

UTILIZATION OF PLAYDOUGH MEDIA IN ARABIC LANGUAGE LEARNING FOR EARLY CHILDHOOD AT TK MUSLIMAT NU XXIV NAWA KARTIKA KROMPOL NGAWI

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ABSTRACT

Arabic language learning for early childhood is an essential part of cognitive and language development. However, in practice, children often face learning difficulties in understanding Arabic vocabulary and basic language concepts. Therefore, educators are required to provide appropriate stimulation and learning media to support children's comprehension skills. TK Muslimat NU XXIV Nawa Kartika Krompol Ngawi implements playdough as a learning medium to overcome these challenges. This study aims to describe the utilization of playdough media in Arabic language learning for children aged 4–5 years. This research employs a qualitative descriptive approach with data collection techniques including observations, interviews, and documentation. The findings indicate that playdough media can effectively improve children's understanding of Arabic vocabulary through hands-on and imaginative learning activities. The use of playdough stimulates children's fine motor development, cognitive abilities, creativity, and language skills. Documentation of student learning outcomes demonstrates significant progress in vocabulary recognition and understanding. Therefore, playdough serves as an effective medium in supporting Arabic learning for early childhood.

Keywords: Playdough Media; Arabic Language Learning; Early Childhood Education; Fine Motor Development; Vocabulary Acquisition.

A. INTRODUCTION

Arabic language instruction at the early childhood level is a critical stage that shapes both the linguistic foundation and cognitive orientation of young learners. In Islamic education, the significance of Arabic is even more pronounced because the primary sources of Islamic teachings—the Qur'an and Hadith—are preserved in their original Arabic form. Early exposure to Arabic therefore functions not only as a linguistic initiation but also as a preparatory process that enables learners to understand religious texts with greater accuracy and depth in later years. Introducing Arabic during early childhood is widely recognized as beneficial for cognitive development, symbolic understanding, and the cultivation of learning habits that can support long-term academic growth.

However, efforts to implement Arabic instruction among children aged four to five often encounter substantial pedagogical challenges. At this developmental stage, children rely heavily on concrete experiences, sensory involvement, and learning environments that allow exploration through play. When instructional activities fail

to provide these elements, Arabic learning may become abstract and difficult to internalize. Teachers frequently report difficulties such as limited vocabulary recognition, inconsistent motivation, short attention spans, and the absence of learning media that align with children's developmental needs. These conditions can lead to learning difficulties that, as defined by Putri and Nur (2022), hinder progress across cognitive, psychomotor, and affective domains. In many cases, the problem is not that children are incapable of learning Arabic, but that instructional strategies do not adequately match how young learners naturally acquire knowledge.

Within this context, the selection of appropriate learning media becomes a vital component of effective early childhood pedagogy. Media that are engaging, tactile, and visually meaningful have the potential to transform abstract linguistic input into comprehensible and enjoyable learning experiences. For early learners, especially those who have minimal prior exposure to Arabic, learning tools that stimulate curiosity and encourage hands-on involvement can significantly improve retention and comprehension. This underscores the need for instructional approaches that merge linguistic objectives with sensory-rich, play-based activities.

TK Muslimat NU XXIV Nawa Kartika Krompol Ngawi applies this perspective by integrating Arabic learning into a play-centered curriculum. One of the media employed in this setting is playdough, a material that allows children to mold shapes, form letters, represent vocabulary items, and engage in collaborative activities with peers. Playdough naturally invites creativity and supports fine motor development, while simultaneously providing a concrete entry point for understanding new Arabic words. Rather than positioning Arabic as an isolated academic subject, the use of playdough embeds language learning into activities that children perceive as enjoyable and meaningful.

Although numerous studies have addressed the role of playdough in enhancing fine motor skills (Nabela, 2021; Huda & Hariati, 2020), research that explores its potential as a medium for foreign language instruction—particularly Arabic—remains limited. Existing literature seldom examines how tactile materials can be systematically utilized to support vocabulary acquisition in early childhood Arabic learning. This gap indicates that the pedagogical value of playdough in language instruction has not been fully recognized or documented.

