

An Innovation in Picture Cards to Overcome Fear and Improve Arabic Vocabulary Memorization in Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Students

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Abstract:

Vocabulary mastery (mufradat) is the main foundation in Arabic language learning in Islamic Elementary Schools (MI). However, conventional rote learning methods often lead to language anxiety and passivity among digital generation students. This descriptive qualitative study aims to explore the implementation of modern physical flashcards combined with experiential learning and group games to overcome language anxiety and improve vocabulary mastery. The study subjects involved 25 third-grade students at MI Bandung III Jombang. Data were collected through structured participant observation, in-depth interviews with partner teachers, and analysis of field notes. The results showed that the integration of colorful modern flashcard visualizations and group game syntax successfully changed classroom dynamics positively. Students who initially showed symptoms of language anxiety such as passivity, fear of making mistakes, and avoiding eye contact became more confident, active, and enthusiastic in pronouncing new vocabulary collectively. In conclusion, the experiential and game-based approach using physical flashcards effectively creates a psychologically safe learning environment that enhances vocabulary memory retention for the alpha generation naturally without emotional stress.

Kata Kunci: *Learning through play; Generation Alpha; Flash cards; Playgroup; Vocabulary*

INTRODUCTION

Arabic language learning at the elementary school level, particularly in Islamic elementary schools (MI), plays a crucial role in shaping students' linguistic foundations. Arabic in the madrasa environment is positioned not merely as a local content subject, but as a tool for spiritual and academic communication that bridges students' understanding of the sources of Islamic teachings. However, teaching a foreign language to elementary school-aged children presents its own complex challenges. At this stage, Arabic is presented as a second foreign language after children have mastered their mother tongue (regional language) and Indonesian. Therefore, a very careful, planned, and enjoyable approach is required to ensure that the process of introducing this new language does not become a heavy psychological burden for children.

Theoretically, the primary orientation of the Arabic language learning curriculum at the MI level focuses on mastering the basic components of language (anashir al-lughah). Among the many linguistic components, such as grammar (nahwu-sharaf) and sounds (ashwat), vocabulary (mufradat) is the most fundamental and crucial element to master. Vocabulary can be likened to the building blocks of a building; without a sufficient vocabulary in children's memory, it is impossible for them to construct sentences, let alone master the four language skills (al-maharat al-arba'ah): listening (istima'), speaking (kalam), reading (qira'ah), and writing (kitabah). Therefore, cultivating and enriching vocabulary in early childhood requires special attention and instructional strategies aligned with their stage of cognitive development.



Arabic language learning in the modern era should no longer be viewed as a passive activity that simply requires students to memorize a series of dead texts, but rather must be transformed into a lively, contextual, dynamic communication process that provides profound meaning for the learner. However, the objective reality often encountered in the field often reveals a view that contradicts this ideal. To date, Arabic language learning at the madrasah level is still often perceived as difficult, boring, complicated, and even intimidating by the majority of students. Based on the results of the initial observations that the researcher carried out in depth in the Arabic language learning process for class III at one MI, it was clear that the material transmission process was still very much dominated by the one-way lecture method and a rigid text-based memorization pattern (rote learning).

Teachers typically begin lessons by writing a long vocabulary list on the board, reading it aloud once, and then asking students to copy it into their notebooks and memorize it or review it at the next meeting. This conventional and monotonous teaching method ignores a crucial psychological fact: elementary school-aged children (between 8 and 9 years old) are in the concrete operational phase of cognitive development. At this stage, children need tangible objects, clear visual representations, or direct physical experience to understand and grasp abstract concepts. Arabic words that are unfamiliar to their ears are abstract concepts that are very difficult to remember if presented only in the form of rigid functional letters on the board. Consequently, this rigid teaching method causes students to become bored very quickly, passive in class, and have very weak memory retention for the vocabulary they have learned. When memorization is presented as a single burden without engaging media, the linguistic gap in madrasah students will widen and trigger psychological resistance or rejection of Arabic from an early age.

Furthermore, the biggest challenge facing educators this decade is the shift in the psychographic profile of students, where the students they are currently dealing with are children belonging to Generation Alpha (children born after 2010). Generation Alpha is a group of pure digital natives who since infancy have been intensively exposed to rapid visual stimulation, multimedia devices, colorful moving images, and highly interactive environments. These innate characteristics indirectly shape their cognitive structure, where they have a much shorter attention span for textual media that is static, plain, and boring. However, on the other hand, they have proven to be very responsive, adaptive, and have an extraordinary high enthusiasm for colorful visual stimulation, interactivity between peers, and game elements (gamification). When these Generation Alpha children are forced to enter a classroom ecosystem that uses the conventional rote drill method of the past century, they tend to show symptoms of language anxiety.¹ These psychological symptoms manifest in the form of physical behavior such as bowing the head deeply, being reluctant to make a sound, being afraid of making mistakes, avoiding eye contact with the teacher, to withdrawing completely from class activities.

