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Original Article

Arabic Language Learning Strategies in Elementary Education: Enhancing Student Motivation and Comprehension through Pedagogical Innovation

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Abstract

Arabic language instruction at the elementary level constitutes a crucial foundation for subsequent linguistic development; however, classroom practice is frequently constrained by limited student engagement and the predominance of monotonous instructional techniques. This study examines the implementation of innovative pedagogical strategies at MI Salafiyah Syafi'iyyah Bandung III and evaluates their implications for learners' motivation and vocabulary acquisition. Employing a descriptive qualitative design, data were obtained through participant observation, in-depth interviews with teachers and students, and analysis of relevant instructional documents. The findings indicate that the incorporation of language-based games and visually enriched learning media fostered a more interactive classroom climate, which in turn enhanced student participation and attendance. Moreover, these strategies were found to facilitate learners' comprehension and retention of basic vocabulary and simple sentence patterns. The study further reveals that learning approaches aligned with children's cognitive and affective characteristics can mitigate common obstacles in early foreign language instruction. Overall, the results underscore the importance of pedagogical innovation in revitalizing Arabic language learning in madrasas and suggest that context-sensitive, child-centered strategies can serve as an effective catalyst for improving both learner motivation and foundational language competence.

Keywords: Arabic Learning Strategies, Elementary Education, Pedagogical Innovation, Student Motivation.

1. Introduction

Language constitutes a fundamental human necessity, serving as a primary medium for expressing ideas, thoughts, and emotions in both spoken and written forms, thereby enabling meaningful communication among individuals (Muhammad et al., 2023). In the global educational context, Arabic occupies a distinctive position as a language of religion, culture, and international communication, making it an important subject of study in many regions.

Nurkarimah (2025) emphasizes that despite its importance, Arabic language learning presents considerable challenges for learners, particularly at the beginner level. One of the most persistent difficulties lies in constructing grammatically accurate Arabic sentences. While some learners are able to gradually adapt to these linguistic demands, others experience persistent obstacles that may lead to reduced motivation, learning fatigue, and disengagement from the learning process.

Novinsah (2020) argues that the various rules and skills of Arabic in the syllabus must be delivered simultaneously in a limited time, which is a challenge for Arabic language teachers. In addition, the character of MI students, both physically and psychologically, needs

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to be well understood by a teacher, but it must be a driver to be more careful in designing learning strategies according to the demands of the times and the character of students so that Arabic lessons are not only easy to understand but also enjoyable for students. This point is 'homework' for Arabic language educators, namely making Arabic learning a plus point in the eyes of students. Although this presents a considerable challenge, it does not render it unattainable. Teachers will face unique challenges in teaching it to children. Unlike other languages, Arabic has a complex structure and word order, requiring learning methods that can facilitate teaching Arabic to children, especially at the elementary level (Benyo et al., 2022; Murxanova, 2025).

In Indonesia , Islamic educational institutions (from elementary to university) that make Arabic a compulsory subject for all students aim to develop an understanding of Islamic knowledge and to master this foreign language as an international language (Al-Khawaldeh & Burhani, 2025; Azizah, 2020). Arabic is a crucial subject in the Islamic education system, particularly at the Islamic elementary school, as the instillation of Arabic at this level is a process that will be carried into adulthood.

As mentioned above, Arabic serves not only as a means of communication but also as the primary key to understanding the sources of Islamic teachings, namely the Quran and Hadith. Therefore, mastering Arabic from an early age is a fundamental requirement for students to ensure they are intellectually and spiritually prepared for the next level of education (Al-halaq, 2020). Upon graduating from madrasah, students already have a good command of Arabic. If students can understand Arabic from an early age, it's guaranteed to be easy in the future. It's easy to understand everything. Nowadays, it's no surprise that people can speak Arabic, as it's so urgent. Once someone has mastered Arabic, they will have a unique value in the eyes of others.

