

STRATEGIES FOR INTRODUCING ARABIC NUMBERS AND COLORS IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

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Abstract: Arabic language learning for early childhood is often hindered by monotonous strategies, making it difficult for children to grasp the material effectively. This study describes the strategies used to introduce numbers and colours in Arabic at an early childhood education institution (RA) in Central Java. The research involved children from group A1 and a class 1 teacher as subjects. A qualitative approach was employed, with data collected through interviews, observations, and documentation. The findings indicate that the strategies used to introduce Arabic numbers and colors to young children involved memory, cognitive, and compensation strategies, combined with singing, conversation, and play methods. The integration of these strategies and methods enhanced the children's engagement and attention in learning numbers 1–10 and basic colors in Arabic. Despite challenges such as limited facilities and children's easily diverted attention, the learners remained enthusiastic, attentive, and showed cooperation in pronouncing numbers and colors in Arabic.

Keywords: Arabic Language Learning, Numbers and Colors, Early Childhood

A. Introduction

Early childhood is a period in which children experience a phase of rapid development and growth. One aspect of development that needs to be considered at this stage is language development. Language skills become an important aspect in the development of early childhood education because young children are in the golden age phase, where they easily absorb all the knowledge they acquire (Aziz et al., 2022). In the concept of language development, the first language acquired by a child is called the mother tongue, while a foreign language is known as the second language. One of the foreign languages that is important to introduce early in Indonesia is Arabic. This is due to the religious influence of the Indonesian society, which is predominantly Muslim, where the Quran and Hadith are the main sources of Islamic teachings that use the Arabic language. Therefore, Muslim children in Indonesia are indirectly introduced to the Arabic language from an early age (Hakim, 2022). The introduction of Arabic as a second language in Indonesia also has a specific purpose, namely to support worship. Arabic is used in prayer recitations and daily prayers, so understanding this language becomes important in forming the religious foundation for Muslim children from an early age.

Learning Arabic in early childhood is an important first step in introducing a foreign language, so many basic materials need to be taught to children, including introducing numbers and colors. The use of numbers and colors as initial materials provides a strong foundation for the development of their language skills, as both are concepts that are easily recognizable and frequently encountered. A child's ability to recognize numbers is a form of their ability to understand symbols representing quantities (Ula et al., 2023). In addition, color recognition is also one of the basic subjects after numbers. Colors are related to the spectrum of colors and encompass aspects of culture, symbolism, beauty, emotions, and more (Semiotika & Barthes, 2020).

Introducing numbers and colors in Arabic to children needs to be done with the right strategy. Early childhood children tend to understand lessons more easily through interactive and enjoyable approaches. However, the problem is that teachers do not fully use varied teaching strategies in Arabic language learning. Monotonous learning can cause children to lose interest, become easily bored,

and have difficulty understanding the material. Therefore, for learning to be effective, every educator must choose the right learning strategy, which allows for the determination of methods, media, and evaluations according to the needs and characteristics of students, especially for early childhood. Learning strategies are a series of steps teachers take to realize actual, efficient, and practical learning activities. (Ariyanti & Syarifah, 2021). Unfortunately, implementing Arabic language learning strategies in early childhood education institutions still encounters many problems.

According to a journal referencing the 2019 survey results from the Indonesian Ministry of Religious Affairs, several main issues have been identified in teaching Arabic in early childhood in Indonesia. This survey involved 150 Islamic early childhood education institutions in five provinces: Central Java, East Java, West Java, South Sulawesi, and North Sumatra. First, around 70% of early childhood education teachers face difficulties delivering material because most do not have a background in Arabic language education or are not graduates of a bachelor's degree in childhood education. Second, as many as 80% of early childhood education institutions still apply conventional teaching methods, such as lectures and memorization, which are less suitable for the characteristics of young children. Third, 65% of institutions still lack interactive Arabic language learning media, such as educational games, audio-visual materials, and digital applications. Lastly, due to limited knowledge of Arabic, only 40% of parents actively support their children's Arabic learning at home (Nur et al., 2024).