Based on this gap, the present study seeks to investigate how playdough can serve as an instructional medium for Arabic vocabulary learning among early childhood learners. The study aims to describe how playdough-based activities influence engagement, facilitate comprehension, and contribute to the internalization of vocabulary through concrete experiences. By addressing an underexplored dimension within early childhood Arabic pedagogy, this research is expected to offer practical insights for teachers and contribute to the development of learning media that are both developmentally appropriate and linguistically effective.

B. RESEARCH METHODS

This study employed a qualitative descriptive method to examine the use of playdough as a learning medium in Arabic language instruction for children aged 4–5 at TK Muslimat NU XXIV Nawa Kartika during the 2024/2025 academic year. Data were obtained through classroom observation, in-depth interviews, and document analysis. The qualitative data collected from these procedures were processed through a systematic data analysis technique.

The research site was selected because the institution is one of the early childhood education centers

in Ngawi under the Nahdlatul Ulama foundation and is equipped with adequate facilities to support the learning process. The participants of this study included the Class A teacher and the school principal. Data collection involved observing instructional activities in the classroom, conducting interviews with the teacher and principal, and reviewing relevant documents such as teaching modules and students' evaluation records (Sugiyono, 2022). The data were analyzed through the stages of data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing.

C. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Learning media constitute a crucial component in early childhood pedagogy, as young learners require multisensory stimuli to construct meaning and engage with instructional content. Materials that allow children to touch, manipulate, observe, and transform objects provide the developmental richness needed to stimulate emerging cognitive, motor, and linguistic abilities. Within this framework, playdough represents a low-cost, flexible, and developmentally appropriate medium that supports exploratory learning and aligns well with early childhood characteristics.

Playdough facilitates a range of fine motor activities—kneading, rolling, shaping, pressing, cutting, and flattening—that strengthen hand-eye coordination, manual dexterity, and muscle control. These foundational skills contribute to later competence in writing, drawing, and other academic tasks (Zubaidah, 2020). Beyond motor development, playdough-based activities often generate engagement, curiosity, and emotional comfort, all of which enhance imagination, problem solving, and language expression.

Support from teachers and parents plays an essential role in optimizing the pedagogical value of playdough. When prepared with safe and inexpensive materials, playdough becomes accessible to classrooms with limited resources while still offering extensive learning opportunities (Nabela, 2021).

Context of Arabic Learning in the Institution

TK Muslimat NU XXIV Nawa Kartika, an Islamic early childhood institution in Ngawi, incorporates Arabic into its curriculum. The school principal affirmed that Arabic is introduced using age-appropriate, simplified content designed for early childhood learners:

“Arabic is included as part of the learning activities, using simple materials suited to the developmental stage of the children.”

(Interview with the principal, 6 May 2025)

The Arabic curriculum implemented in the classroom remains foundational, focusing on the recognition of hijaiyah letters, basic reading and writing, and introductory vocabulary related to everyday objects—fruits, vegetables, colors, and classroom items:

“The Arabic content is still basic: identifying letters, reading and writing simple forms, and learning introductory vocabulary.”

(Interview with the classroom teacher, 6 May 2025)

Implementation of Playdough in Arabic Learning

Playdough was integrated into Arabic vocabulary instruction through a structured sequence of activities:

1. **Introduction of target vocabulary**, specifically fruits and vegetables.
2. **Preparation of materials**, using natural and readily available ingredients.
3. **Collaborative dough preparation**, in which children actively participated under teacher supervision.
4. **Group division**, allowing small-group interaction.
5. **Shaping activities**, where children modeled fruits and vegetables corresponding to the Arabic vocabulary taught.

(Learning Module Documentation, 6 May 2025)

This procedure is consistent with the stages outlined by Hasibuan (2024), which emphasize teacher explanation, material selection, joint preparation, group assignment, and imaginative modeling.

The school prepares its own playdough using simple ingredients—flour, salt, water, oil, and food coloring—allowing children to participate in both the making and shaping processes. The teacher explained:

“The ingredients are easy to obtain: flour, salt, water, oil, and food coloring.”