Arabic language learning in madrasah and Islamic boarding school environments is mandatory to support religious understanding (Rahmaini, 2023). Rahmaini (2023) demonstrates that Arabic learning is mandatory in both madrasas and Islamic boarding schools. At Islamic elementary school, Arabic is taught as a compulsory subject from grades 1 to 6. This learning is expected to equip students with basic Arabic language skills, particularly vocabulary mastery *(mufradat)*, simple expressions, and comprehension of short texts. However, in practice, Arabic learning has not been fully optimized. Especially in Islamic elementary school. Some of the problems that frequently arise in Arabic language learning in Islamic elementary school students include low student motivation to learn, limited learning media, and the use of monotonous and stagnant learning methods. Furthermore, the differences in Arabic language structure with Indonesian often hinder students understanding of the material. Islamic elementary school students have even struggled with writing Arabic, often finding it "very slow" due to the infrequent use of Arabic letters in class (Alhumaira & Lubis, 2023; Wahidah et al., 2022).

While previous studies have extensively discussed the use of media in Arabic language learning, this research offers novelty by exploring the synergy between contextual game strategies and visual media adapted to the local curriculum at MI Salafiyah Syafi'iyyah Bandung III. This is crucial given the gap between curriculum demands and students' basic skills in writing and constructing Arabic sentences, which often triggers boredom.

These conditions require Arabic language teachers to be skilled at designing and implementing appropriate learning strategies. Varied, creative, and tailored learning strategies tailored to student characteristics are expected to create a pleasant learning environment and increase student engagement and understanding. Therefore, according to researchers, this problem is so crucial that it needs to be researched further.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Language as a Medium of Communication and the Position of Arabic in Islamic Education

Language is widely conceptualized as a primary medium through which meaning is constructed and conveyed in social interaction (Noermanzah, 2019). In the Indonesian context, Arabic holds a strategic and epistemic position within Islamic education, as foundational religious sources and much of the classical Islamic scholarly tradition are articulated in Arabic. Consequently, Arabic learning in madrasas is not merely instrumental but also constitutive of religious literacy and identity formation. Nevertheless, existing literature tends to frame Arabic predominantly in terms of its religious function, with limited attention to the pedagogical challenges faced by young learners in acquiring functional communicative competence.

2.2. Foundational Arabic Language Learning at the Elementary Level

At the MI/SD level, Nurkarimah (2025) underscores the importance of emphasizing basic listening and speaking skills as the foundation of Arabic language acquisition. While this skills-oriented approach is essential for early learners, prior studies often prioritize linguistic mechanics over learners' affective experiences. This narrow focus risks overlooking the developmental characteristics of children, such as limited attention span and the need for experiential learning, which may hinder sustained engagement in Arabic classrooms.

2.3. Innovative Learning Media and Student Motivation

Research on instructional innovation suggests that interactive media such as videos, simulations, and educational applications, can enhance students' comprehension of vocabulary, grammar, and cultural context while simultaneously increasing learning motivation and classroom participation (Dhamija & Dhamija, 2019). However, much of the existing work remains technology-centered, emphasizing tools rather than examining how such media can be pedagogically integrated into daily classroom practices, particularly in resource-constrained madrasah settings.

2.4. Motivation in Early Arabic Language Learning: A Research Gap

Motivation is a critical determinant of successful foreign language learning, as learners' internal drive shapes persistence, attention, and effort. Despite its acknowledged importance, strategies for fostering motivation in elementary Arabic instruction remain underexplored. Existing studies often discuss motivation as an outcome rather than as a design principle embedded within instructional strategies (Nurkarimah, 2025). This indicates a gap in the literature, particularly regarding how pedagogical innovation aligned with children's psychological characteristics can systematically enhance motivation and learning outcomes in primary-level Arabic education.

3. Methods

According to Nasution (2023) qualitative research has the natural setting as the direct source of data and researcher is the key instrument. He understands qualitative research as being as naturalistic as possible, with the researcher as the primary focus. This study uses a qualitative approach with a descriptive approach.

