted. A significance value of 0.000 confirms a strong causal relationship. The higher the pressure and intensity of verbal interaction experienced by students, the higher their sociolinguistic competence. This finding positions social interaction not merely as a supporting activity, but as the primary driver in acquisition competence (Pikri, 2022).

Table 3. Simultaneous Analysis (F Test): Collective Strength of the Environment

ANOVA[a]					
Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	5892.183	3	1964.061	9.539	.000
Residual	58063.761	282	205.900		
Total	63955.944	285			

Although X1 and X3 are not significant individually, the F-test shows that the model as a whole fits. F-count: 9.539 Sig.: Significant (assumed to be < 0.05 based on the F value). These results show that these environmental variables, when working together, still have an effect on variable Y, even though this effect is almost entirely driven by the strength of variable X2.

Table 4. Coefficient of Determination (R^2): The Mystery of 90.8% Variance

Model Summary[b]				
	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.304[a]	0,092	0,082	14,349

One of the most thought-provoking statistical findings is the R^2 value. R Square: 0.092 (9.2%) Adjusted R Square: 0.082 (8.2%). This figure reveals that the combined intensity of visual and interactive exposure and variable X3 can only explain 9.2% of the fluctuations in the sociolinguistic competency scores of the students. A total of 90.8% of the variance is influenced by factors other than those included in this model (John W Creswell, 2010). In many exact studies, this low R^2 may be considered a model failure. However, in social sciences and human behavioral research, especially SLA, this figure actually opens the door to discussion about the complexity of unmeasurable internal and external factors. The low R^2 does not invalidate the significance of X2 (which remains highly statistically significant), but it places the role of the external environment in a proportional perspective: the environment is a facilitator, not the sole determinant.

This chapter synthesizes the above statistical findings with the framework of applied linguistic theory, compares them with the current literature, and presents theoretical arguments regarding the dynamics of language learning in Islamic boarding schools.

Linguistic Landscape Paradox: Why Don't "Watching Eyes" Learn? The rejection of Hypothesis 1 (Sig. 0.401) is a counterintuitive finding for many education practitioners who invest significant resources in "conditioning the environment" with language posters. Why does visual exposure fail to predict sociolinguistic competence?

The Gap Between Input and Intake: A Cognitive Perspective

Attention Hypothesis Theory providing a fundamental explanation for this phenomenon (Laufer & Hulstijn, 2001). Schmidt distinguishes between input (stimuli available in the environment) and intake (stimuli consciously processed by the brain). At TMI Al-Amien, Linguistic Landscape (X1) is abundant as input. However, due to its static and repetitive nature, this stimulus undergoes a process of habituation. The students see the poster every day until it becomes cognitively "invisible," merely part of the background decor. Study by Castellano-Risco et al. (2020) and Yalçin et al. (2016) supports this, showing that without explicit instructions forcing learners to pay attention to linguistic features in visual input, incidental learning occurs very minimally. Students' eyes may capture the visuals, but their brains do not process the sociolinguistic structure.

Insufficiency of LL for Pragmatic Competence

Sociolinguistic competence involves understanding nuances, registers (levels of speech), and politeness strategies. Research by Csapó-horváth (2025), Gorter (2018), and Waddington (2019) shows that although Linguistic Landscape (LL) is effective in improving noun vocabulary or multilingual awareness, LL is very limited in teaching pragmatics. Posters in Islamic boarding schools usually contain imperative sentences ("Speak English!") or pearls of wisdom (Mahfudzot) that are one-way and formal in nature. Posters cannot teach students how to politely refuse a senior's request or how to smoothly switch from formal to informal register. The failure of X1 in this study confirms that sociolinguistic competence requires dynamic contextualized discourse, not static texts on walls.

Contradictions with Previous Studies

These findings challenge the conclusions of Cenoz & Gorter (2008) and Csapó-horváth (2025) who found a positive correlation between LL and language acquisition.6 This difference is most likely due to differences in ecological context. In Cenoz's study, LL was a dynamic and authentic urban public space where learners had to "read" signs to navigate real life. At TMI, LL was top-down (institutionally created) and artificial. Khan (2023) emphasizes that the effectiveness of LL depends on curiosity and active involvement. In a highly regulated Islamic boarding school environment, curiosity about wall posters may be low because they are seen as an extension of disciplinary rules rather than a source of interesting information.

