Fostering The Love Of Arabic Language From An Early Age Through Play and Song-Based Learning In Islamic Early Childhood Education

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Informasi Artikel	Abstract
	This community service project aims to foster early childhood interest and love for the Arabic language through play and song-based learning in Islamic early childhood education. The program was conducted with teachers and children at TKM Al-Asy'ari Sidoarjo, emphasizing joyful, interactive, and spiritually enriched learning experiences. The methods involved teacher mentoring, demonstration of Arabic songs, and implementation of play-based activities integrating basic Arabic vocabulary. Observation and interviews were used to evaluate children's engagement, linguistic responses, and enthusiasm. The results showed a significant improvement in children's motivation, memory of Arabic words, and participation during learning sessions. Teachers also reported increased confidence in applying creative Arabic teaching strategies. This study highlights the importance of integrating emotional, cultural, and spiritual elements in Arabic learning from an early age to build positive language attitudes and lay the foundation for future proficiency.

INTRODUCTION

Early childhood is widely recognized as the most crucial stage in human development, forming the foundation for linguistic, cognitive, emotional, and spiritual growth. During this sensitive period, children experience rapid brain development and absorb information from their environment naturally (Greenough et al., 1987). Therefore, introducing a second or foreign language such as Arabic must be done through methods that align with their developmental characteristics (Rochmat et al., 2025). Rather than relying on conventional memorization techniques, educators must provide joyful, experiential learning through play and music that stimulate children's imagination and intrinsic motivation to learn.

Arabic language learning occupies a central role in Islamic education because it is not only a linguistic skill but also a spiritual bridge to the Qur'an and daily worship . For Muslim children, learning Arabic from an early age is an effort to nurture both identity and faith (Agustina et al., 2020). However, current observations show that many Islamic early childhood institutions still teach Arabic through rote repetition and static classroom routines. This often results in limited vocabulary retention and a lack of enthusiasm among children, signaling the need for an engaging and developmentally appropriate pedagogical shift (Setyawati & Hasan, 2024).

Preliminary observations conducted at several Islamic PAUD institutions in East Java, particularly at TKM Al-Asy'ari Sidoarjo, revealed that children displayed high enthusiasm when learning through songs, stories, and games but quickly lost attention during direct vocabulary drills (Asri et al., 2023). Teachers at TKM Al-Asy'ari also expressed challenges in maintaining enthusiasm and designing creative Arabic materials suitable for their students' developmental levels (Hasan, Aziz, et al., 2024). These findings highlight the urgency of introducing play-based and song-oriented learning models that can naturally enhance motivation and strengthen language comprehension among early learners of Arabic in Islamic early education contexts.

Play-based learning has long been established as a fundamental approach in early childhood education, as it supports imagination, cooperation, and emotional expression (Rochmat et al., 2025). When integrated with songs and rhythmic movement, this method becomes a powerful medium for language acquisition. Singing helps children repeat vocabulary effortlessly, develop pronunciation accuracy, and associate meaning through rhythm and melody (Mahmudah, 2025). Such joyful engagement makes the learning process not only cognitively stimulating but also emotionally rewarding, ensuring better long-term memory and understanding of Arabic words.

In the Islamic educational context, the combination of play and song-based learning aligns with prophetic pedagogical principles emphasizing joy (*farah*), affection (*mahabbah*), and balance (*tawazun*). Through Arabic songs and movement-based activities, children are invited to experience happiness in their learning process, building a positive emotional connection with the Arabic language (Marni & Rahmi, 2025). This emotional attachment is essential for cultivating a lifelong interest in Arabic and countering the perception of it as a difficult or foreign subject.

Several previous studies have demonstrated the effectiveness of musical and play-based approaches in early language acquisition. Erlangga and Bahroni (Erlangga & Bahroni, 2024) found that children who learned Arabic through songs exhibited better pronunciation and vocabulary recall compared to those taught with traditional methods. Likewise, Dewi and Yusuf (Dewi & Yusuf, 2025) reported that game-based Arabic learning improved engagement and comprehension among preschoolers in Islamic settings. However, previous works have not explicitly focused on fostering affective dimensions such as love, enjoyment, and motivation toward Arabic learning in PAUD Islam. The present study introduces this novelty by integrating emotional, linguistic, and spiritual development into a unified, holistic Arabic learning framework applied in TKM Al-Asy'ari Sidoarjo.

