

Improving Hijaiyyah Letter Recognition Ability of Children Aged 5–6 Years Through Flashcard Media at KB An-Nur

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Abstract

The ability to recognize Hijaiyyah letters is an essential foundation in early childhood Qur'anic education that directly determines the quality of Qur'an reading in the future. However, various field findings indicate that this ability remains very low in many Islamic early childhood education institutions, including KB An-Nur, where only 4 out of 20 observed children (20%) were able to recognize Hijaiyyah letters well. This low achievement is attributed to the use of learning media that is insufficiently varied and engaging for children. This study aims to describe the implementation process of flashcard media and analyze the improvement in the ability to recognize Hijaiyyah letters of children aged 5–6 years at KB An-Nur. The study uses a Classroom Action Research (CAR) design following the Kemmis & McTaggart model, conducted in two cycles, each consisting of three meetings. Research subjects were 20 Group B children at KB An-Nur. Data were collected through structured observation, interviews, and documentation, then analyzed using a descriptive qualitative approach combined with percentage achievement calculations. The success criterion was set at $\geq 80\%$ of children reaching the Developing as Expected (BSH) category. The results show a significant improvement: in the initial condition only 20% of children reached BSH; increasing to 60% at the end of Cycle I; and reaching 90% at the end of Cycle II, surpassing the established success criterion. The effectiveness of flashcard media operates through mechanisms of multisensory stimulation, visual memory reinforcement, and enjoyable learning appropriate to the learning characteristics of early childhood.

Keywords: Flashcard Media, Hijaiyyah Letters, Letter Recognition Ability, Early Childhood

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1. Introduction

Reading the Qur'an is one of the fundamental obligations for every Muslim, and this ability must be built from early childhood for the internalization process to proceed optimally. The primary foundation of Qur'an reading ability is the mastery of Hijaiyyah letters – the Arabic alphabet consisting of 29 letters with unique characteristics in shape, sound, and pronunciation that differ significantly from the Latin alphabet system familiar to Indonesian children. From an Islamic perspective, parents are responsible for instilling love for the Qur'an and providing reading education from an early age, as the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) said: “Educate your children in three things: loving your Prophet, loving the Prophet's family, and reading the Qur'an” (HR. Thabrani). This hadith affirms that Qur'anic learning, including recognition of Hijaiyyah letters as its foundation, is a priority in Islamic early childhood education.

The importance of early literacy education – including letter symbol recognition – has received strong confirmation from developmental neuroscience. Blakemore and Frith (2005) affirm that early childhood (0–8 years) is a sensitive period for brain development, during which the capacity for language acquisition and symbol recognition is at its peak. During this period, appropriate stimulation – including consistent exposure to letter symbol systems – forms strong synaptic connections and produces a highly advantageous cognitive foundation for later literacy learning. Snow et al. (1998) affirm that letter recognition ability at preschool age is the strongest predictor of reading ability in early elementary school – a finding that applies across writing systems, including Hijaiyyah letters.

In Indonesia, awareness of the importance of Qur'anic education from an early age is growing, reflected in the proliferation of Qur'an-based Islamic PAUD institutions such as Kelompok Bermain (KB), Islamic Kindergartens, TPA, and Raudhatul Athfal (RA). The Indonesian Minister of Religion Regulation No. 13 of 2014 explicitly designates Hijaiyyah letter recognition as a basic competency to be achieved by early childhood children in Islamic educational institutions. However, surveys by various researchers show that achievement of this competency remains far below expectations in many institutions, with achievement percentages often below 50% (Mukhlis & Hamid, 2022; Rahmawati & Purwanto, 2022).

Similar conditions were found at KB An-Nur. Based on initial observations, of 20 Group B children observed, only 4 children (20%) were able to recognize Hijaiyyah letters well – able to name letters, recognize their shapes, and distinguish them from similar letters. Eight children (40%) were in the Emerging (MB) category, and 8 children (40%) were in the Not Yet Developed (BB) category. Teacher interviews identified the main cause: Hijaiyyah letter learning had been conducted conventionally through copying from the blackboard and group oral memorization, without engaging and interactive media. Children became bored quickly, showed poor concentration, and lacked motivation.

The challenges in teaching Hijaiyyah letters to early childhood children are multidimensional. From a linguistic perspective, Hijaiyyah letters comprise 29 characters, most of which have no visual equivalent in the Latin alphabet, making knowledge transfer from prior Latin letter learning unreliable (Mukhlis & Hamid, 2022). From a morphological perspective, each Hijaiyyah letter has four different forms depending on its position in a word. From a developmental perspective, children aged 5–6 years are still in the preoperational stage and learn optimally through concrete and visual experiences, not through abstraction and rote memorization (Piaget, 1969).