Facing these challenges, several early childhood education institutions in Indonesia have been striving to develop varied strategies for Arabic language learning. Several studies have shown that the use of appropriate strategies can have a positive impact on the effectiveness of Arabic language learning. One of the studies conducted by Muniroh et al., (2022), which examined Arabic language learning at Raudhatul Athfal Nurul Iman Sampit and Assanabil Banjarmasin, found that Arabic language learning strategies that prioritize the use of visual media, singing methods, contextual approaches, and repetition have proven to enhance children's interest and vocabulary mastery. A similar point was made by Roajana, (2024) through research at Raudhatul Athfal Al-Ikhlas in Pariaman City, which showed that using methods

such as singing, card games, and writing helps improve children's vocabulary mastery, pronunciation, and learning motivation.

Based on the findings above, it can be concluded that although Arabic language learning in early childhood in Indonesia has great potential, its implementation still faces real challenges from educators' limited competence to parents' low active role in the learning process. Therefore, effective and responsive learning strategies for advancing educational technology are needed.

The learning strategies that can be applied to teach Arabic to young children, according to Nurhidayati and Ridwan (in Isbah et al., 2022) There are direct and indirect learning strategies. Direct learning strategies include memory, cognitive, and compensation strategies. Meanwhile, indirect learning strategies include metacognitive, emotional, and social strategies.

Memory Strategy. This strategy is applied to store information learned through reading or listening so that learners can remember and use it again when needed. Four aspects of this strategy include: (a) the integration of spirituality and creativity, a combination of spiritual creativity aspects; (b) the balance of voice and imagination; (c) review; and (d) activity implementation. **Cognitive Strategy.** This strategy involves training techniques, transferring and sending information, analyzing, guessing, and forming sentence patterns. **Compensation Strategy.** This strategy aims to help learners address their limitations in understanding and knowledge of language and linguistic abilities.

The goals and focus of early childhood Arabic language learning are undoubtedly different from those of teaching at higher education levels. By understanding these differences, educators can design more interactive and enjoyable learning experiences, allowing children to absorb the material more easily and develop their language skills from an early age. In addition to choosing the right strategy, educators must carefully consider methods and media to support learning.

Learning methods are approaches used by educators to ensure that the teaching and learning process runs smoothly and successfully achieves the desired goals. (Yakin et al., 2020). The methods for introducing numbers and colors in Arabic vary, including singing, playing, and conversing. Educators can create an enjoyable learning atmosphere by choosing the correct

process, making children more enthusiastic about learning. Meanwhile, interactive learning media for teaching numbers and colors in Arabic to young children must be designed to be engaging, appropriate for the child's developmental stage, and easily accessible. Therefore, applying proper strategies and methods in Arabic language learning is very important because it can create organized, systematic, and practical learning. It makes children more enthusiastic about learning and allows their Arabic language skills to develop early. Based on that urgency, examining the implementation of Arabic language learning strategies and methods in early childhood education institutions is very important.

Raudhatul Athfal (RA) At-Tarbiyah is one of the early childhood education units located in Jepara Regency, which implements Arabic language learning as an opportunity to introduce foreign languages and strengthen Islamic culture. Therefore, introducing numbers and colors in Arabic at RA At-Tarbiyah is important in supporting young children's foreign language learning. Accordingly, this research aims to explore a deeper understanding of the effectiveness of teaching using memory, cognitive, and compensation strategies combined with methods such as singing, conversing, and playing in introducing and enhancing children's understanding of numbers and colors in Arabic at RA At-Tarbiyah as an effort to strengthen the foundation of foreign language and Islamic values from an early age.

B. Method

This research is a field study with a qualitative approach. Qualitative research studies phenomena in their natural conditions. In this approach, the researcher acts as the primary instrument, data is collected through triangulation techniques or method integration, data analysis is conducted inductively, and the results emphasize understanding meaning rather than generalization (Sugiyono, 2022). This research activity was conducted at RA At-Tarbiyah, located in Dongos Village, Kedung District, Jepara Regency. The research subjects consisted of 20 children in group A1 and 1 class teacher. Data was collected through interviews, observations, documentation, and the integration of various relevant sources.