Another pressing issue identified through field data in TKM Al-Asy'ari Sidoarjo is the limited pedagogical capacity among PAUD teachers to design creative Arabic lessons. While many teachers possess basic linguistic competence, they often lack methodological innovation. The program thus focuses not only on improving children's learning outcomes but also on empowering teachers through mentoring and demonstration. Teachers are guided to compose Arabic songs, design thematic play tools, and evaluate children's affective and linguistic progress systematically.

Beyond the immediate intervention, this program aims to establish sustainable models of Arabic education in Islamic early childhood institutions. By training teachers to integrate music, play, and spiritual themes into daily lessons, Arabic learning becomes a joyful routine rather than a rigid subject. Such sustainability ensures that positive learning attitudes are maintained and transmitted to future cohorts of children in PAUD Islam environments, including those in Sidoarjo and its surrounding areas.

This initiative also responds to Indonesia's national agenda for character education and religious reinforcement at the early childhood level. The integration of Arabic language learning with cultural and religious values directly supports the development of moral, linguistic, and socio-emotional competencies. In doing so, the project contributes to national education goals by promoting both intellectual and spiritual growth in children from an early age.

Through this approach, Arabic is reframed as a source of joy, identity, and connection rather than a mere academic requirement. Children learn to associate the language with playfulness, music, and emotion, which builds positive learning dispositions and self-confidence. The affective foundation established through these experiences paves the way for stronger Arabic literacy and communicative abilities in later years of education.

In summary, this study addresses the pedagogical limitations of Arabic instruction in early childhood settings by presenting a novel integration of affective, creative, and spiritual approaches. It emphasizes that fostering love for the Arabic language must begin with enjoyable, meaningful, and emotionally rich learning experiences. This innovation not only enhances children's linguistic competence but also cultivates their intrinsic motivation and enduring affection for the Arabic language as part of their Islamic identity demonstrated concretely through the implementation at TKM Al-Asy'ari Sidoarjo.

METHOD

The research employed a qualitative descriptive approach within the framework of community-based educational research, focusing on the implementation of play and song-based Arabic learning at TKM Al-Asy'ari Sidoarjo (Miles et al., 1992). The participants consisted of **teachers and children aged 4–6 years** enrolled in the institution. The sampling method used was **purposive sampling**, selecting participants who were actively involved in Arabic language learning sessions. Data were collected through classroom observations, interviews with teachers, and documentation of teaching activities (Alhamid, 2019). The observation process aimed to capture the children's engagement, linguistic responses, and affective reactions during the learning sessions, while interviews were conducted to gain insights into teachers' perceptions and challenges in implementing creative Arabic teaching strategies.

The collected data were analyzed using a thematic analysis technique, focusing on patterns of student participation, emotional involvement, and language acquisition outcomes. The process involved data reduction, display, and conclusion drawing, as suggested by Miles and Huberman (Miles et al., 1992), to ensure the credibility and coherence of findings. Triangulation of data sources from teacher interviews, observational notes, and learning documentation was applied to validate the results (Rusandi & Muhammad Rusli, 2021). The qualitative findings were supported by quantitative indicators, such as the frequency of student responses and participation levels, to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the program's impact. This methodological design ensured that the study accurately reflected the effectiveness of integrating play and song-based strategies in fostering early childhood love for the Arabic language within an Islamic educational setting.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study at TKM Al-Asy'ari Sidoarjo demonstrate that the integration of play and song-based learning in Arabic language instruction for early childhood significantly increased children's engagement, vocabulary retention, and emotional connection to the learning process. The results were obtained from observation data, teacher interviews, and documentation over a 4-week period of implementation.

Table 1. Improvement of Arabic Language Learning Outcomes through Play and Song-Based Approach at TKM Al-Asy'ari Sidoarjo

Indicators	Before Implementation (%)	After Implementation (%)	Improvement Description
Children's Engagement during Arabic sessions	58%	91%	Students showed increased enthusiasm, focus, and participation during learning activities.
Vocabulary Retention (measured through recall activities)	43%	85%	Significant growth in the ability to recall and use Arabic words in songs and play.
Teacher Creativity and Confidence in Teaching	52%	88%	Teachers became more confident in designing and applying Arabic learning using songs and games.
Emotional Response and Joyfulness during Learning	60%	94%	Learning atmosphere became more joyful, with laughter and singing observed throughout sessions.

