

## Arabic Language Learning Innovations Based on Puzzle Games: Case Study at Walisongo Ngabar Ponorogo Islamic Boarding School

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### ABSTRACT

This study aims to describe Arabic language learning innovations based on puzzle games at the Walisongo Ngabar Islamic Boarding School and analyze its effectiveness in increasing students' interest and understanding of the subject matter. The background of this research is based on the need for a learning method that is fun, interactive, and able to activate the participation of students in the Arabic learning process, which has tended to be monotonous and teacher-centered. This research approach uses a qualitative method with a case study type. Data collection techniques are carried out through observation, interviews with teachers and students, and documentation of learning activities. The results of the study show that the use of puzzle media, such as crossword puzzles, word searches, and sentence composing, is able to increase students' enthusiasm for learning, strengthen mastery of mufradat (vocabulary), and encourage group cooperation in the classroom. This strategy also helps teachers in creating an active and fun learning atmosphere without reducing the depth of the material being taught. Thus, Arabic learning innovations based on puzzle games can be an effective alternative in developing teaching methods in the pesantren environment.

Keywords: Arabic Language Learning, Innovation, Puzzles and Educational Games

### Introduction

Arabic is one of the main languages in the world of Islamic education because it is the main key in understanding Islamic teachings sourced from the Qur'an and Hadith. Good command of Arabic not only serves as a means of communication, but also as a scientific and spiritual means to dig deep into the treasures of Islamic science. In the context of Islamic educational institutions such as Islamic boarding schools, Arabic has a strategic position because it is the main medium in teaching and learning activities, especially in the fields of

interpretation, hadith, and fiqh. However, although Arabic is conceptually important, the practice of learning in the field still faces significant challenges.

One of the main problems that is often encountered in learning Arabic in Islamic boarding schools is the low motivation of students to learn. This is largely due to the traditional and teacher-centered approach to learning. This teaching model makes students tend to be passive, only receiving material without many opportunities to actively participate. According to Arsyad (2019), learning media has an important role in increasing student attention, participation, and understanding. Visually appealing and interactive media are able to create a more dynamic and fun learning atmosphere, so that the learning process is no longer monotonous and boring.

Furthermore, in the current era of modern education, learning is not enough to be oriented only to the transfer of knowledge, but also to emphasize the transfer of skills and the transfer of values. This means that learning Arabic in Islamic boarding schools needs to be directed to develop communicative competence, critical thinking skills, and the active and collaborative character of students. To achieve this goal, innovation in learning methods and media is an urgent need (Hamalik, 2020). Innovation does not only mean the use of technology, but also involves teachers' creativity in designing learning activities that are contextual, relevant, and fun.

One form of effective innovation in the context of language learning is the application of educational game media, such as puzzles. Educational games have great potential to overcome learning boredom and increase student engagement. Puzzles, as one of the game media, require students to think critically, find patterns, and connect concepts with each other. According to Huda (2018), educational game media can encourage active learning and meaningful learning, because students are directly involved in the process of finding meaning, not just passively receiving information.

In the context of learning Arabic, puzzle games can be modified to train various language skills (*maharah lughawiyah*), such as *maharah al-qirā'ah* (reading), *maharah al-kitābah* (writing), *maharah al-istimā'* (listening), and *maharah al-kalām* (speak). For example, letter puzzles can be used to introduce new vocabulary, while sentence puzzles can practice the ability to understand the structure of *nahwu* and *sharf* in a fun way. In addition, puzzle building activities can strengthen long-term memory because they involve visual, motor, and cognitive processes simultaneously.

More importantly, the application of puzzle game media in learning Arabic in Islamic boarding schools can be a means of integration between the *tarbiyah* method (value and character education) and *ta'dib* (habituation of manners and social skills). Through collaborative games, students not only learn the language, but also develop an attitude of cooperation, responsibility, and sportsmanship. Thus, puzzle-based learning innovations are not only oriented to academic results, but also shape the personality and character of students as a whole (holistic education).