Forcing 20th-century learning methods on 21st-century children is a fatal methodological error. Contemporary Arabic language learning must adapt by integrating entertainment, enjoyment, strong visual stimulation, and physical activity to accommodate their visual and kinesthetic learning styles. To bridge this gap and address children's psychological challenges, innovative learning media are needed that can transform abstract Arabic concepts into concrete, enjoyable experiences for children.² One of the classic visual media that is very

¹ F. Z. Sholeha dan S. Al Baqi, "Kecemasan Peserta Didik dalam Pembelajaran Bahasa Arab," *Mahira: Journal of Arabic Studies* 2, No. 1 (2022): 1–12.

² D. N. Maghfirah, T. Taufik, dan A. Aliwafa, "Menjadikan Pembelajaran Mufradat Menyenangkan: Strategi Inovatif untuk Meningkatkan Motivasi Belajar Bahasa Arab di MI," *Al-Madrasah: Jurnal Ilmiah Pendidikan Madrasah Ibtidaiyah* 8, No. 4 (2024).

adaptive, flexible, and proven to be effective for child psychology is picture word cards (flashcards).³ However, the word cards developed and implemented in this study are not the usual conventional cards that are small and rigid in design. The picture cards in this study are modernly designed with a proportional size for children, featuring full-color, expressive cartoon graphic visualizations, and using a clear Arabic font that is easy for elementary school children to read. The use of physical media in the form of printed cards was deliberately chosen to restore the focus on real social interactions in the classroom, prevent children from excessive dependence on gadgets, and ensure the learning process can run smoothly without technical obstacles such as internet signal interference or limitations of school electronic devices.

In order for the use of physical picture card media to achieve maximum results and not get stuck in the monotonous traditional word guessing method, researchers integrated its use with a direct experience-based learning model (experiential learning) and the principles of healthy group play.⁴ Through this collaborative model, students do not just sit quietly looking at cards held by the teacher, but they experience direct language interactions through physical activities, object searches, group simulations, and fun inter-team competitions. The main focus of this single research is emphasized on qualitative descriptive analysis of how the dynamics of student learning behavior change in the classroom, how they erode fear of mistakes and linguistic anxiety, and how the MI classroom ecosystem can transform into a more inclusive, child-friendly, and joyful learning space. Based on the background of the problem, this study aims to describe and photograph in depth and comprehensively the implementation of innovative media of physical picture word cards based on experience and group games for third grade MI students in the current modern era.

METHOD

This research was conducted using a qualitative descriptive approach. The choice of this qualitative approach was based on the research objective of presenting in-depth, concrete, complete, and contextual descriptions, portraits, and data recordings of psychological phenomena, behavioral changes, and social dynamics of students during the learning intervention process in the classroom. Qualitative research allows researchers to examine not only the final results but also the processes, emotional expressions, and interactions between individuals that cannot be measured with conventional statistics. In the context of this research, the researcher acted as the primary instrument (human instrument), going directly into the field to collect data, observe situations, and interact with the research subjects. To maintain objectivity and data accuracy, the researcher was accompanied by a third-grade Arabic language teacher who acted as both an observer and a collaborator in the classroom.

This research was conducted at MI Bandung III Jombang, an elementary school that serves as an ideal location for capturing the characteristics of Generation Alpha students in a suburban environment. The subjects involved in this study were all third-grade students at MI Bandung III Jombang, a total of 25 boys and girls. The selection of grade III is based on considerations of the transition in children's cognitive development, where they begin to be faced with the demands of a more complex Arabic vocabulary structure compared to grade one or grade two, so that the potential for anxiety to arise in learning a foreign language is higher at this phase.

³ A. Arsyad, *Media Pembelajaran* (Jakarta: Rajawali Pers, 2011), h. 45.

⁴ S. Purnama, "Pembelajaran Bahasa Arab Berbasis Gamifikasi di Madrasah," *Jurnal Inovasi Pembelajaran* 8, No. 2 (2020): 145-158.

The data analysis process in this study adopted the interactive model developed by Miles and Huberman. This model views qualitative data analysis activities as not being conducted in isolation, but rather as a continuous, progressive cycle that flows through three main stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing or verification.