The data presented in Table 1 clearly illustrate the substantial impact of implementing play and song-based learning strategies in Arabic instruction at TKM Al-Asy'ari Sidoarjo. Each indicator showed a marked improvement, with engagement and joyfulness exceeding 90%,

reflecting the effectiveness of this emotionally driven pedagogical approach. These results signify that early learners respond more positively to multisensory and interactive experiences, where movement, music, and play become integral components of language exposure. The increased motivation and active participation observed throughout the sessions demonstrate that Arabic learning, when presented through joyful and meaningful activities, can effectively overcome the traditional perception of difficulty often associated with language acquisition in Islamic early childhood contexts.

Furthermore, the findings emphasize that teacher involvement and innovation play a vital role in sustaining this success. The mentoring sessions encouraged teachers to shift from conventional memorization methods toward creative instructional designs that harmonize linguistic, affective, and spiritual development. As teachers gained confidence, they were able to create culturally relevant Arabic songs and games that resonated with children's daily experiences. This transformation not only elevated classroom dynamics but also strengthened the institutional capacity of TKM Al-Asy'ari Sidoarjo to become a model for Arabic early childhood education grounded in play, music, and joy.

Increased Engagement through Play-Based Learning

The observation data at TKM Al-Asy'ari Sidoarjo showed a significant increase in children's engagement during Arabic language sessions, rising from 58% to 91% after the introduction of play-based learning methods. Children demonstrated high levels of enthusiasm and participation through singing, movement games, and storytelling activities that incorporated Arabic vocabulary. The classroom atmosphere became more dynamic, and children were eager to repeat Arabic words while playing, indicating both affective and cognitive engagement. This improvement underscores how play transforms learning into an enjoyable and meaningful experience, making Arabic lessons more accessible and memorable for early learners.

Theoretically, these findings are in line with Vygotsky's social constructivist theory (Wertsch & Sohmer, 1995), which emphasizes that learning occurs most effectively through social interaction and active participation (Hariana, 2021). Play, as a social and symbolic activity, provides opportunities for children to internalize new concepts, including language, within meaningful contexts. Through songs and role-play, learners construct understanding collaboratively, guided by teachers who act as mediators within their Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) (Suardipa, 2020). Thus, play-based learning serves as a bridge between the child's current linguistic ability and potential development, fostering not only language comprehension but also emotional and social growth in line with early childhood developmental principles.

In comparison to previous studies, these results reinforce and expand the existing evidence. Adhimah found that gadged-oriented Arabic instruction enhances preschoolers' focus and interaction, while Adhimah (Adhimah & Hasan, 2024) demonstrated that music-based learning improves vocabulary retention and pronunciation accuracy. However, the present study introduces a novel integration of play, song, and spiritual values within Islamic early childhood education. By embedding Arabic vocabulary into joyful and faith-based activities, this approach not only improved engagement but also cultivated an emotional and spiritual connection to the Arabic language—an aspect rarely explored in earlier research. This novelty highlights the importance of viewing Arabic not merely as an academic subject but as a source of joy, identity, and moral development from an early age.

Enhanced Vocabulary Retention through Song Integration

The implementation of Arabic song-based learning at TKM Al-Asy'ari Sidoarjo resulted in a remarkable improvement in children's vocabulary retention, increasing from 43% to 85% after the intervention. Children enthusiastically learned Arabic words through interactive songs such as *Asma' al-Alwan* (Names of Colors) and *A'dad bil-Ghina'* (Numbers in Song). The rhythm, melody, and repetitive lyrics created an enjoyable learning atmosphere that made it easier for children to remember and recall words during play activities. Teachers also observed that children began to use Arabic terms spontaneously in daily classroom communication, demonstrating that music not only facilitated memorization but also encouraged active language use in meaningful contexts.

Theoretically, this finding aligns with Howard Gardner's Multiple Intelligences Theory, particularly the musical-linguistic intelligence domain (Miller, 1993). Gardner posits that rhythm, tone, and melody enhance cognitive processing and memory retention, especially among young learners who are naturally responsive to auditory stimuli (Gardner, 2000). Through singing, children engage both the right and left hemispheres of the brain, stimulating emotional and linguistic networks simultaneously. This dual engagement strengthens neural connections associated with word recognition and recall (Munir & Hasan, 2024). In the context of early childhood education, integrating Arabic songs supports not only linguistic development but also emotional regulation, coordination, and cultural appreciation—core aspects of holistic learning emphasized in Islamic pedagogical frameworks (Hasan, Adhimah, et al., 2024).