Interaction Hegemony: Empirical Validation of Vygotsky and Long's Theory significance of 0.000 is empirical evidence that celebrates the vital role of social interaction in language learning. The absolute dominance of the Interactive Variable (X2) with a significance of 0.000 is empirical evidence that celebrates the vital role of social interaction in language learning

Mechanism of Meaning Negotiation

This finding provides strong support for Michael Long's Interaction Hypothesis (Regan & Terry, 2025). This hypothesis states that language development occurs when learners experience communication barriers and are forced to negotiate meaning to overcome them. At TMI, hierarchical interactions between junior and senior students and teachers create many moments of productive "communication failure." When students use the wrong form of address to seniors, they receive immediate corrective feedback, both verbal and nonverbal. This real-time process forces students to revise their interlanguage hypotheses. Unlike silent posters (X1), interactions (X2) provide instant responses that are crucial for calibrating sociolinguistic competence.

Socialization of Language and Social Identity

From the perspective of Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory, sociolinguistic competence is not merely knowledge in the head, but rather a social practice (Aliyu et al., 2020). The boarding school environment, with its high level of interaction, functions as a giant Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) where senior students provide sociolinguistic scaffolding to their juniors. Study by Duizenberg (2025), Ishihara & Cohen (2014) and Kim et al. (2023) emphasizes that pragmatic aspects of language (such as politeness and implicature) are nearly impossible to learn without active participation in the speech community. The significance of X2 proves that santri "absorb" the social rules of language through daily social friction, not through visual memorization.

The Superiority of Active Involvement

These findings are consistent with recent neurocognitive research. Studies by De Wilde et al. (2020), MacLeod et al. (2010), and Rowland et al. (2014) shows that the production effect of actively producing words creates a much stronger memory trace in the brain than passive perception. In the context of TMI, Muhadatsah (mandatory conversation) and public debate activities force students to fully activate their language circuits, which in turn strengthens their sociolinguistic competence much more effectively than simply reading wall magazines (X1).

Deconstructing the Mystery of Low R-Squared (9.2%)

An R^2 value of 0.092 is often misinterpreted as a sign of research weakness. However, in the context of complex SLA, this is a meaningful finding. If X1 and X2 only explain 9.2% of the variance, where is the remaining 90.8%?

The Individual Faktor Differences

Scopus Q1 literature in the field of SLA consistently shows that internal factors are often stronger predictors than external environmental factors; a) Willingness to Communicate (WTC): Studies by Duizenberg (2025), MacIntyre (1994), and Peng (2022) identifying WTC as a key variable. A student may be in an intense interactive environment (high X2), but if he or she has high trait anxiety or low WTC, he or she will withdraw from the interaction, thereby preventing the development of competence, b) Motivation and Identity: Integrative motivation (desire to be part of the L2 community) vs. instrumental motivation (only for grades) greatly influences how deeply students process input. Dörnyei's L2 Motivational Self System may explain most of this missing variance (Duizenberg, 2020).

Quality vs. Quantity of Interaction

The IEIS instrument in this study measures intensity (frequency), not the quality of interaction. It is highly likely that many interactions are repetitive or superficial (phatic communion). A study by Suka et al. emphasizes the importance of "deep processing." If santri interactions are limited to the same daily pleasantries, then the impact on sociolinguistic competence (which requires complex register variation) will be limited, resulting in a small R^2 even though the variables are significant.

The Dynamic Systems Theory Perspective

Referring to the work of Burhanuddin (2024) and Luo (2025), Second language development is viewed as a chaotic non-linear system. The relationship between environmental input and competence is not always linear (1:1). There are unpredictable factors (butterfly effect) such as the emotional state of students, native language background (L1), and exposure to digital media that interact dynamically. Linear regression models may be too simplistic to capture this complexity, leaving a large amount of residual variance.

D. Conclusion

This study, through rigorous statistical analysis and in-depth theoretical interpretation, successfully maps the anatomy of the language environment's influence at TMI Al-Amien Prenduan, revealing a fundamental asymmetry in its impact. Despite its massive and measurable presence, the visual environment specifically the Linguistic Landscape fails to exert a significant effect on students' sociolinguistic competence, leading to the rejection of the first hypothesis. This finding confirms that sociolinguistic competence cannot be effectively acquired through passive osmosis. Instead, social interaction pressure emerges as the sole significant environmental determinant (supporting the second hypothesis), acting as the crucial mechanism by which language knowledge is converted into social competence through friction, feedback, and the negotiation of meaning. Furthermore, the study highlights the limits of environmental determinism; a notably low R-squared value of 9.2% demonstrates that the physical and social environments act merely as initial facilitators. The true crux of language mastery resides within the internal realm of students' motivation, talent, and psychology areas not yet fully addressed by current environmental engineering. Ultimately, these findings suggest that the future of language education in Islamic boarding schools does not lie in walls covered with writing, but rather in the cultivation of spaces for lively, dynamic, and humane dialogue.

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