In the data reduction stage, the researcher conducted a rigorous process of selection, simplification, abstraction, and transformation of raw data sourced from random field notes, teacher interview transcripts, and recordings of student conversations. This data was grouped into narrative clusters that focused on two main indicators: a decrease in linguistic anxiety (such as a shift from silence to speaking up) and an increase in student motivation and vocabulary retention.

After data reduction, the next step was data display. At this stage, the researcher organized the selected data into a logical, systematic, and flowing narrative text, complemented by a summary table of the game's action flow to facilitate readers' understanding of the sequence of classroom activities. In the final stage, namely drawing conclusions and verification, the researcher conducted an in-depth interpretation of the behavioral patterns that emerged in the field. To maintain the validity, reliability, legitimacy, and objectivity of the data, the researcher applied source triangulation techniques (comparing observational data with teacher and student interviews) and method triangulation (comparing visual observations with field notes) before drawing final, permanent conclusions.

RESEARCH ANALYSIS

Portrait of Early Linguistic Anxiety of Generation Alpha Students

Based on the entire set of initial data collected through participant observation in grade III of MI Bandung III Jombang, an empirical portrait of conventional Arabic language learning shows very strong indications and symptoms of linguistic anxiety among students. Prior to the intervention using physical picture cards, the learning process was very rigid and entirely teacher-centered. When the supervising teacher began the lesson by writing a list of vocabulary words (*mufradat*) on the theme of school supplies (*adawatul madrosiyyah*) on the blackboard using chalk or markers, then asked students to imitate the pronunciation classically and memorize them independently, the classroom atmosphere suddenly became very cold, stiff, and passive.

The majority of Generation Alpha students, who psychologically greatly prefer dynamic visual stimulation, immediately displayed signs of acute boredom and veiled rejection of the material presented. A concrete symptom, captured in detail in the researcher's field notes, was the phenomenon of "mass head-bowing" when the teacher finished writing and offered the students the opportunity to read or pronounce the words alone in front of the class. Most children actively try to avoid eye contact with teachers to avoid being called to the front. Some students pretend to be busy tidying their pencil cases, others pretend to be writing, and still others choose to whisper to their deskmates simply to vent their boredom.

In-depth interviews with partner teachers revealed that this passive behavior pattern has crystallized and become a characteristic of the class for a long time. Teachers explained that students feel deeply pressured by the fear of making mistakes in pronouncing letter sounds (*makhraj*) and punctuation (*harakat*). These elementary-aged children's greatest fear is that their mispronunciations will trigger ridicule, cheers, or laughter from their peers in class. This uncomfortable psychosocial situation clearly demonstrates that traditional learning methods, which rely solely on rote learning, have failed to accommodate the emotional development needs of Generation Alpha. These outdated methods not only fail to transmit knowledge, but

instead build negative emotional barriers and minor academic traumas that alienate children from their love and interest in learning Arabic as a foreign language.

Dynamics of Experiential Learning and Group Games

A complete reorientation of the learning atmosphere and ecosystem began when researchers and partner teachers intervened by implementing innovative physical flashcards, designed with a modern, colorful design, and combined with a dynamic group game cycle. This radical transformation was closely observed by researchers through three phases of student learning behavior development that were highly interactive in the field:

Concrete Experience Phase (Vocabulary Treasure Hunt)

The initial step began with changing the physical layout of the classroom. Students' desks and chairs, initially arranged rigidly in rows facing the front, were reconfigured into a horseshoe or U-shape, leaving a large space in the center of the classroom. The researchers then divided the 25 students into five small, heterogeneous groups, each consisting of five children with varying academic abilities.

Instead of lengthy teacher explanations, the researchers immediately announced a group competition mission titled "Vocabulary Treasure Hunt." The researchers had previously hidden dozens of word cards with engaging physical images in various corners of the classroom, behind window blinds, under desks, and around the secure area of the madrasah courtyard.

Field observations recorded a surge in energy and a drastic change in the classroom atmosphere. Generation Alpha children, who initially appeared sluggish, sleepy, and passive, suddenly displayed physical enthusiasm and vibrant facial expressions. As soon as the whistle blew to start the game, they immediately became physically active, coordinating with their teammates, running around in an orderly fashion, and working together to find and collect hidden picture cards. This physical activity successfully broke the ice in the classroom and broke down the psychological distance between the students and the Arabic lesson.

