

Factors in the Acquisition of Arabic Language among Children

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Abstract

The acquisition of Arabic among children in Malaysia is currently expanding as society increasingly recognizes the importance of Arabic language education from an early age. This study focuses on three main objectives: first, to examine the factors influencing the acquisition of Arabic; second, to identify the challenges faced during the teaching and learning process; and third, to determine strategies or solutions to address these challenges. This research employs a qualitative method based on in-depth interviews with five teachers from the same kindergarten. The findings indicate that the acquisition of Arabic among children aged 4-6 years is influenced by several factors, including intelligence, teaching and learning techniques, parental upbringing, health, focus and interest in Arabic, and age. The study also identifies challenges such as incorrect pronunciation of Arabic letters, lack of focus and interest in Arabic, difficulty recognizing Arabic letters, delayed writing skills, and insufficient parental guidance. The study suggests several strategies to overcome these challenges, including diversifying teaching techniques, increasing reinforcement exercises, utilizing various teaching aids (BBM), and monitoring and improving parental guidance at home.

Keywords: Language Acquisition, Arabic, Kindergarten

Introduction

Language acquisition is the process through which individuals develop the ability to understand and produce language. First language acquisition refers to the natural assimilation of the mother tongue in children from birth, whereas second language acquisition involves learning a foreign language after mastering the native language. The study of second language acquisition in early childhood is particularly compelling. This research focuses on the process of acquiring a second language, specifically Arabic, within the educational context of Pasti Pra Tahfiz Ar-Rahman Kindergarten in Pengkalan Arang, Kuala Terengganu, an institution that integrates Arabic language learning into its curriculum. Exploring the factors in the acquisition of the Arabic language among children is crucial for preserving cultural identity, improving educational outcomes, and supporting broader societal goals of multilingualism and international cooperation.

This research addresses several pertinent issues. First, as noted by Mohammad Taufiq and Wan Abdul Aziz (2018), students often struggle to use Arabic both inside and outside the classroom, underscoring the importance of early Arabic language education. Second, Agostini (2020) highlights numerous challenges faced by children learning Arabic as a second language, given that it is not their mother tongue and not readily reinforced in their environment. Third, according to Muhammad Firdaus, Muhammad Zaid, Mohamad Redha, and Ilman Mursyid (2021), creating an immersive Arabic environment for children is challenging. They argue that the absence of an Arabic-speaking environment affects parental decisions to provide Arabic language learning opportunities for their children.

The Significant of the study

The significance of studying the factors in the acquisition of the Arabic language among children is multifaceted, impacting various stakeholders in education, language preservation, and societal development. This study is important and beneficial because it enhances educational practices, supports cultural and linguistic preservation, informs policy, and benefits various stakeholders including educators, parents, and researchers. This research ultimately contributes to the broader goal of fostering effective language learning and preserving Arabic as an essential cultural and linguistic resource.

Research Objectives

This study aims to examine the factors influencing Arabic language acquisition among children. These factors are categorized into two main groups: internal and external. Internal factors include intelligence, focus, interest, health, and age. External factors encompass teaching techniques and parental involvement. Both sets of factors significantly impact children's ability to acquire the Arabic language.

Methodology

This study employs a qualitative research design based on in-depth interviews with five teachers at Pasti Pra Tahfiz Ar-Rahman Kindergarten in Pengkalan Arang, Kuala Terengganu. The researcher chose semi-structured interviews to gather detailed information and perspectives on the factors affecting Arabic language acquisition, the challenges faced by children, and the strategies for addressing these challenges. The interviews were conducted in person at the kindergarten, each lasting approximately 20 minutes. The questions were posed informally, allowing respondents to answer based on their teaching experiences at the kindergarten. The interview data were recorded, transcribed, and analyzed by categorizing responses according to the research objectives.