(Interview with classroom teacher, 6 May 2025)

The use of primary colors (red, blue, yellow) also enables children to explore color mixing, introducing elemental concepts of art and science.

Procedure for Preparing Playdough

Observations and interviews revealed the following procedure:

- a. Flour and salt are mixed by hand.
- b. Water is added gradually to achieve a smooth, non-sticky texture.
- c. Oil is incorporated, and the dough is kneaded until soft.
- d. The dough is kneaded to achieve elasticity.
- e. It is divided into several portions.

- f. Food coloring is added to each portion and kneaded until evenly distributed.

A teacher described the process as follows:

“We mix the ingredients, add water gradually, knead the dough, divide it, and add food coloring. After that, it is ready for use.”

(Interview with classroom teacher, 6 May 2025)

Findings: Pedagogical Contributions of Playdough

Analysis of observational notes, interview data, and learning documentation indicates that playdough contributed meaningfully to children's cognitive and linguistic development in Arabic learning. Students demonstrated improved recognition of Arabic vocabulary, stronger engagement with instructional activities, and greater retention of content. Learning artifacts produced by the children reflected stable developmental progress.

Playdough also mediates additional learning dimensions:

- a. conceptual understanding of physical transformation (science),
- b. color experimentation (art),
- c. collaborative interaction (social-emotional development),
- d. vocabulary recall and expressive language (linguistic development),
- e. fine motor strengthening (motor development) (Huda & Hariati, 2020).

These findings reinforce the potential of playdough as a multimodal instructional tool capable of supporting several learning objectives simultaneously.

Advantages and Limitations of Playdough

Advantages

- a. Provides concrete, hands-on learning experiences.
- b. Reduces abstract verbalism by linking vocabulary to tangible objects.
- c. Allows visualization of objects and processes in a comprehensive manner.

Limitations

- a. Inability to construct large objects due to material and space constraints.
- b. Requires careful storage and maintenance.
- c. Some activities require continuous teacher supervision.

Despite these constraints, playdough remains highly engaging for young children and supports multiple developmental domains through integrated learning.

Challenges and Mitigation Strategies

Several challenges emerged during implementation, including limited instructional time, variability in teacher skill, uneven student participation, hygiene concerns, restricted creativity, and the need for sustained supervision.

Teachers addressed these challenges through:

- a. detailed instructional planning,
- b. close monitoring of activities,
- c. creative adaptation of playdough tasks,
- d. clear distribution of responsibilities,
- e. collaboration with parents,
- f. ongoing skill development,
- g. regular evaluation and reflection.

D. CONCLUSION

The findings of this study demonstrate that playdough functions as an effective and developmentally appropriate medium for introducing Arabic vocabulary to children aged 4–5 at TK Muslimat NU XXIV Nawa Kartika. The integration of tactile, sensory-rich activities with basic Arabic instruction enhanced children's engagement, supported vocabulary recognition, and strengthened fine motor abilities that contribute to early literacy readiness. Through observation, interviews, and documentation, it became evident that playdough allowed learners to link abstract linguistic concepts with concrete representations, thereby reducing learning difficulties commonly experienced in early Arabic instruction.

The study further shows that playdough provides multidimensional learning opportunities, encompassing cognitive, linguistic, motor, social, and exploratory domains. Despite its advantages, several challenges—such as limited instructional time, variations in teacher skill, hygiene considerations, and the need for continuous supervision—must be carefully addressed. The strategies implemented by teachers, including structured planning, collaborative activity design, parental involvement, and reflective practice, proved effective in mitigating these constraints.

Overall, the use of playdough offers a promising approach to early Arabic language education, particularly in contexts where learners require concrete and engaging experiences to internalize new vocabulary. The results highlight the importance of developmentally sensitive instructional media and suggest that further research may explore the long-term impact of play-based materials on children's linguistic and cognitive development in Arabic learning environments.

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AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Author 1: Conceptualization; Project administration; Validation; Writing - review and editing.

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