

An Analysis of the Difficulties Early Childhood Students Face in Learning to Write in Arabic Language Instruction

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Article Information:

Received April 10, 2026

Revised May 16, 2026

Accepted June 21, 2026

Keywords: *Learning difficulties, writing, Arabic, early childhood*

Abstract

This study was motivated by the difficulties experienced by young children in learning *al-kitabah* (Arabic writing skills) at Minang Smart Kindergarten in Pariaman City. The problems identified include difficulty recognizing and distinguishing the Hijaiyah letters, understanding the right-to-left direction of Arabic writing, and poor fine motor skills that affect the children's writing ability. This study aims to analyze the forms of difficulties in learning *al-kitabah*, their causal factors, and to provide an overview of the efforts needed to overcome these difficulties. The study employs a qualitative method with a descriptive approach. The research subjects consisted of Arabic language teachers and the principal of Minang Smart Kindergarten in Pariaman City. Data were collected through observation, interviews, and documentation, then analyzed using the Miles and Huberman model. Data validity was ensured through triangulation of sources, techniques, and time. The results of the analysis indicate that children still face difficulties in recognizing Hijaiyah letters with similar shapes, understanding the writing direction of Arabic which differs from Latin script and controlling hand movements while writing due to suboptimal fine motor development. The results of the discussion indicate that these difficulties are influenced by the cognitive developmental stage of young children, who are still in the preoperational stage, the habit of using the Latin alphabet in daily life, and limitations in fine motor skills. Therefore, *al-kitabah* instruction needs to be supported through repeated practice, the use of visual aids and engaging teaching methods, as well as intensive guidance from teachers so that the ability to write *hijaiyah* letters can develop optimally.

INTRODUCTION

Arabic is one of the international languages that exerts significant influence in the fields of religion, education, culture, economics, and global diplomacy. In Indonesia, Arabic holds an important position because the majority of the Indonesian population is Muslim; consequently, Arabic is used in various religious activities, such as reciting the Quran, worship, and Islamic studies (Khasanah, 2016).

How to cite:

Rojana, E., Suskha, F. (2026). An Analysis of the Difficulties Early Childhood Students Face in Learning to Write in Arabic Language Instruction. *El-Rusyd*, 11(1), 148-155.

E-ISSN:

2580-0256

Published by:

The Institute for Research and Community Service

In the context of Islamic education, Arabic holds a very important position because it is the language of the Quran, hadith, and various Islamic texts (Firdaus et al., 2025; Mufadhol & Nuraeni, 2025; Ridwan, 2023; Sya'bani & Has, 2023). Therefore, Arabic language instruction is introduced as early as kindergarten to lay the foundation for language proficiency while instilling religious values in children (Dodego, 2022; Nadhif, 2023).

Arabic language learning for young children encompasses four language skills (*mahārah lughawīyah*): listening (*istimā'*), speaking (*kalām*), reading (*qirā'ah*), and writing (*kitābah*). Among these four skills, writing or *al-kitābah* is one of the more complex abilities for young children because it requires fine motor coordination, concentration, the ability to recognize letter symbols, and an understanding of the right-to-left writing direction. One of the four essential Arabic language skills to master is writing (*mahārah al-kitābah*). Ahmad Rathomi defines *mahārah al-kitābah* as the skill of forming letters and the ability to express thoughts or feelings in written form (Engkizar et al., 2022, 2025, 2026; Khairunisa et al., 2025; Masoud & Almajri, 2025; Rathomi, 2020; Wulandari et al., 2024).

In practice, teaching *al-kitābah* to young children often faces various challenges. Children struggle to recognize the shapes of the Hijaiyah letters, distinguish between letters with similar shapes, and write letters according to Arabic writing rules. Additionally, children's underdeveloped fine motor skills result in messy handwriting and frequent errors in letter connections. These conditions can affect children's interest and motivation in learning Arabic (Ah et al., 2019; Ariyanti & Syarifah, 2021; Putri, 2017).