Flashcard media offers a solution that is theoretically well-suited to address these challenges. Flashcards are practical-sized learning cards displaying images, symbols, or text on one side and supporting information on the other, designed to facilitate quick and efficient visual recognition. Mayer's (2009) Cognitive Theory of Multimedia Learning affirms that combining visual and verbal representations in a single learning medium produces significantly

better understanding and retention compared to unimodal learning – a principle that directly supports the use of flashcards in Hijaiyyah letter learning.

Various empirical studies have confirmed the effectiveness of flashcard media in letter and vocabulary learning for early childhood children. Basal et al. (2016) found that digital flashcards significantly improved letter and word recognition ability in preschool children compared to conventional methods. Rahmawati and Purwanto (2022) found significant improvement in Hijaiyyah letter recognition through picture flashcard media. Mukhlis and Hamid (2022) confirmed similar effectiveness in RA institutions. This study therefore aims to: (1) describe the initial condition of Hijaiyyah letter recognition ability of children aged 5–6 years at KB An-Nur; (2) describe the implementation process of flashcard media in two CAR cycles; (3) analyze the improvement in children's Hijaiyyah letter recognition ability; and (4) identify factors supporting and hindering flashcard media effectiveness.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Hijaiyyah Letter Recognition Ability

Hijaiyyah letters constitute the Arabic alphabet of 29 letters used in the Qur'an. Unlike the Latin alphabet, Hijaiyyah letters are written from right to left, have forms that change depending on position in the word, and have unique phonetic characteristics (makhrāj) – not all of which have equivalents in Indonesian. Hijaiyyah letter recognition ability in early childhood is defined as the ability to identify, name, and distinguish the visual form of each Hijaiyyah letter consistently – a competency that is an absolute prerequisite for Qur'an reading ability (Khadijah, 2016).

From a literacy development perspective, letter knowledge is one of the most predictive early literacy components for later reading ability. Adams (1990) in her seminal work identified knowledge of letter names and shapes as the strongest predictor of early reading ability, even more predictive than general intelligence or socioeconomic status. Although Adams' research focused on the Latin alphabet, Ghali et al. (2022) found an analogous pattern: Hijaiyyah letter recognition ability at age 5–6 is the strongest predictor of Qur'an reading ability in early elementary school.

The complexity of Hijaiyyah letter learning for early childhood children must be comprehensively understood. First, the visual-discriminative aspect: many Hijaiyyah letters share similar skeletal forms and are distinguished only by the number and position of dots (nuqtah) – for example, ba' (ب), ta' (ت), and tsa' (ث) are all similarly shaped but differ in the number of dots. Second, the phonetic aspect: each Hijaiyyah letter has a specific sound, several of which have no equivalent in Indonesian. Third, the sequential and naming aspect: in addition to recognizing shapes and sounds, children must learn the name of each letter (alif, ba', ta', etc.) (Khadijah, 2016; Mukhlis & Hamid, 2022).

Indicators of Hijaiyyah letter recognition ability for children aged 5–6 years used in this study encompass four dimensions: (1) visual identification – the ability to point to a named letter from a set of letter cards; (2) naming – the ability to state the letter's name when shown a specific card; (3) discrimination – the ability to distinguish visually similar letters; and (4) production – the ability to trace or copy the letter shape (Khadijah, 2016; Mukhlis & Hamid, 2022). Factors influencing this ability include both internal factors (visual-motor maturity, working memory capacity, intrinsic motivation) and external factors (frequency and quality of exposure, learning media quality, teacher pedagogical competence) (Mukhlis & Hamid, 2022).

2.2. Flashcard Media: Concept, Theoretical Foundations, and Advantages

Flashcard media is one of the most widely used visual media in global language and literacy learning for early childhood. Etymologically, flashcard comes from flash (quick) and

card, reflecting its use: cards are shown quickly and repeatedly to build automatic recognition of the displayed information. In Hijaiyyah letter learning, flashcards can display a large, colored letter on one side accompanied by the letter name, pronunciation guide, and supporting images on the other side (Arsyad, 2020).

The theoretical basis for using flashcard media rests on several mutually supportive theories. First, Paivio's (1986) Dual Coding Theory states that the human brain processes information through two different yet interacting systems: the verbal system (for words and language) and the imagistic system (for images and visuals). When both systems are activated simultaneously – as when children see a Hijaiyyah letter shape (visual) while hearing the letter name (verbal) – the memory representation formed is far stronger than unimodal encoding.