Discussion

The discussion of the research findings focuses on the primary factors influencing the acquisition of Arabic language among children. It also elaborates on the problems encountered during the learning and teaching processes and identifies strategies or solutions to these problems. This study was conducted through direct interviews with five respondents, who are teachers at the Pusat Asuhan Tunas Islam (PASTI) in Pengkalan Arang, Kuala Terengganu. The research aims to answer three main objectives by analyzing the responses of the participants.

Discussion on the Factors Influencing Arabic Language Acquisition Among Children at PASTI

This section discusses the findings related to the first research question, which addresses the factors influencing Arabic language acquisition among children at PASTI. Various factors were highlighted by the respondents, including intelligence, teaching and learning techniques, parental upbringing, health, focus and interest in the Arabic language, and age.

Intelligence

Three teachers believe that intelligence significantly impacts language acquisition among children at PASTI. For instance, respondent 1 stated, "I think the first factor is intelligence. Intelligent students can easily grasp what is taught. Conversely, less intelligent students require more attention from teachers." Therefore, intelligence is crucial as language acquisition depends on the children's cognitive abilities; intelligent children memorize and understand taught material faster than their less intelligent counterparts.

This issue is corroborated by Fatima Al-Zahra (2023), who states that intelligence is an internal factor inherent in the students themselves. Internal factors include psychological and physical disruptions or deficiencies, such as cognitive abilities (e.g., memory and comprehension). Intan Maya Sari (2016) also noted that intelligence is a unique skill possessed by individuals, which requires extensive training to be realized.

Teaching and Learning Techniques

Three teachers believe that repetition techniques affect language acquisition among children. Respondent 2 explained that if a word is repeated several times, children will easily remember it. Repetition involves reading or memorizing something continuously. This technique sharpens memory and enhances understanding when applied in teaching and learning. It is particularly suitable for those memorizing vocabulary or the Quran. For example, at PASTI, daily assemblies include songs containing collections of hadiths, prayers, and practical solat, while on Wednesdays, songs with Arabic vocabulary about colors, days of the week, animals, body parts, etc., are sung.

Additionally, respondent 3 believes that daily conversations in class affect language acquisition among children at PASTI. For instance, teachers frequently ask basic questions such as "Kaifa Haalukum?" and "Sobaal Khoir." This two-way communication technique is effective for strengthening speaking skills. Providing simple conversation scripts like greetings, thanking, asking names, or inquiring about well-being is suitable for practice outside the classroom. Respondent 3 also believes that children should recognize the Hijaiyyah letters before learning Arabic. For instance, Arabic language learning at PASTI begins in June or July because, during the first half of the year, teachers focus on teaching Nur Quran (Book of Recognizing Letters) to ensure children recognize the Hijaiyyah letters first.

Parent Education

Three teachers opine that parental education significantly impacts the language acquisition of children at PASTI. For instance, Respondent 1 shared the story of Fatimah, a child fluent in Arabic who communicates with her father in Arabic at home because her father is an Arabic language teacher at a school in Kuala Terengganu. This underscores the importance of parental involvement, as parents are the primary educators and lifelong companions of their children. Parents should continuously offer support, encouragement, and appropriate activities for learning Arabic to make the learning process enjoyable and motivating for their

children. Moreover, parents can choose kindergartens that employ Arabic teaching and learning methods suitable for their children's developmental stages.

Ransom (2022) highlighted that external factors affecting students stem from their family environment. Ahmad Taqi Al-Din Wafi Allah (2019) further elucidated how a father's efforts in teaching his children significantly impact their success, emphasizing the family's role as the primary educational foundation.

Health Factors

Three teachers believe that health factors affect language acquisition among children at PASTI. Firstly, internal conditions like Slow Learner Syndrome impede understanding, as these children struggle even with their native language, let alone a foreign one. Respondents 3 and 5 noted that Slow Learners require repeated explanations. Secondly, external ailments such as fever, cough, and flu hinder concentration, leading children to sleep in class instead of engaging in learning activities. Health factors, therefore, play a crucial role in language acquisition. They are categorized into two: external or physical illnesses like fever and lethargy, which hinder sensory reception and brain processing, and internal conditions affecting the brain's cognitive functions.