Therefore, this study is important to further analyze the effectiveness of puzzle game media in learning Arabic at the Walisongo Ngabar Islamic Boarding School. This research is expected to make a theoretical contribution to the

development of innovative Arabic learning models, as well as offer practical solutions for educators in pesantren in creating a more active, fun, and meaningful learning environment for students.

## Method

This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach with a case study method at the Walisongo Ngabar Islamic Boarding School. The main data sources came from Arabic teachers, students, and the results of observation of learning activities. Data was collected through participatory observation techniques, in-depth interviews, and documentation (Sugiyono, 2019).

The qualitative approach has a natural characteristic because it uses direct data sources, here the process is more important than the results. 1 A qualitative approach can be used in revealing and understanding something behind the phenomenon that occurs. In some fields of study, it is basically more appropriate to use a qualitative approach, for example research that seeks to reveal the nature or experience of a person about a phenomenon. 2 The type of research used in this study includes field research, research that is carried out systematically by collecting data in the field. 1 Field research is carried out in the community or institution. (Lexy J Moleong, 2008)

In this study, the researcher acts as a key instrument, where the researcher plans the research, prepares research proposals and research permits. Then look for data that includes data on the implementation of student Arabic language learning. Next, collect data, analyze data, and finally write a report on the results of the research.

The location of this study is at the Walisongo Islamic Boarding School, Ngabar Village, Siman District, Ponorogo Regency. Data sources are subjects from which research data can be obtained. Based on this understanding, it can be understood that what is meant by a data source is where the researcher will start and dig up information in the form of the necessary data. Data sources generally consist of people, places and papers. 1

The data collection technique in this study is based on Sugiyono's opinion, the author uses interviews, namely by using a free guided interview technique, meaning that the interview is carried out by asking the main questions that have been compiled based on the core of the problem which aims to enable the author to get data, especially about learning Arabic by using a puzzle-based learning strategy to improve Arabic understanding in the 4 students of the Walisongo Islamic boarding school. Then observation, in this study the author uses participatory observation, namely the author is directly involved in the program activities of the language class, especially the observed Arabic language learning. Among the types of activities observed were the Arabic language learning process, the application of puzzle-based Arabic learning strategies, the advantages and disadvantages of puzzle-based learning methods.

## Results and Discussion

Arabic learning in Islamic boarding schools has its own characteristics because it not only emphasizes cognitive aspects, but also spiritual and social values. In this context, learning media plays an important role in creating an effective, interactive, and fun learning atmosphere (Arsyad, 2019: 21). Good media is not only a visual aid, but also a vehicle that is able to bridge theory and practice, and help students build the meaning of learning through direct experience. Therefore, this study focuses on the application of puzzle media as an Arabic learning innovation at the Walisongo Ngabar Islamic Boarding School.

Conventional methods that have been used in teaching Arabic, such as lectures and memorization, often make students feel bored and passive. In this case, media that is able to actively involve them both cognitively and affectively is needed. Huda (2018: 57) emphasized that activity-based learning can increase student engagement and encourage them to think creatively and discover their own knowledge. Against this background, the use of puzzles is the right strategy to create a more meaningful learning experience.

### ***The Process of Applying Puzzle Media***

The application of puzzle media in Arabic learning at the Walisongo Ngabar Islamic Boarding School is carried out through several strategic stages that are structured and adjusted to an active learning approach. This strategy is designed to ensure that the activities are effective, fun, and remain in harmony with the objectives of learning Arabic which emphasizes mastery of vocabulary (*mufradāt*) and sentence structure (*tarkīb*). This approach is based on the principle of *student-centered learning*, where students become active subjects in building their knowledge (Piaget, 1972).