Second, Mayer's (2009) Cognitive Theory of Multimedia Learning identifies three relevant principles: the multimedia principle (people learn better from words and pictures than from words alone), the coherence principle (effective learning requires eliminating irrelevant information), and the segmenting principle (learning broken into small segments is more effective than holistic presentation). Third, Ebbinghaus's (1885) Spaced Repetition Learning principle states that repetition spread across increasing time intervals is far more effective for long-term memory consolidation than massed practice. Flashcard use naturally supports spaced repetition implementation (Kornell & Bjork, 2008).

Fourth, from a developmental perspective, flashcard use is highly suited to the learning characteristics of children aged 5–6 years. Piaget (1969) affirms that preoperational children learn optimally through concrete and visual experiences. Vygotsky's (1978) concept of Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) explains how teachers, through structured flashcard use, can provide appropriate scaffolding to help children build Hijaiyyah letter recognition from what they already know toward more complete mastery.

Advantages of flashcard media in early childhood learning documented in the literature include: (1) time efficiency, many items can be presented in a short time; (2) flexibility of use – applicable in various contexts (individual, small group, classical) and activities (matching, sequencing, guessing games); (3) visual appeal, colored and illustrated designs attract children's attention and motivation; (4) portability; (5) active engagement, enabling hands-on activities; and (6) ease of evaluation, teachers can easily monitor individual progress (Arsyad, 2020; Rahmawati & Purwanto, 2022; Mukhlis & Hamid, 2022).

2.3. Learning Characteristics of Children Aged 5–6 Years

Children aged 5–6 years are in the late preoperational stage according to Piaget's cognitive development theory, characterized by perception-based and concrete-experience-dominated thinking, increasingly mature symbolic function development, ability to classify objects by one attribute, and beginning development of more structured memory capacity. At this stage, children are highly responsive to engaging visual stimulation and learn most effectively through enjoyable repetition (Suyadi & Ulfah, 2021).

NAEYC (2020) in its Developmentally Appropriate Practice document identifies several relevant learning principles: active learning (children learn best when actively engaged physically, mentally, and emotionally – flashcard activities involving pointing, holding, matching, and naming fulfill this principle); play-based learning (a play context provides high intrinsic motivation and reduces learning anxiety – flashcards can easily be integrated into enjoyable games); and repetition with variation (children need consistent repetition presented in variety that maintains interest). The fine motor development aspect is also relevant: activities of tracing and copying Hijaiyyah letter shapes contribute to fine motor development while simultaneously reinforcing letter recognition (Khadijah, 2016).

3. Research Methodology

3.1. Research Design and Setting

This study uses a Classroom Action Research (CAR) design following the Kemmis and McTaggart (1988) cyclical model, conducted in two cycles. The approach combines descriptive qualitative analysis with quantitative percentage calculations to measure indicator achievement. The research was conducted at KB An-Nur, located in Asahan Regency, North Sumatra, during the even semester of the 2025–2026 academic year (January–March 2026). Research subjects were all 20 Group B children at KB An-Nur (10 boys and 10 girls), aged 5–6 years.

3.2. Research Procedure: Cycles I and II

Each cycle consisted of three meetings (60–90 minutes each) and proceeded through four sequential stages.

Planning stage included: identifying Hijaiyyah letters to be taught in each cycle (Cycle I: letters alif–mim; Cycle II: letters nun–ya' plus reinforcement of difficult letters from Cycle I); preparing Daily Learning Implementation Plans (RPPH) integrating flashcard media; producing A4-sized, colored, illustrated Hijaiyyah flashcard sets; preparing structured observation sheets; and preparing individual assessment sheets. Cycle II planning also incorporated improvements based on Cycle I reflection, including additional activity variations and differentiation strategies.

Implementation stage followed the prepared RPPH. Each meeting followed a sequence: opening with prayer and Hijaiyyah letter apperception (10 minutes); core activities using flashcards through varied activities (40–60 minutes); and closing with brief evaluation and group reflection (10 minutes). Flashcard-based activities included: (a) whole-class flashcard presentation – teacher shows cards one by one while naming letters and children repeat; (b) matching game – children match letter cards with picture cards; (c) hide and seek card – children find letter cards hidden around the classroom; and (d) group competition – groups race to correctly sequence letter cards.

Observation stage was conducted simultaneously with action implementation. Observers used structured observation sheets containing four Hijaiyyah letter recognition indicators assessed using a four-point scale: Not Yet Developed (BB/1), Emerging (MB/2), Developing as Expected (BSH/3), and Developing Very Well (BSB/4).