Ransom (2022) confirmed that internal factors include psychological and physical impairments such as visual and auditory disturbances, which impact learning. Ahmed Taqi Al-Din Wafi Allah (2019) also asserted that health issues could disrupt the learning process.

Interest and Focus in Arabic

Two female teachers believe that interest in the Arabic language affects language acquisition among children at PASTI. Respondents 3 and 5 observed that students interested in Arabic learn it more easily, and most PASTI students show interest due to familiar vocabulary used during assemblies. One teacher emphasized that classroom focus also influences language acquisition; focused students excel in listening, speaking, and writing.

Interest in Arabic and classroom focus are critical factors. One notable aspect of PASTI education is the morning assembly, where students participate in prayer simulations, Quranic recitations, and vocabulary memorization in Malay, English, and Arabic. This routine likely piques children's interest in learning Arabic. To enhance classroom focus, teachers should provide diverse teaching aids catering to visual, auditory, and kinesthetic learning styles.

Age Factor

Two teachers noted that age affects language acquisition among children at PASTI. Respondent 5 stated, "Six-year-old students remember vocabulary more easily because they have been at PASTI for two years and regularly sing Arabic songs during assemblies compared to four- and five-year-olds." Thus, age plays a role in Arabic language acquisition. Six-year-olds acquire Arabic faster than four- and five-year-olds because they have been at PASTI longer, have previously learned vocabulary topics, and are more mentally mature.

In conclusion, various factors influence the Arabic language acquisition among children at PASTI, including parental education, health, interest and focus in the language, and age. Addressing these factors can enhance the effectiveness of language teaching and learning.

Discussion on Problems Faced During the Teaching and Learning Process

This section discusses the findings from the second research question, which addresses the problems encountered during the teaching and learning process. Several issues were highlighted by respondents, including inaccurate pronunciation of hijaiyyah letters, lack of student focus and interest in Arabic, unfamiliarity with hijaiyyah letters and slow writing speed, and insufficient parental involvement.

Inaccurate Pronunciation of Hijaiyyah Letters

Three teachers noted that one of the common problems during Arabic language instruction at PASTI is inaccurate pronunciation of letters. For instance, Respondent 3 mentioned, "Some students at PASTI struggle with correct pronunciation, especially those missing their front teeth." The issue of incorrect pronunciation at a young age is normal due to factors such as early speech development, dental issues common in children aged 4-6, and the infrequent use of certain Arabic letters that do not exist in the Malay alphabet, such as the letter "Dad."

Lack of Focus and Interest in Arabic

Three teachers indicated that a significant problem during Arabic language instruction at PASTI is the lack of student focus. Respondent 5 stated, "Students often lack focus and prefer to play." Additionally, two teachers noted that the problem stems from students' disinterest in Arabic. Respondent 3 remarked, "Those who are not interested just follow along without retaining what is taught." This issue is common as young children naturally enjoy playing, especially with their peers. Therefore, teachers need to diversify their teaching methods to make learning more engaging and to maintain student focus.

Unfamiliarity with Hijaiyyah Letters and Slow Writing Speed

Two teachers highlighted that a common issue is students' unfamiliarity with hijaiyyah letters, which is essential for learning Arabic. At PASTI, Respondent 1 explained that teachers ensure students learn the Nur al-Quran first to familiarize themselves with the hijaiyyah letters before progressing to Arabic. This approach facilitates easier Arabic language acquisition once students can read a few words. Regarding slow writing speed, teachers need to develop specific methods to teach correct writing techniques, enabling students to write quickly and accurately.