In relation to previous research, this study supports Amaliyah (Amaliyah & Hasan, 2025), who found that rhythmic repetition improved pronunciation and word retention among Arabic learners, and Setyawati (Setyawati & Hasan, 2024), who confirmed that music-based instruction enhanced motivation and recall in early childhood language learning. However, the novelty of the present study lies in the integration of Arabic songs with Islamic values and contextualized play, creating a learning environment that nurtures both linguistic and spiritual growth. Unlike previous studies that focused solely on cognitive outcomes, this project highlights the affective and faith-based dimensions of Arabic learning, demonstrating that song integration not only strengthens memory but also builds an emotional attachment to the Arabic language as part of children's Islamic identity.

Strengthened Teacher Confidence and Emotional Connection

The results from TKM Al-Asy'ari Sidoarjo demonstrated a substantial improvement in both teacher confidence and classroom emotional climate following the implementation of play- and song-based Arabic learning. Teachers' confidence in applying creative teaching strategies rose from 52% to 88%, while children's emotional joyfulness during Arabic sessions reached 94%. Through mentoring and demonstration, teachers developed the ability to compose simple Arabic songs, integrate them into storytelling, and design engaging play activities. This empowerment shifted Arabic learning from monotonous memorization to lively, participatory experiences that fostered both enjoyment and meaningful learning. The emotional atmosphere of the classroom became more positive, as children began to associate Arabic lessons with happiness, laughter, and excitement rather than with rote difficulty.

Theoretically, these findings align with Lev Vygotsky's socio-emotional learning theory, which highlights the integral relationship between emotion, interaction, and cognitive growth (Cole & SCRIBNER, 1978). According to Vygotsky, positive emotional experiences during learning strengthen children's mental functions and promote deeper engagement with the subject matter. In this study, the joy and enthusiasm cultivated through teacher-student interaction acted as socio-cultural scaffolding that reinforced not only linguistic comprehension but also emotional security and motivation (Hariana, 2021). Teachers' increased confidence further amplified this process by providing consistent emotional cues and supportive guidance, confirming that

effective language learning in early childhood is inseparable from affective engagement and relational warmth within the classroom (Karpov & Bransford, 1995).

These findings are consistent with Qodir (Qodir & Hasan, 2024), who reported that teacher confidence and student enjoyment directly influence learning effectiveness in early childhood classrooms. Similarly, Nurharini (Nurharini et al., 2024) emphasized that emotionally responsive teaching improves language comprehension and long-term retention. However, the novelty of the current study lies in its integration of affective, creative, and spiritual dimensions within Arabic learning at the early childhood level. By training teachers to design Arabic instruction grounded in joy (*farah*) and affection (*mahabbah*), this study moves beyond conventional pedagogy toward a spiritually enriched educational model. This innovation not only enhances teacher professionalism but also builds a sustainable affective foundation for children's lifelong love and connection to the Arabic language.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study at **TKM Al-Asy'ari Sidoarjo** conclude that the integration of play and song-based learning in Arabic instruction for early childhood is highly effective in fostering linguistic, emotional, and pedagogical growth. The data showed significant improvements across key indicators children's engagement increased to 91%, vocabulary retention rose to 85%, teacher confidence reached 88%, and emotional joyfulness during learning achieved 94%. These results demonstrate that learning Arabic through music, movement, and play not only enhances children's language comprehension but also builds positive emotional associations with the language. This approach transforms Arabic learning into a joyful, interactive, and spiritually meaningful experience that aligns with children's developmental characteristics.

Furthermore, the program proved successful in empowering teachers to design creative Arabic learning activities that are both pedagogically sound and culturally relevant. The strengthened teacher capacity ensures sustainability and continuity of joyful Arabic instruction beyond the research period. The overall implication of this study highlights that early Arabic language education, when grounded in playfulness and emotional connection, can cultivate intrinsic motivation, positive identity, and enduring affection for the language. This model of integrating affective and spiritual values within play-based pedagogy offers a replicable framework for other Islamic early childhood institutions seeking to make Arabic learning more engaging, holistic, and transformative.

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