Joint Observation and Imitation Phase (Modeling)

After each group had successfully found all the picture word cards, the activity shifted to the observation and conceptualization phase. Within their respective groups, students began to carefully examine the physical cards they had received. The cards featured modern cartoon illustrations closely related to their daily lives, along with large, clear Arabic script underneath.

In this phase, the teacher's role shifted to that of facilitator and modeler. The teacher came to the front of the class, held up a large, identical card, and pronounced the word with correct pronunciation and intonation. Researchers observed a very natural and unified imitation process within the group. The children collectively imitated the sounds of the words spoken by the teacher while their eyes fixed firmly on the pictures on the cards they held. When they pronounced words like "*qolamun*" (pen), "*kitabun*" (book), or "*mistoratun*" (ruler) together as a group, the fear of making individual mistakes completely disappeared. The presence of colorful physical cards acts as the main focus of children's attention, so they feel like they are playing a fun group quiz, not being tested or judged by the teacher.

Active Experimentation Phase (Collective Body Movement Method)

The peak of this learning transformation occurred when the researcher incorporated the principle of body movement (Total Physical Response) into the group competition system in front of the class.⁵ The group that collects the picture cards the fastest and most accurately

⁵ S. Wahyuni, "Penerapan Metode Total Physical Response Guna Meningkatkan Kemampuan Motorik dan Kebahasaan Siswa MI," *Jurnal Basicedu* 8, no. 1 (2024): 102-115.

matches the Arabic word cards to their corresponding picture cards is challenged to demonstrate the words in front of the entire class. However, this challenge must be carried out collectively by all team members, not by individual representatives. For example, when it's a group's turn to demonstrate the word "mistoratun" (ruler), all five members of the team must come to the front of the class together.

They then simultaneously demonstrate a physical movement of their hands as if drawing a long, straight line in the air, while loudly and cheerfully repeating the word "mistoratun."⁶ Observations noted that this method of expressive and collaborative body movements succeeded in melting and dissolving all the child's emotional tension, embarrassment and linguistic anxiety completely.

Discussion of Theoretical Analysis and Psychosocial Implications

Theoretically and scientifically, the changes in adaptive behavior and increased self-confidence in students consistently recorded in this qualitative study can be analyzed using several theoretical foundations of developmental psychology and learning. First, the phenomenon of growing student courage aligns closely with the concept of Social Learning Theory, proposed by Albert Bandura.⁷ Menurut Bandura, tingkat keyakinan diri seseorang (efikasi diri) untuk melakukan sebuah intention baru dalam hal ini melafalkan kosakata bahasa asing dapat tumbuh secara optimal apabila individu tersebut berada di dalam lingkungan sosial yang memberikan dukungan penuh serta adanya penguatan positif (*positive reinforcement*).

This is in line with the dynamics of emotional development of elementary school children in the modern era, where understanding of mental health and psychological readiness of students in receiving foreign language material is a determining factor in the success of internalizing the linguistic values themselves.⁸ Horizontal emotional support among peers within small groups acts as a very solid psychological support. Third-grade students who individually have low self-confidence, experience articulation difficulties, or are slow to read Arabic texts, are gradually inspired to speak up because they experience positive emotional contagion from their much more active and enthusiastic group members. Constructing an interactive learning environment like this has been proven to be able to erode the fundamental problem in foreign language learning, where articulation difficulties and low initial student interest often stem from minimal positive emotional involvement in the classroom.⁹

This phenomenon of social interaction also strengthens and validates Lev Vygotsky's theory of social development regarding the concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD).¹⁰ Vygotsky emphasized the importance of adaptive social interactions in facilitating children's cognitive maturation through peer tutoring. More proficient students subconsciously guide their less proficient peers as they arrange and match picture cards in a game, allowing the transfer of knowledge to occur without any patronizing influence.

Second, when viewed from the perspective of children's cognitive information processing, the integration of strong visual stimulation on physical picture cards has been proven to qualitatively extend the attention span of Generation Alpha students, which is known to be very short. Based on the Dual Coding Theory developed by Allan Paivio, the brains of elementary school-aged children work with a much higher level of efficiency when they process

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ Albert Bandura, *Social Learning Theory* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1977), h. 34.

⁸ R. Ahmad, "Psikologi Perkembangan Anak Masa Kini," *Jurnal Edukasi* 9, no. 3 (2023): 210-222.

⁹ Z. Zakaria, "Problematisasi Bahasa Arab Sebagai Bahasa Asing," *Jurnal Jiluna Arabiyah* 4, no. 1 (2024): 12-25.