Other factors contributing to difficulties in learning *al-kitābah* include a lack of variety in teaching methods and the limited learning materials available to teachers. Monotonous instruction causes children to become bored quickly, making the learning process less effective (Ayshara & Kamil, 2024). In fact, young children prefer learning that is concrete, enjoyable, and incorporates play-based activities, as well as the use of visual aids, songs, movement, and interactive technology. Current developments in educational technology also indicate that the use of digital and interactive media can help children learn the Arabic alphabet and boost their motivation to learn Arabic (Avida & Fahyuni, 2026). The use of audiovisual media, educational games, and letter-tracing exercises has been proven to support the development of language and motor skills in young children (Adhimah & Hasan, 2024).

Based on initial observations conducted at Minang Smart Kindergarten in Pariaman City, it was found that some children still face difficulties in learning *al-kitābah*. Some children are not yet able to write the Hijaiyah letters correctly, still confuse the shapes of the letters, and have difficulty following the direction of Arabic writing. Additionally, the learning process is still dominated by conventional methods, causing children to be less active and quickly become bored during Arabic writing activities.

Numerous studies have been conducted on Arabic language learning in early childhood; however, most of these studies still focus on teaching methods, vocabulary acquisition, learning materials, and the ability to pronounce the Hijaiyah letters. Research specifically addressing learning difficulties in *al-kitābah* (Arabic writing skills) among early childhood students remains relatively limited. For instance, the study conducted by Kasmianti examined the implementation of the direct method in Arabic language instruction for early childhood students. That study placed greater emphasis on the general use of Arabic language teaching methods and did not specifically examine the barriers children face in writing skills (*al-kitābah*).

This issue indicates that teaching *al-kitābah* to early childhood students requires special attention, whether in terms of teaching methods, the use of media, or

teachers' strategies in adapting instruction to the children's developmental stages. Therefore, this study is important to analyze the forms of learning difficulties in *al-kitābah*, their contributing factors, and teachers' efforts to address these difficulties in Arabic language instruction at Minang Smart Kindergarten in Pariaman City.

METHODS

This study employs a qualitative research method using a case study approach (Abdurrahman et al., 2024; Adzakiyah et al., 2023; Zayuda et al., 2023). A qualitative approach was used because this study aims to gain an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon of difficulties in learning *al-kitābah* among early childhood students in Arabic language instruction at Minang Smart Kindergarten in Pariaman City. The research was conducted at Minang Smart Kindergarten in Pariaman City during the second semester of the 2025/2026 academic year. The research location was selected because issues were identified in *al-kitābah* instruction, particularly regarding children's ability to write the Hijaiyah alphabet and understand the direction of Arabic script. The research subjects consisted of Arabic language teachers and the principal of Minang Smart Kindergarten in Pariaman City.

The researcher used purposive sampling a technique for selecting data sources based on specific criteria to determine the data sources. One factor mentioned in this context is that when selecting data sources, the researcher considers the source's level of knowledge regarding the data relevant to the research objectives. The Arabic language teachers and the school principal served as informants, sources, or participants who provided data for the qualitative research. The purpose of these informants is to strengthen the data. Data collection techniques include documentation, interviews, and observation.

To analyze the data, the researchers used the analytical method developed by Miles and Huberman, which includes data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions. To ensure the accuracy and validity of the information collected, the data validation process involved triangulation of sources, techniques, and time (Huberman, 2014).

