

## INTEGRATION OF PLAY-BASED ARABIC LANGUAGE LEARNING IN DEVELOPING EARLY CHILDHOOD LINGUISTIC COMPETENCE

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### ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze and describe the integration of play-based Arabic language learning in developing early childhood linguistic competence. Early childhood education represents a critical period for language acquisition, where appropriate stimulation significantly influences children's future language abilities. However, Arabic language instruction in early childhood settings often relies on conventional methods, such as rote memorization, which are less aligned with children's developmental characteristics. Therefore, this study proposes a play-based learning approach as a more effective and child-centered alternative. This research employed a qualitative approach with a case study design conducted at Raudhatul Athfal Ibrahimy Sukorejo. The participants included teachers, the school principal, and children aged 5–6 years. Data were collected through participatory observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation, and analyzed using the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña, including data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The findings reveal that play-based Arabic language learning is implemented through various activities such as songs, role-playing, storytelling, and the use of visual learning media. This approach creates a meaningful, interactive, and enjoyable learning environment that enhances children's engagement. Furthermore, the results indicate that play-based learning contributes significantly to the development of linguistic competence, including phonological, morphological, syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic aspects. Children not only acquire vocabulary but also demonstrate the ability to use Arabic in simple communicative contexts. In conclusion, play-based Arabic language learning serves as an effective and holistic pedagogical model for early childhood education. It provides both theoretical and practical contributions to improving language teaching practices that are developmentally appropriate and contextually relevant.

**Keywords:** *Arabic language learning, play-based learning, early childhood education, linguistic competence, preschool education*

### ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis dan mendeskripsikan integrasi pembelajaran bahasa Arab berbasis bermain dalam mengembangkan kompetensi linguistik anak usia dini. Pendidikan anak usia dini merupakan fase krusial dalam pemerolehan bahasa, di mana stimulasi yang tepat akan berpengaruh signifikan terhadap kemampuan berbahasa di masa depan. Namun, praktik pembelajaran bahasa Arab pada PAUD masih didominasi metode konvensional seperti hafalan, yang kurang sesuai dengan karakteristik perkembangan anak. Oleh karena itu, penelitian ini menawarkan pendekatan pembelajaran berbasis bermain sebagai alternatif yang lebih efektif dan berpusat pada anak. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan desain studi kasus yang dilaksanakan di Raudhatul Athfal

Ibrahimi Sukorejo. Subjek penelitian meliputi guru, kepala sekolah, dan anak usia 5–6 tahun. Teknik pengumpulan data dilakukan melalui observasi partisipatif, wawancara mendalam, dan dokumentasi. Analisis data menggunakan model interaktif Miles, Huberman, dan Saldaña yang meliputi reduksi data, penyajian data, dan penarikan kesimpulan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa pembelajaran bahasa Arab berbasis bermain diimplementasikan melalui berbagai aktivitas seperti lagu, permainan peran, storytelling, serta penggunaan media visual. Pendekatan ini mampu menciptakan suasana belajar yang interaktif, menyenangkan, dan bermakna sehingga meningkatkan keterlibatan anak. Selain itu, pembelajaran berbasis bermain berkontribusi signifikan terhadap pengembangan kompetensi linguistik anak, meliputi aspek fonologi, morfologi, sintaksis, semantik, dan pragmatik. Anak tidak hanya mengenal kosakata, tetapi juga mampu menggunakannya dalam komunikasi sederhana. Dengan demikian, pembelajaran bahasa Arab berbasis bermain merupakan model pedagogis yang efektif dan holistik serta relevan untuk diterapkan pada pendidikan anak usia dini.

**Kata Kunci:** *pembelajaran bahasa Arab, berbasis bermain, anak usia dini, kompetensi linguistik, PAUD*

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## INTRODUCTION

Early childhood education (ECE) constitutes a fundamental phase in children's cognitive, social, and linguistic development. At this stage, children exhibit a high sensitivity to language acquisition; therefore, appropriate stimulation significantly influences their future language abilities. In the context of Islamic education, Arabic functions not only as a means of communication but also as a medium for understanding primary sources of Islamic teachings. Consequently, the introduction of Arabic from an early age becomes a strategic necessity for fostering both linguistic and religious competence in children (Suyadi & Widodo, 2019; Rohman, 2020).

However, Arabic language instruction in early childhood education continues to face several challenges, particularly in relation to pedagogical approaches that are not aligned with children's developmental characteristics. Many instructional practices remain conventional, such as decontextualized vocabulary memorization, which tends to overlook play as a fundamental need of young learners. In fact, according to cognitive development theory, children learn most effectively through activities that are enjoyable, interactive, and contextual (Hasanah, 2021; Mulyasa, 2020). This misalignment has the potential to hinder the natural development of children's linguistic competence.