### ***Learning Preparation Stage***

The first stage begins with learning preparation involving media design and technical planning of activities. The teacher compiles puzzles based on Arabic vocabulary and sentences according to the student's ability level. The puzzle piece contains words and phrases that must be arranged into meaningful sentences, both in the form of *the number of ismiyyah* and *the number of fi'liyyah*. In addition, teachers also prepare supporting media such as word cards, game boards, instruction sheets, and stationery needed in activities (Arsyad, 2019, p. 134).

In order to make the activity more effective and communicative, the students were divided into small groups of three to five members. This division aims to encourage collaboration and interaction between students during the game. The teacher then sets the rules of the game which include the procedure for preparing puzzles, game time limits, and evaluation mechanisms. At this stage, observation methods and qualitative documentation are also determined, such as field recording, photo taking, and video recording for the purpose of analyzing learning outcomes (Miles & Huberman, 1994). This preparatory stage shows that learning is designed not only to deliver material, but also to build an active and reflective learning environment.

### ***Introductory Stage (5–10 minutes)***

The next stage is the introduction, which lasts for five to ten minutes. In this section, the teacher briefly explains the learning objectives and benefits of puzzle game activities, especially in improving the ability to understand sentence structure and enriching Arabic vocabulary. The teacher also gave a simple example of putting together a puzzle so that students understand the flow of the game and instill important values such as cooperation, communication, and courage to use new vocabulary (Huda, 2018, p. 47).

In addition to providing technical direction, teachers also instill important values such as cooperation, good communication, and the courage to try new vocabulary. This is done with light interaction to build a positive classroom atmosphere. For example, the teacher asks, "*Who wants to try to put this word together first?*", which was then welcomed with enthusiasm by the students. They began to discuss, try various possible word arrangements, and give each other input on the results of their groupmates. This lively classroom atmosphere is the basis for the emergence of intrinsic learning motivation and active involvement of all students.

### ***Puzzle Game Implementation Stage (20–40 minutes)***

The core stage of this activity is the execution of the puzzle game, which lasts for twenty to forty minutes. At this stage, each group receives a set of puzzles and game instructions. The students took turns reading the pieces of the available words, discussing their meanings, and arranging them into correct sentences. This activity requires cooperation, syntax understanding, and precision in placing each element of the sentence. The teacher acts as an active facilitator by going around among the groups to monitor the learning process. Instead of giving direct answers, the teacher encourages students to think critically through reflective questions such as, "*Is the position of this word appropriate as fi'l or khabar?*" or "*What if we change the arrangement, does the meaning change?*" These kinds of questions help students understand the grammatical function of words and improve their analytical skills.

During the game, it was seen that several groups of students showed a healthy competitive spirit. They challenged each other and had intense discussions about the most appropriate sentence structure. The light debates that arise are actually a productive means of learning, because students learn to express opinions, give reasons, and respect differences of views. The classroom atmosphere becomes lively and fun, fostering intrinsic motivation and giving rise to spontaneous learning beyond the teacher's plan. This situation shows the occurrence of *effective peer learning*, because they learn through interaction and negotiation of meaning (Brown, 2007, p. 112). In addition to practicing linguistic skills, this activity also fosters a healthy competitive spirit and strengthens social skills among students.

### ***Closing and Reflection Stage (10–15 Minutes)***

The final stage is the closing and reflection, which lasts for ten to fifteen minutes. At this stage, each group is asked to present the results of their puzzle

arrangement in front of the class. This presentation provides an opportunity for students to explain the reasons for choosing sentence structure and the meaning resulting from its structure. The teacher then provides constructive feedback on the accuracy of structure, vocabulary choice, and group cooperation (Arikunto, 2013, p. 145).

After the feedback session, the teacher invited the students to reflect on their learning. Each group discusses and shares their learning experiences, including the new vocabulary acquired, the group strategies used, the challenges they faced, and how they overcame them. This reflection is an important part of fostering students' metacognitive awareness, namely the ability to assess and improve their own learning process in the future.