Interviews were conducted with the school principal and class teachers to obtain information related to the Arabic language

teaching strategies implemented, the role of teachers in the learning process, and the challenges faced in the field. Observation was conducted during the learning process, where the researcher was also directly involved as a teacher. The observation focused on the children's responses to the teaching methods and media used and their involvement in class activities. Documentation was completed as a data complement by collecting activity photos and field notes.

Data analysis uses descriptive analysis, which means systematically presenting and interpreting the data. The analysis involves combining, selecting, comparing, and filtering information to find relevant data.

C. Results and Discussion

Based on the interview results with the leader of RA At-Tarbiyah, introducing the Arabic language to children from an early age aims to familiarize them with a foreign language with religious values. Since RA At-Tarbiyah is a religious-based educational institution, almost all daily activities use Arabic, such as prayers, short verses, hadiths, and worship performances. The A1 class teacher stated that the teaching strategies usually applied in the classroom include demonstrations, dialogues, question and answer sessions, and the assignment of simple tasks. Although these approaches help deliver the material, they are still conventional when applied to early childhood children who enjoy fun things and easily get bored.

Learning Arabic for early childhood has characteristics that differ from learning for adult students due to differences in learning orientation and student characteristics. This difference impacts the selection of materials, strategies, methods, media, evaluation, and learning environment (Mahyudin, 2018). Adult learners appear to be more independent and learn rationally and purposefully, in contrast to young children, who have a character that enjoys playing and learning through concrete experiences. According to Tamat (in Sihombing, 2019) several characteristics of adult learning include (1) the learning process focuses on knowledge, skills, maturity, and attitudes; (2) it involves activities such as discussions, problem-solving, experiments, exercises, simulations, and field practice to gain understanding and personal growth; (3) adult learners can learn when the material they study relates to the problems they face; and (4) the enhancement of competence is emphasized through real-

life activities they engage in. These differences in characteristics show that Arabic language learning must be adapted to the phases of development and needs of students from all age groups.

Activities conducted in the A1 RA At-Tarbiyah group focus on teaching vocabulary of numbers and colors in Arabic through direct interaction with the children. The introduction vocabulary is essential in learning Arabic and operates as an initial foundation for children to develop language skills. Vocabulary learning is a fundamental type of learning that is very easy for children just starting their education, especially in early childhood education (Ramadhan, 2017). Therefore, as an initial step to introduce basic vocabulary to the A1 group at RA At-Tarbiyah, the researcher chose the material of numbers and colors in Arabic through more diverse and interactive strategies and methods tailored to the characteristics and needs of the children.

The learning process is designed in three stages: opening, main activity, and closing, to ensure that each step is enjoyable and well-structured.



Figure 1. Material introduction through flashcards

At the start of the activity, the researcher has prepared materials and media to support the learning process. This opening activity begins with familiarisation, beginning with prayer before studying, reciting Asmaul Husna, reading short verses, and daily prayers. Moving on to the first material, which is the number introduction. The number of lessons focuses on the numbers 1 to 10 in Arabic. Before using media to introduce numbers, the researcher provided an exploratory lesson, such as counting from 1 to 10 in Indonesian and then using Arabic to make it easier for the children to understand the material.

The next step is using flashcards to introduce numbers in

Arabic. Flashcards are used to teach the vocabulary of numbers and colors in Arabic so that they can recognize and understand the material more easily. It is in line with Arsyad's view (in Nihayati & Sholiha, 2023) which states that using flashcard media is an effective learning process because it utilizes picture cards, text, or symbols that help students remember easily and improve their skills in recognizing symbols and letters. During the activity, the researcher pronounced the numbers in Arabic, and then the children repeated the pronunciation. When the introduction began through flashcards, the children appeared to pay close attention. They started to show enthusiasm in learning the numbers 1 to 10 in Arabic, although some children needed repetition to reinforce their understanding.