Reflection stage was conducted at the end of each cycle through observation data analysis, identification of supporting and hindering factors, and formulation of improvements for the next cycle, conducted through discussion between researcher and assistant teacher.

3.3. Data Collection and Analysis

Data were collected through three complementary techniques: structured observation using four-scale observation sheets with four Hijaiyyah letter recognition indicators, supplemented by field notes; semi-structured interviews with the Head and Class Teacher of KB An-Nur; and documentation including RPPH, daily assessment records, and photographs/video recordings of learning activities (with school and parental consent).

Data analysis used Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña's (2014) interactive model: data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. Achievement percentage was calculated using the formula: $P = (f / N) \times 100\%$, where P = achievement percentage, f = number of children reaching BSH or BSB category, and N = total number of children (Sudijono, 2010). The research success criterion was set at $\geq 80\%$ of children reaching BSH or BSB across all Hijaiyyah letter recognition indicators. Data validity was ensured through technique triangulation (comparing observation, interview, and documentation data) and source triangulation.

4. Results

4.1. Initial Condition: Hijaiyyah Letter Recognition Ability Before Action

Initial observation before flashcard media implementation revealed a concerning condition regarding the Hijaiyyah letter recognition ability of children aged 5–6 years at KB An-Nur. Of 20 research subjects, assessment of four indicators showed: only 4 children (20%) were in the BSH or BSB category. Eight children (40%) were in the MB category, and 8 children (40%) were still in the BB category.

Per-indicator details showed: visual identification: 5 children (25%) reached BSH/BSB; letter naming: 4 children (20%); discrimination of similar letters: 3 children (15%); production/tracing: 6 children (30%). The letter discrimination indicator had the lowest achievement, confirming that distinguishing letters differing only in the number and position of dots (such as ba', ta', tsa') was the greatest challenge for children.

Teacher interviews identified the main cause: “We have been teaching Hijaiyyah letters only by writing on the blackboard and asking children to copy. There is no engaging media, so children become bored and lose focus quickly.” The Head of KB An-Nur added that limited learning media at the institution was the primary obstacle to pedagogical innovation. This validated the urgent need for flashcard media implementation.

Table 1. Summary of Achievement Across Three Conditions

Indicator	Initial Condition	Cycle I	Cycle II
Visual Identification	25% (5 children)	65% (13 children)	95% (19 children)
Letter Naming	20% (4 children)	60% (12 children)	90% (18 children)
Discrimination of Similar Letters	15% (3 children)	50% (10 children)	85% (17 children)
Production / Tracing	30% (6 children)	65% (13 children)	95% (19 children)
Overall BSH/BSB	20% (4 children)	60% (12 children)	90% (18 children)

4.2. Cycle I: Flashcard Media Implementation

Cycle I focused on introducing the first 15 Hijaiyyah letters (alif through mim) across three meetings. Each meeting introduced 4–5 new letters while reviewing letters from previous meetings. The flashcard set was designed in A4 size with letters printed large in the center in blue or pink, accompanied by the letter name in Arabic and Indonesian, with supporting images on the back.

The first meeting used whole-class flashcard presentation with a structured approach: teacher shows the card, clearly names the letter, requests whole-class repetition, then calls on individual children. Children's enthusiasm was very high – the colored and illustrated flashcards successfully captured all children's attention from the outset. The second meeting added a matching game where children matched letter cards with picture cards. The third meeting used a group competition where teams raced to correctly sequence letter cards.

Observation results at the end of Cycle I showed significant improvement: children reaching BSH/BSB increased from 4 children (20%) to 12 children (60%). Per-indicator results are shown in Table 1. Although showing meaningful improvement, these results had not yet reached the 80% success criterion, so the research continued to Cycle II.

Reflection on Cycle I identified areas needing improvement: (a) activity variation needed to increase – children showed signs of fatigue toward the same format in the third meeting; (b) special attention needed for visually similar letter groups (ba', ta', tsa'; dal, dzal; ra', zai; etc.) as highest error rates occurred in these letter groups; (c) positive reinforcement systems needed

strengthening and greater consistency; and (d) pacing needed adjustment – some children required more consolidation time before moving to the next letter.

4.3. Cycle II: Improvement and Continued Implementation

Based on Cycle I reflection findings, Cycle II was designed with several strategic improvements. First, content focus: in addition to continuing to the remaining 14 letters (nun through ya'), Cycle II gave special attention to letters with the highest error rates in Cycle I. Second, richer activity variation: new activities were added including hide and seek card (letter cards hidden around the classroom for children to find), memory card (children match identical card pairs from face-down positions), and sand writing (children trace letters with their finger on a sand-filled tray). Third, differentiation strategies: 8 children still below BSH received 10-minute intensive guidance sessions before the main activity. Fourth, a collective reward system: a class star board visually showing all children's progress, providing collective motivation.