Insufficient Parental Involvement

Two teachers pointed out that insufficient parental involvement is a major issue. Respondent 4 stated, "Many parents rely entirely on teachers and do not review lessons at home, forcing teachers to repeat lessons continuously." Inadequate parental attention affects children's language acquisition, potentially delaying their speech development. For instance, busy parents often give their children smartphones to keep them occupied, which reduces parent-child communication and can delay speech development.

This issue is supported by Ahmed Taqi Al-Din Wafi Allah (2019) in his study on the influence of parental roles on students' achievement, contribution, and motivation in learning Arabic at the Nour Al Uloom School in Malang. The study indicated that children from less attentive families tend to feel isolated and neglected, leading to social difficulties and rebellious behavior.

Discussion on Strategies or Solutions to the Problems Faced by Children

This section discusses the findings from the third research question, which focuses on strategies or solutions to the problems faced by children. Several strategies were suggested by respondents, including diversifying teaching techniques and increasing reinforcement exercises, using a variety of teaching aids, and monitoring parental involvement at home.

Diversifying Teaching Techniques and Increasing Reinforcement Exercises

Four teachers agreed that diversifying teaching techniques and increasing reinforcement exercises are effective strategies. Respondent 1 suggested singing repetitive songs during assemblies. Respondent 3 recommended repeating the same words for the first two weeks. Respondent 4 emphasized the importance of proper teaching methods as children can easily memorize. Respondent 5 explained that for students struggling with writing, teachers should first demonstrate the correct technique on the whiteboard. Increasing reinforcement exercises was also highlighted as essential.

Fadhilah Almukarramah (2023) supported this approach, stating that repetition helps students practice and apply vocabulary, reinforcing their language skills. For example, teachers can have students read discourse texts before answering comprehension questions, which improves reading and writing skills.

Using a Variety of Teaching Aids

Four teachers emphasized the importance of using various teaching aids to enhance Arabic language proficiency among children. At PASTI, commonly used aids include flashcards, slides, colorful posters on classroom walls, and engaging activities. These methods are particularly effective for young learners as learning preferences vary among individuals. Some are visual learners, benefitting from colorful images and posters; some are auditory learners, benefitting from listening to YouTube videos or songs; and some are kinesthetic learners, requiring physical movement.

A. Dr. Muhammad Oneisi Joy Al-Kaabi (2022) confirmed that teaching aids aim to achieve educational goals by providing additional educational tools that stimulate students' motivation and desire to learn. These tools should be appropriate, easy to use, useful, and effective.

Monitoring Parental Involvement at Home

One teacher agreed that parental involvement in children's education is crucial. Respondent 5 mentioned, "Sometimes I ask parents to help with reinforcement exercises at home." Therefore, it is recommended that parents pay attention to their children's education, especially those aged 4-6 years. For example, parents can discuss what their children learned at school or fill their time with reading *Iqra'* in the evening. Encouraging children to do their best and achieve better results is also important.

Ahmed Taqi Al-Din Wafi Allah (2019) supported this in his study on the influence of parental roles on students' achievement, contribution, and motivation in learning Arabic at the Nour Al Uloom School in Malang. The study highlighted that parents who want their children to excel should always provide encouragement and support, as positive parental responses significantly impact children's performance and results.

Conclusion

This study can be summarized into three main discussions. Firstly, the analysis of factors influencing children's acquisition of Arabic at PASTI indicated that intelligence, teaching and learning techniques, parental upbringing, health, focus and interest in Arabic, and age are crucial elements. Secondly, the discussion on the problems encountered by children during the Arabic learning and teaching process revealed issues such as inaccurate pronunciation of hijaiyyah letters, lack of focus and interest in Arabic, unfamiliarity with hijaiyyah letters and slow writing speed, and insufficient parental involvement. Thirdly, the analysis of strategies or solutions to these problems suggested diversifying teaching techniques and increasing reinforcement exercises, using various teaching aids, and monitoring parental involvement at home as effective measures.

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