Figure 2. Material introduction through singing

The next activity involves repeating the material using the first strategy applied by the researcher, known as the memory strategy. This strategy helps children retain the material they have previously learned through flashcards. The repetition is reinforced through the singing method while displaying music videos from YouTube, played twice. This method is chosen because young children enjoy singing, creating a more enjoyable learning atmosphere and strengthening their memory. Aziz Muzayin & Meitia Faramida Sugiharyati, (2023) They also explain that the singing method is highly effective in stimulating children to absorb the material taught, increasing their interest in learning, and reducing boredom or tension during learning activities. In its implementation, the children sang the song together, enabling them to recite confidently the numbers 1 to 10 in Arabic. It demonstrates that repetition

through music videos can accelerate vocabulary acquisition in a foreign language and enhance children's engagement.



Figure 3. Material introduction through conversation

During the implementation, an obstacle was the unavailability of a projector to integrate technology. This resulted in the music video being displayed only through a laptop, which caused the learning atmosphere to be less than optimal. The A1 class teacher expressed that there are still limitations in implementing technology at RA At-Tarbiyah, such as the unavailability of projectors and speakers, unstable Wi-Fi networks, and insufficient supporting facilities to meet the children's learning needs. This condition aligns with Hasan's opinion (in Kurniadi, 2024). The utilization of technology in Arabic language education in Indonesia is still severely limited. In this digital era, technology should enhance interest and the effectiveness of learning. However, some educational institutions still do not use technology and have not yet utilized it in teaching Arabic. Nevertheless, these limitations do not hinder teachers or researchers from creating an enjoyable learning atmosphere by singing together, thus keeping the learning interactive.

Cognitive strategies are applied after singing activities to enhance children's understanding of Arabic numbers. This strategy involves sending and receiving information, guessing, analyzing, and constructing sentence patterns, which aims to help children think while learning. The method used is conversational, where children take turns counting the colorful balls in Arabic. During this process, they actively interact with the teacher and their classmates while practicing their ability to count in Arabic. Conversing is very important

for early childhood development because it can enhance communication skills with others, improve the ability to complete tasks together, and boost verbal skills in expressing feelings or conclusions (Fatimah & Linarsih, Marmawi R, 2023).

The next phase, after the child understands the numbers 1-10 in Arabic, is that the researcher connects the learning with colorful balls to introduce the second material, which is about basic colors in Arabic, such as red, orange, yellow, green, and blue. At this stage, the children are asked to name the colors in Indonesian first and then asked to name the colors in Arabic. However, only a few children were able to answer correctly. Therefore, the strategy used in this process is compensation, which helps to overcome their deficiencies in understanding a new language or vocabulary. Then, the researcher introduced color vocabulary using flashcards and sang a color song in Arabic using repetition with the same method as when introducing numbers. After repeatedly using songs and flashcards, the children began to recognize colors in Arabic, and most of them started to be able to pronounce basic color vocabulary. However, this process took longer compared to learning numbers.

Children in the A1 group tend to have attention and focus that are easily distracted, making this a particular challenge in the learning process, especially when learning a foreign language like Arabic. Learning Arabic requires a high level of independence and motivation because there are many challenges in understanding various aspects of the language, and a lack of motivation can hinder significant progress (Sulaiman, 2023). In addition, the duration of learning needs to be adjusted so that it is not too long, allowing children to remain motivated and avoid boredom during the learning process. Therefore, in the main activities, the researcher applied an interactive learning method, namely the play method.

Playing is an essential part of a child's world. Through play, children have fun, acquire new knowledge, develop ideas, and have opportunities to explore, imagine, and create with appropriate stimulation and support, as well as meet their developmental needs (Fauziddin & Fikriya, 2020). Research by Muharram et al., (2023) revealed that the application of play-based methods in Arabic language learning has a very positive impact on students' ability to recognize letters, numbers, and vocabulary.