A play-based learning approach offers a solution that is more aligned with the nature of early childhood. Play is not merely a form of recreation, but also an effective learning

medium for fostering various aspects of development, including language. In the context of Arabic language instruction, the integration of play activities such as role-playing, songs, and storytelling can help children understand vocabulary and language structures in a contextualized and meaningful way (Nurgiyantoro, 2018; Fitriani, 2022). This approach is consistent with constructivist learning principles, which emphasize direct experience as the foundation for knowledge construction.

A number of previous studies have demonstrated that play-based methods can enhance children's motivation and engagement in language learning. For instance, a study by Sari (2021) found that the use of educational games in foreign language instruction significantly improved children's vocabulary retention. Similarly, Hidayat and Anwar (2022) reported that a communicative approach grounded in play-based activities effectively strengthened both receptive and productive Arabic language skills among young learners. These findings underscore the substantial potential of play-based approaches in early language education.

Nevertheless, systematic investigations into the integration of play-based Arabic language learning remain relatively limited, particularly those examining its relationship with the comprehensive development of linguistic competence, including phonological, morphological, syntactic, and semantic aspects. Most existing studies tend to focus on specific components, such as vocabulary acquisition or speaking skills, without addressing the full spectrum of linguistic competencies in an integrated manner. This indicates the presence of a research gap that warrants further in-depth exploration.

Based on the foregoing discussion, this study proposes a novel contribution in the form of an integrative model of play-based Arabic language learning designed holistically to develop early childhood linguistic competence. This model not only incorporates various forms of educational play but also systematically and structurally links them to key linguistic components. Accordingly, this study is expected to contribute theoretically to the advancement of Arabic language pedagogy in early childhood education, as well as practically by providing guidance for teachers in designing more effective and engaging learning experiences.

Therefore, the objective of this study is to analyze and describe the integration of play-based Arabic language learning in developing early childhood linguistic competence. It is anticipated that the findings will serve as a reference for the development of innovative Arabic language teaching practices that are aligned with children's developmental

characteristics, while also addressing pedagogical challenges in early childhood language education.

## METHOD

This study employed a qualitative approach with a case study design aimed at providing an in-depth description of the integration of play-based Arabic language learning in developing early childhood linguistic competence. A qualitative approach was chosen because the study focuses on understanding phenomena holistically within their natural context, emphasizing meaning, processes, and interactions that occur during learning (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moleong, 2017). The case study design was used to explore instructional practices specifically within a Raudhatul Athfal institution implementing play-based Arabic language learning.

The research site was selected purposively at an Islamic-based Raudhatul Athfal institution, namely Raudhatul Athfal Ibrahimy Sukorejo, which has integrated Arabic language instruction into daily learning activities. The participants included teachers, the school principal, and early childhood learners (Group B, aged 5–6 years). Participants were selected through purposive sampling based on their active involvement in Arabic language learning. This approach aimed to obtain relevant and in-depth data aligned with the research focus (Sugiyono, 2019).

Data were collected through participatory observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation. Observation was conducted to directly examine the implementation of play-based learning, including teacher–child interactions, types of games used, and children’s responses to Arabic language instruction. In-depth interviews were carried out with teachers and the school principal to explore instructional strategies, planning processes, and challenges encountered during implementation. Documentation, including lesson plans (RPPH), instructional media, and activity records, was used as supporting data to strengthen the research findings (Miles et al., 2014).

The primary research instrument in this study was the researcher as a human instrument, supported by observation protocols, interview guides, and documentation sheets. The researcher played an active role in collecting, analyzing, and interpreting the data. To ensure data trustworthiness, source and method triangulation were employed by comparing findings from observations, interviews, and documentation, thereby enhancing the credibility and reliability of the data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Data analysis was conducted interactively and continuously using the model proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña, which consists of three stages: (1) data reduction, (2) data display, and (3) conclusion drawing/verification. Data reduction involved selecting and focusing on information relevant to the integration of play-based learning. Data display was presented in a systematic descriptive narrative, while conclusions were drawn progressively with ongoing verification throughout the research process (Miles et al., 2014).

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Conceptualization of Play-Based Arabic Language Learning in Early Childhood

Play-based Arabic language learning in early childhood can be conceptualized as a pedagogical approach that integrates play activities with the aim of facilitating second language acquisition in a natural and contextualized manner. From the perspective of contemporary education, play is not merely a recreational activity but serves as a primary means through which children construct knowledge through direct experience and social interaction. Research indicates that play-based learning fosters meaningful, active, and developmentally appropriate learning experiences (Harris, 2023; Sitorus et al., 2025; Khoirotin et al., 2024). In the context of Arabic language instruction, this approach enables children to perceive language as a tool for communication rather than merely an object of memorization.