¹⁰ L. S. Vygotsky, *Mind in Society: The Development of Higher Psychological Processes* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1978), h. 56.

verbal symbols (Arabic text) presented side by side and simultaneously with non-verbal symbols (concrete and colorful cartoon illustrations).¹¹ Optimizing contextually designed visual media has been proven to accelerate the visualization of abstract vocabulary concepts into concrete understanding for children naturally. When students see an engaging picture of a book alongside the word "kitabun," their brains create two memory pathways simultaneously.

Through this exciting, hands-on experience involving physical activity, students' retention of new vocabulary can be firmly embedded in their long-term memory through subconscious learning, rather than through the exhausting, one-way process of forced memory. This methodological transformation confirms the absolute necessity of updating material delivery strategies for elementary Arabic language teachers to achieve curriculum targets without sacrificing children's enjoyment of learning.

Comparative Dimensions	Initial Conditions (Conventional)	Post-Intervention Condition (Cards & Games)
Main method	Lectures, rote learning (rigid text-based memorization)	Experiential learning through card hunts and group competitions
Instructional media	Chalk/marker writing on a blackboard (static and plain)	Physical, modern, full-color picture word cards (flashcards)
Student attitude	Passive, head down, afraid of making mistakes, anxious	Active, bold in speaking, confident, enthusiastic in moving
Class focus	Teacher-centered	Student-centered and group interaction
Memory (retention)	Very weak, students quickly forget at the next meeting	Very strong, vocabulary is stored in long-term memory

Furthermore, in-depth interviews with Arabic language teachers confirmed a significant paradigm shift in teaching within educators. Partner teachers acknowledged that this simple yet creative learning model innovation offers a new perspective and perspective. Teaching Generation Alpha children doesn't require sophisticated and expensive technology, but rather requires teachers' willingness to design engaging visual media and act as facilitators, creating a psychologically safe play space for children.¹² The success of this innovative classroom management based on physical media is authentic proof that teachers' creativity in designing handmade educational teaching aids is actually much more effective and adaptive when applied to elementary school level madrasahs.¹³

When this emotional safe space is successfully created within the madrasah, students no longer view Arabic lessons as a frightening academic threat or a ghost to be avoided, but rather as a fun, inclusive, child-friendly linguistic adventure that is eagerly anticipated each week. The use of physical cards has also proven to be free from technical operational constraints that often disrupt the rhythm of teachers' teaching, such as power outages or computer errors, allowing learning time to be fully utilized 100% for meaningful educational interactions.¹⁴

¹¹ A. Arsyad, *Media Pembelajaran* (Jakarta: Rajawali Pers, 2011), h. 48.

¹² N. Nurhayati, "Pendekatan Humanis Guru Bahasa Arab dalam Pembelajaran Generasi Alfa," *Jurnal Pendidikan Islam* 11, No. 2 (2025): 189-204.

¹³ M. F. R. Rozie, "Inovasi Media Pembelajaran Di Madrasah Ibtidaiyah," *Jurnal Imtiyaz* 5, No. 2 (2021): 120-131.

¹⁴ M. Sahroni, "Karakteristik Pembelajaran Generasi Alfa pada Tingkat Pendidikan Dasar," *Jurnal Pendidikan Dasar Nusantara* 6, No. 1 (2022): 88-102.

CONCLUSION

Based on all the data analysis results, field findings, and theoretical discussion outlined above, this qualitative descriptive study can firmly conclude that the innovative implementation of physical flashcards, combined with hands-on experience and group games, has proven highly effective in addressing linguistic anxiety and improving vocabulary mastery in third-grade students at MI Bandung III Jombang. The radical transformation of the classroom from a rigid, conventional instructional model to an interactive, colorful, and movement-based learning environment successfully reduced the negative psychological barriers of Generation Alpha students. Fear of making mistakes, shyness, and passivity were effectively eliminated and replaced by a sense of self-confidence, courage to explore pronunciation, and a strong sense of collaboration among peers.

The combination of enjoyable physical activity, strong visual stimulation through modern card designs, and a healthy group game structure has been shown to optimize children's long-term memory retention of Arabic vocabulary naturally without triggering emotional distress or academic stress. Based on the success of this intervention program, the researcher provides a strong recommendation to educators at the MI level to start abandoning the rigid memorization drill method and switch to adopting a physical picture card-based learning model and group games as one of the main instructional strategies that is adaptive, inexpensive, easy to implement, but very appropriate to the characteristics of the psychological development of Generation Alpha children in today's modern era.

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