The implementation of this learning is supported by various media and tools such as Arabic vocabulary-based puzzles and sentences, word cards for game variations, game boards and instruction sheets as guides, and timers or timers to add elements of challenge and excitement. The use of varied learning media has been proven to increase students' attention and learning retention (Sudjana & Rivai, 2015, p. 73).

Evaluation in this activity is carried out qualitatively by focusing on the process, not just the results. Teachers conduct direct observations to assess student participation, vocabulary reading ability, and effectiveness of group cooperation. In addition, small tests were carried out to measure understanding of new vocabulary, as well as individual reflections where students wrote or told their learning experiences. Documentation in the form of photos, videos, and field notes is also used as data triangulation material in the analysis of learning outcomes (Creswell, 2014, p. 189).

Overall, the stages of implementing this puzzle media illustrate that Arabic learning that is active, participatory, and reflective is able to create a fun and meaningful learning atmosphere. This proves the relevance of constructivism theory and collaborative learning in the context of pesantren education, where the learning process not only emphasizes the cognitive aspect, but also develops the social and affective dimensions of students

### ***Advantages and Disadvantages of Puzzle Media Application***

The advantages of puzzle media in learning Arabic at the Walisongo Ngabar Islamic Boarding School include:

1. Increase the motivation and learning participation of students. Because the students feel like they are playing while learning. The fun learning atmosphere makes students more enthusiastic and actively participate (Arsyad, 2019: 35).
2. Helps to understand sentence structure, especially in recognizing the pattern of *the number of ismiyyah* and *the number of fi'liyyah*. Puzzles provide a concrete learning experience that clarifies the syntactic function in Arabic (Piaget, 1972: 94).
3. Develop cooperation and communication, which is in line with the values of pesantren education. Group learning through puzzles trains students to work together, discuss, and argue well (Sari, 2020: 114).

4. Strengthen the memory of vocabulary, because active involvement in composing sentences requires an understanding of the meaning of words. Students must understand the meaning of words before composing them, so as to strengthen long-term memory (Bruner, 1976: 52).
5. Create a stress-free learning atmosphere. Game-based learning reduces anxiety and increases students' confidence (Wulandari, 2021: 78).

However, there are some drawbacks to be aware of, including:

1. It takes a long preparation time. Teachers must design puzzle pieces that are in accordance with the material and the level of ability of the students (Huda, 2018: 63).
2. Less effective for complex materials. Puzzles are more suitable for learning basic sentence structure than long texts or abstract concepts (Arsyad, 2019: 40).
3. Dependence on class conditions. If the number of students is too large or the classroom is narrow, activities become less effective and difficult to control (Sari, 2020: 115).
4. Intensive guidance from teachers is needed. Without supervision, students tend to focus on the game aspect, not the purpose of learning linguistics (Huda, 2018: 64).

## Conclusion

Based on the results of research and discussion, it can be concluded that the application of puzzle media in learning Arabic at the Walisongo Ngabar Islamic Boarding School has proven to be able to create a more active, interactive, and fun learning process. This media is an effective learning innovation because it combines elements of games with linguistic learning, thereby encouraging student intrinsic participation and motivation. Through systematic learning stages—from preparation, implementation, to reflection—students not only understand sentence structure and enrich vocabulary, but also develop critical thinking, communication, and collaboration skills. This is in line with the constructivist theory of Piaget (1972) and Bruner's (1976) view that knowledge is built through direct experience and the active involvement of learners in the learning process.

In addition to these advantages, this study also found several limitations in the application of puzzle media. Media preparation takes a long time, and its effectiveness depends on the conditions of the classroom and the intensity of the teacher's guidance. This media is also more suitable for learning basic sentence structure compared to complex or abstract material. However, overall, puzzles are able to provide a stress-free learning atmosphere, increase confidence, and strengthen students' memory of vocabulary. Thus, the use of puzzle media can be used as an innovative alternative in learning Arabic in Islamic boarding schools, as long as it is designed with a mature pedagogical strategy and optimal teacher support.

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