Conceptually, play-based learning is closely aligned with second language acquisition theories that emphasize the importance of social interaction and contextual language use. Activities such as role-playing, storytelling, and symbolic play provide opportunities for children to use Arabic functionally in real-life situations. Recent studies suggest that play-based interactions strengthen the relationship between language and meaning, thereby enhancing children's early literacy skills (Liu et al., 2025; Wati & Aulina, 2025). Accordingly, Arabic is acquired as a living social practice rather than as an abstract linguistic system.

This approach also positions children as active agents in the learning process. In play-based learning, children are given the freedom to explore, experiment, and interact with their environment, thereby fostering creativity and linguistic initiative. Research indicates that play activities can simultaneously enhance cognitive, social, and language development, as children learn through meaningful and enjoyable experiences (Sitorus et al., 2025; Harris,

2023). This is particularly relevant in Arabic language instruction, which is often perceived as difficult when taught through conventional methods.

Play-based language learning has also been shown to be effective in improving children's linguistic competence, both receptively and productively. Play-based interventions have demonstrated significant gains in vocabulary acquisition, speaking ability, and language comprehension among young learners (Misna & Pamungkas, 2025; Jurnal Pena PAUD, 2024; Hamdi et al., 2025). In the context of Arabic, this implies that children not only acquire vocabulary but are also able to use it in simple communicative contexts in a natural manner.

Thus, the conceptualization of play-based Arabic language learning can be understood as a holistic approach that integrates cognitive, social, emotional, and linguistic dimensions within a unified learning process. This approach underscores that the success of Arabic language learning in early childhood largely depends on learning experiences that are contextualized, interactive, and enjoyable. Therefore, play-based learning should not be viewed merely as an alternative, but rather as a central paradigm in early childhood language education in the contemporary era.

### **Implementation of Play-Based Arabic Language Learning in Early Childhood**

The implementation of play-based Arabic language learning in early childhood emphasizes the systematic and well-planned integration of play activities into the instructional process. In practice, teachers do not merely deliver language content; rather, they design meaningful learning experiences through educational activities such as songs, role-playing, picture cards, and storytelling. This approach has been shown to enhance children's active engagement, as learning takes place in an enjoyable and non-threatening environment (Heidari-Shahreza, 2024; Sitorus et al., 2025).

In its application, the teacher assumes the role of a facilitator who guides play activities to ensure that they maintain clear linguistic objectives. For example, the use of instructional games in Arabic (such as *iqra' wa ishārah* [read and point] or *simā' wa naffidz* [listen and act]) helps children comprehend vocabulary through direct action. Research indicates that structured play-based learning significantly improves children's ability to understand and express language (Wati & Aulina, 2025; Mayasari & Nasution, 2025).

The implementation of play-based learning also involves the use of concrete and visual media to support children's language comprehension. Media such as flashcards, puppets, and educational play materials function as linguistic stimuli that strengthen the association between words and their meanings. Research findings indicate that literacy-based

play activities significantly enhance children's language abilities, both in terms of comprehension and language production (Jurnal Pena PAUD, 2024; Misna & Pamungkas, 2025).

Another example of learning to count in Arabic is presented through a hoop game, where children jump from one hoop to another while counting in Arabic. Each jump serves as a stimulus to name the numbers sequentially, allowing children to learn kinesthetically and enjoyably. After passing through the hoops, children then put the ball into a bucket as a form of completing the task, which simultaneously trains motor coordination and focus. This activity reflects the integration of language learning, numeracy, and play, thus creating an active, contextual learning experience that is appropriate to the characteristics of early childhood. This can be seen in Figure 1.1:



**Figure 1.1: Counting in Arabic**

This approach also requires a supportive learning environment, often referred to as a language-rich environment. Such an environment enables children to be continuously exposed to the Arabic language through daily interactions. Studies show that the success of language learning in early childhood is strongly influenced by the intensity of interaction and the quality of the available linguistic environment (Esanova et al., 2024; van der Westhuizen & Hannaway, 2021).

The implementation of play-based Arabic language learning depends not only on instructional methods but also on the synergy among the teacher's role, learning media, and the learning environment. This approach has proven effective in creating meaningful, interactive, and contextual learning experiences, thereby optimizing children's language development. Therefore, appropriate implementation can make Arabic language learning

more adaptive to the characteristics of early childhood and more aligned with contemporary educational paradigms.

### **Development of Early Childhood Linguistic Competence**

The development of linguistic competence in early childhood constitutes a fundamental foundation for supporting children's cognitive, social, and academic growth in the future. Linguistic competence encompasses phonological, morphological, syntactic, and semantic abilities that develop progressively through interaction with the environment. Research indicates that early language proficiency is strongly correlated with academic success and children's socio-emotional development (Finders et al., 2023; Dewi & Randi, 2024).