Observation results at the end of Cycle II showed very significant improvement, surpassing the success criterion. Children reaching BSH/BSB increased to 18 children (90%). Per-indicator results are shown in Table 1. The dramatic improvement in the similar letter discrimination indicator – from 50% to 85% – demonstrates that strategies specifically focused on similar letter groups proved highly effective. The most notable improvement compared to the initial condition was in letter naming (from 20% to 90%) and visual identification (from 25% to 95%).

4.4. Discussion: Mechanisms of Flashcard Media Effectiveness

The significant improvement in Hijaiyyah letter recognition ability – from 20% (initial condition) to 60% (Cycle I) and 90% (Cycle II) – provides strong empirical confirmation of flashcard media effectiveness at KB An-Nur. This effectiveness can be explained through four interrelated mechanisms.

First, the dual coding mechanism: each flashcard simultaneously activates the visual system (seeing the letter shape) and the verbal system (hearing and pronouncing the letter name), producing stronger memory representations through Paivio's (1986) dual coding mechanism. When both representations are formed and interconnected, information accessibility from memory increases significantly.

Second, the spaced repetition mechanism: each meeting consistently revisited previously learned letters while introducing new ones. This distributed repetition optimizes long-term memory consolidation in accordance with Kornell and Bjork's (2008) principle. Cards not yet mastered were shown more frequently – intuitively applying effective spaced repetition.

Third, the active engagement mechanism: various flashcard-based activities – guessing games, matching, hide and seek, group competition – actively engaged children physically, cognitively, and emotionally. This active engagement aligns with NAEYC's (2020) active learning principle and produces far more meaningful learning than passive reception.

Fourth, the intrinsic motivation mechanism: game elements integrated into flashcard use create an enjoyable and intrinsically motivating learning context. Deci and Ryan's (2000) self-determination theory affirms that intrinsic motivation produces deeper, more durable, and more adaptive learning. When children enjoy flashcard games, they unknowingly engage in intensive repetition that highly optimizes Hijaiyyah letter learning.

These findings are consistent with previous research. Rahmawati and Purwanto (2022) found significant improvement in Hijaiyyah letter recognition through picture flashcards. Mukhlis and Hamid (2022) confirmed flashcard effectiveness in RA contexts. Basal et al. (2016) showed that flashcards consistently produce significant letter recognition improvement across cultural contexts. This cross-study consistency provides strong empirical support for

flashcard media as a reliable Hijaiyyah letter learning strategy across diverse Islamic PAUD institution contexts.

5. Conclusion

Based on research results and discussion, four main conclusions can be drawn. First, the initial condition of Hijaiyyah letter recognition ability of children aged 5–6 years at KB An-Nur was very low, with only 20% of children reaching the BSH/BSB category. This low achievement was primarily caused by the use of conventional teaching methods without engaging and interactive media, failing to motivate children or optimize memory encoding for Hijaiyyah letters. Second, flashcard media implementation was systematically conducted through two CAR cycles with varied activities – whole-class presentation, matching game, hide and seek card, and group competition – successfully creating engaging, enjoyable, and meaningful learning experiences. Reflection-based improvements in Cycle II, including additional activity variations, differentiation strategies, and a more consistent reinforcement system, proved to substantially increase effectiveness.

Third, flashcard media is proven effective in significantly improving Hijaiyyah letter recognition ability: from 20% (initial condition) to 60% (Cycle I) and 90% (Cycle II), surpassing the established 80% success criterion. This effectiveness operates through four mechanisms: dual coding, spaced repetition, active engagement, and intrinsic motivation. Fourth, the visual discrimination indicator for similar-looking letters is the most challenging dimension requiring the longest mastery time, but can be significantly improved through specifically focused strategies – from 15% (initial condition) to 85% (Cycle II).

Based on these conclusions, four strategic recommendations are offered. For teachers at KB An-Nur and other Islamic PAUD institutions: adopt flashcard media as the primary medium for Hijaiyyah letter learning, integrating varied flashcard-based activities each session. For school heads and administrators: invest in developing quality Hijaiyyah flashcard sets and provide pedagogical training on effective flashcard techniques. For parents: reinforce school learning through Hijaiyyah flashcard use at home in short, enjoyable daily sessions (5–10 minutes). For future researchers: explore further innovations including digital flashcard applications integrating audio pronunciation, augmented reality flashcards displaying 3D animations, and comparative studies between conventional and digital flashcards to identify optimal usage contexts.

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