Figure 4. Play-based plasticine collage activity

Beginning the main activity, the researcher applied a method of playing with a plasticine collage to strengthen the children's understanding of numbers and colors in Arabic. According to Swartz (in Mustiani et al., 2023) plasticine is a material that children can use to play in the classroom, which serves as entertainment and provides enjoyable and satisfying experiences for children. Research by Suranto reveals that learning using plasticine media is well received by children and is effective in improving their ability to recognize numbers and colors and developing their fine motor skills (Suranto & Ansyori, 2021).

The learning process begins by showing the shapes of Arabic numbers using collage cards. After that, the children are invited to recite together the basic colors on the plasticine, such as red, yellow, green, and blue, in Arabic. The researcher then demonstrated how to form Arabic numerals with plasticine according to the patterns on the collage cards. During this process, the children had to choose the number of cards and the colors of the plasticine they preferred. The children appeared very enthusiastic and interested in this learning medium. During the activity, the teacher also provided guidance by asking them to mention the numbers and colors they received in Arabic to reinforce their understanding of the concepts of numbers and colors in Arabic. The learning media is also designed to provide an engaging and interactive learning experience, motivating children to be involved in the learning process.

Playing with plasticine and forming Arabic numerals indirectly serves as an early introduction to writing skills for children aged 4-5 in group A1. Through fine motor activities, children learn to recognize the visual forms of Arabic numerals and try to imitate them, which is an early stage in the development of writing skills.

Playing with playdough can train children's fingers and the coordination between their eyes and hands. In addition, children can freely create according to their desires, making them more enthusiastic about playing while honing their fine motor skills. These fine motor skills are essential for helping children prepare to move on to the next stage of learning, such as writing skills (Sari & Nursafitri, 2024).

In this closing activity, the children repeated the vocabulary of numbers, followed by the vocabulary of colors that had been demonstrated earlier in Arabic, both through pronunciation and singing. The researcher also conducted an assessment by observing the children as they practiced pronouncing vocabulary in Arabic and their ability to remember the material they had learned. They also provided feedback to improve their understanding.

Based on the observations, there is no significant difference in the learning enthusiasm between boys and girls. However, boys seem more enthusiastic about physical activities, such as playing with plasticine or group games, while girls appear more focused on activities like singing and dialogue. The children's response to this learning becomes a key indicator in determining a strategy appropriate for the classroom situation.

Implementing the strategies applied in learning is also inseparable from the classroom teacher's role. The head of RA At-Tarbiyah revealed that besides delivering learning materials, the classroom teacher plays a crucial role as a facilitator who accompanies the children and provides guidance during the learning process. This was also evident during observations of the learning activities, where the teacher was involved in every stage, motivating, and when the child experienced difficulties understanding Arabic vocabulary. By understanding the role of the teacher as a facilitator in helping children build knowledge, educators can develop effective learning strategies, create an interactive environment, and enhance good interactions with students. This will help overall development and support success in the early stages of development. (Reviani et al., 2023).

The teaching activities for introducing numbers and colors in Arabic finished smoothly. The children of group A1 RA At-Tarbiyah showed enthusiasm and active participation during the learning process, using various strategies,

methods, and media tailored to their development and characteristics. This aims to help children recognize and understand numbers and colors in Arabic more effectively.

D. Conclusion

Learning strategies that combine memory, cognitive, and compensation strategies with methods such as singing, conversing, and playing with plasticine collages have proven effective in introducing numbers and colors in Arabic to early childhood children at RA At-Tarbiyah, particularly in group A1. The children appeared to pay attention during the lesson and showed unity in pronouncing numbers and colors in Arabic. Although challenges include limited facilities and the children's attention being easily diverted, they still show enthusiasm during the learning process.

It is hoped that educators continue to implement the strategies and methods applied in this learning process. In addition, it is crucial to develop creative innovations while still paying attention to the development and characteristics of children in early childhood. This aims to introduce Arabic language learning as a foreign language in an enjoyable way so that children do not feel bored while also increasing their motivation and enthusiasm during the learning process.

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