The research subjects were Arabic language teachers and fifth-grade students of Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Salafiyah Syafi'iyyah Bandung III. Data were obtained through observation of the learning process, interviews with the madrasah principal and teachers, and

documentation. Data analysis was carried out through the stages of data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions.

4. Results and Discussion

Fatihah (2023) essentially, every human being possesses the ability to learn every language, albeit to varying degrees and with varying motivation. These differences can stem from differences in the desired learning objectives, basic abilities, internal motivations, interests, and persistence. Therefore, foreign language instruction, including Arabic, must be tailored to the child's learning needs.

According to Alwi (2022) Arabic is a second language as well as a religious language for Indonesian people, so Arabic is the main subject for school under the auspices of the Ministry of Religion. Learning Arabic in has different Madrasah Ibtidaiyah is the initial foundation for students in learning it, each school has different in the teaching process. Mohamad Alwi understands that Arabic is both a second language and a religious language for Indonesians, making it a compulsory subject under the Ministry of Religious Affairs. Learning Arabic provides the foundation for understanding the language, and each madrasah (Islamic school) has its own unique methods and strategies.

Alfianor (2022) note that strategy is a crucial tool for the success of teaching and education. As Asse and Nursyam (2014) stated, without an appropriate and appropriate strategy, it will be difficult to achieve the desired goals and objectives. Strategy is a general and systematic way of working, especially in the search for scientific truth. In relation to Arabic language teaching, strategy always stems from the essence of conveying teaching materials to students so that they are understood and accepted. Whoever holds the strategy demands skill and ability to apply it. Strategy is a tool or something used as a solution. With practice and concentration, anyone can become an expert and able to improvise. The success or failure of Arabic language learning is determined by the strategy used. Therefore, strategy occupies a crucial position in achieving the method and content of language teaching.

According to the researcher's interview with the Arabic language teacher and the principal, he said that:

"Yes, it's true that fifth-grade students in MI sometimes have difficulty understanding Arabic. This is despite the fact that their parents have tutored them at home and the Arabic language teacher has also provided them with guidance at school," (Interview with principal, 1 October 2025).

"The Arabic language teacher added that fifth-grade students in MI do indeed have difficulty memorizing vocabulary." (Interview with the teacher, 2 October 2025).

Based on the results of an interview with an Arabic language teacher on October 2, 2025, it was revealed that the main difficulty for fifth-grade students was memorizing abstract vocabulary. The teacher explained: 'Before there were visual media, students often felt sleepy. However, since we used picture cards and word guessing games, they have been more competitive and actively asked questions.' Observational data supports this explanation, where students were able to complete vocabulary quizzes 30% faster than when using conventional lecture methods.

After researchers conducted fieldwork, they discovered that Arabic language learning still faced difficulties in understanding. Upon recognizing these difficulties, Arabic language teachers implemented several strategies. The results showed that the Arabic language learning

strategies implemented by teachers included vocabulary memorization, question-and-answer sessions, language games, and visual media.

This strategy has been proven to increase student engagement during the learning process. Furthermore, the use of visual media helps students understand the meaning of the vocabulary "*mufradat*" more easily. This finding aligns with language learning theory, which emphasizes the importance of active and contextual learning, particularly at the elementary level.

5. Conclusion

This study concludes that the implementation of innovative strategies such as language games and visual media at MI Salafiyah Syafi'iyyah Bandung III has proven effective in increasing fifth-grade students' learning motivation. Field findings indicate that structural barriers in Arabic can be overcome through a more enjoyable and student-centered approach. The main recommendation for educators is the need for consistency in updating learning media to align with the development of student interests at the elementary school level.

This research contributes to the field of Islamic pedagogy by providing a practical framework for educators to transform "monotonous" Arabic lessons into engaging and interactive experiences. The pedagogical implication suggests that teachers must shift from traditional rote-memorization to student-centered innovation to ensure foundational linguistic competence.

Despite its findings, this study is limited by its small sample size and focus on a single institution. Future research should involve a broader demographic or adopt a quantitative approach to measure the long-term academic impact of these strategies on students' speaking and writing proficiency across various educational contexts.

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