Within the context of play-based learning, the development of linguistic competence occurs naturally through activities involving both verbal and nonverbal interaction. Play provides opportunities for children to use language in meaningful situations, thereby strengthening both language comprehension and production. Studies show that literacy-based play activities significantly enhance children's language abilities, particularly in vocabulary acquisition and meaning comprehension (Wati & Aulina, 2025; Harianto et al., 2024).

A play-based approach also contributes to the development of phonological and morphological aspects of language. Through songs, rhymes, and sound-based games, children are able to recognize sound patterns and word structures more effectively. Research demonstrates that play-based learning strategies are effective in improving phonological awareness and early literacy skills in young children (Astuti & Yafie, 2025; Rhamadanty & Ulum, 2024).

Beyond the structural aspects of language, linguistic competence also encompasses pragmatic ability, namely the use of language within social contexts. Play activities such as role play and storytelling enable children to understand the functions of language in everyday communication. Research indicates that social interaction in play plays a crucial role in enhancing children's communication skills and language expression (Sitorus et al., 2025; Misna & Pamungkas, 2025).

The development of linguistic competence is also influenced by the quality of the language environment available to children. A language-rich environment, characterized by frequent interactions with teachers and peers, can accelerate language acquisition. Studies show that supportive learning environments contribute significantly to early childhood language development (Finders et al., 2023).

Table 1.1 shows indicators of children's Arabic language development in play-based learning.

**Table 1.1: Indicators of children's Arabic language Development**

Developmental Aspect	Indicators Achieved by Children	Example in Arabic
Phonology	Able to recognize and imitate sounds; distinguish pronunciation; follow songs	Repeating sounds: بَ - تَ - ثَ song: وَاجِدٌ وَاجِدٌ أَيَّنَ الْوَلَدُ؟
Morphology	Recognizes simple word forms; uses basic vocabulary appropriately	يَلْعَبُ (singular-plural); كُتُبٌ - لَعِبَ - لَعِبَ
Syntax	Forms simple sentences; understands word order	هَذَا كُرَةٌ (This is a ball); أَنَا أَقْفِزُ (I jump)
Semantics	Understands meanings; connects words with objects/actions	Teacher: خُذِ الْكُرَةَ → child takes the ball; ضَعِ فِي الدَّلْوِ (Put it in the bucket)
Cognitive	Remembers vocabulary; understands instructions; links language with concepts	Counting while jumping: وَاجِدٌ، اثْنَانِ، ثَلَاثَةٌ
Motor Skills	Coordinates movement with language instructions	اِزْمِ! (Walk!), اِقْفِزْ! (Jump!), اِثْرِمِ! (Throw the ball!)
Language Environment	Becomes accustomed to hearing and responding to Arabic	Teacher: اِسْمَعْ وَتَقَدِّ (Listen and do); children respond accordingly

Table 1.1 shows that every aspect of child development can be stimulated in an integrated manner through play activities while strengthening the use of Arabic in a contextual and communicative manner.

Thus, the development of early childhood linguistic competence is a multidimensional process involving the interaction of instructional methods, environment, and technology. A play-based approach has proven to be an effective strategy as it integrates various developmental domains holistically. Therefore, optimizing language learning in early childhood should consider approaches that are contextual, interactive, and aligned with children's developmental characteristics.

## CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that play-based Arabic language learning is an effective approach that aligns with the developmental characteristics of early childhood. Through the integration of play activities such as songs, role-playing, and storytelling, the learning process becomes more contextual, interactive, and enjoyable. This approach not only enhances children's engagement but also facilitates natural language acquisition through direct experience and social interaction, supported by the roles of teachers, instructional media, and a conducive language environment.

Furthermore, play-based learning has been shown to promote the holistic development of children's linguistic competence, encompassing phonological, morphological, syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic aspects. Children not only acquire Arabic vocabulary but also demonstrate the ability to use it in simple communicative contexts. Therefore, this approach can serve as an innovative and relevant instructional model in early childhood Arabic language education, contributing to the advancement of more effective and meaningful teaching practices.

### AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION STATEMENT

The first author contributed as the principal investigator by conceptualizing the study, designing the research, conducting data collection and analysis, and drafting the initial manuscript. The second author contributed to the development of the theoretical framework, conducted the literature review, and performed substantial revisions to ensure analytical depth and scholarly rigor. The third, fourth and fifth authors was responsible for validating the research methodology, ensuring data trustworthiness through triangulation, and carrying out the final editing of the manuscript prior to publication. All authors actively participated in the discussion of the findings and approved the final version of the manuscript for publication.

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