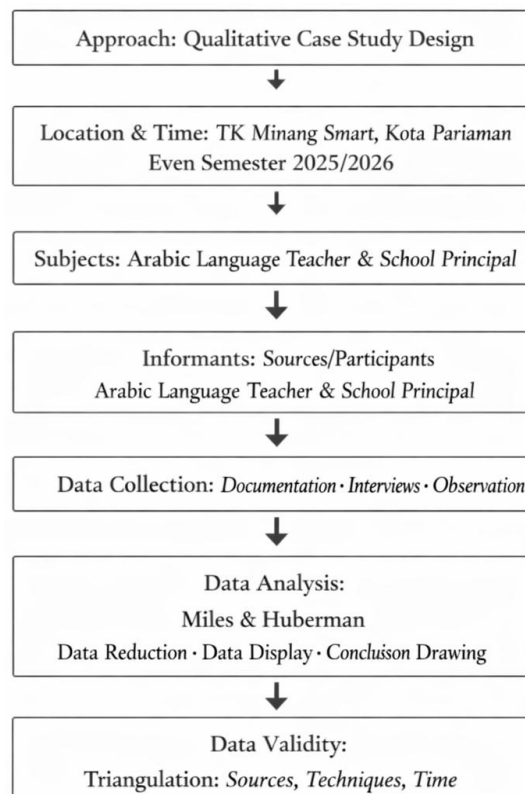


Fig 1. Stages of the research methodology

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This study aims to analyze the difficulties early childhood students face in learning *al-kitābah* during Arabic language instruction at Minang Smart Kindergarten in Pariaman City. Research data were collected through observation, interviews, and documentation conducted with the principal and Arabic language teachers at Minang Smart Kindergarten in Pariaman City. Based on the results of the field research, it was found that early childhood students still experience various difficulties in learning *al-kitābah*, or Arabic writing skills. These difficulties include trouble recognizing the shapes of the Hijaiyah letters, distinguishing between letters with similar shapes, understanding the direction of Arabic writing, and limitations in the children's fine motor skills when writing Hijaiyah letters.

Children's Difficulties in Recognizing and Distinguishing Hijaiyah Letters

Based on observations during the learning process, it was found that most children still have difficulty recognizing the shapes of Hijaiyah letters. Children often confuse letters that have nearly identical shapes, such as ب (*ba*), ت (*ta*), and ث (*tsa*). In addition, some children are also unable to consistently recall the shapes of the letters when asked to write independently. These difficulties become apparent when the teacher asks the children to copy and trace the Hijaiyah letters. Some children still require the teacher's assistance to distinguish the placement of dots and the basic shapes of the letters.

Interviews with Arabic teachers revealed that difficulty recognizing Hijaiyah letters is the most common challenge children face in learning *al-kitābah*. An Arabic teacher stated:

"Children often have trouble distinguishing between Hijaiyah letters that look almost identical. They sometimes forget where the dots go, so their writing is often incorrect. For example, the letters (ba), (ta), and (tsa) are often mistaken for one another by children because their basic shapes are similar. Children usually only remember the shape of the letter's strokes without paying attention to the number and position of the dots. Additionally, when the teacher asks the children to rewrite the letters that have been demonstrated, some children are still confused about determining the correct letter shape; there are also children who write the dots upside down or with the wrong number of dots (informant 1)."

Based on the results of these interviews, it is clear that young children's visual abilities and memory are still developing, so they require repeated practice to recognize Arabic letter symbols. Visual abilities and memory are crucial aspects of early childhood language development, particularly in the process of recognizing Arabic letter symbols. In early childhood, children are still in the cognitive development stage, so their ability to recognize, distinguish, and remember letter shapes has not yet fully developed. Therefore, children require a learning process that is conducted gradually and repeatedly so that they can understand letter symbols well.

According to Jean Piaget's theory of cognitive development, young children are in the preoperational stage, which spans approximately ages 2–7. At this stage, children begin to recognize symbols and images, but their thinking remains concrete, and they are not yet fully capable of understanding abstract concepts (Hanifa et al., 2024). The Hijaiyah letters, as linguistic symbols, represent abstract forms for children; thus, they require visual aids and hands-on experiences to more easily recognize letter shapes (Madanagopal, 2020).

Children's Difficulty in Understanding the Direction of Arabic Writing

Children have difficulty understanding that Arabic is written from right to left. They appear to be accustomed to writing from left to right, as is the case with the Latin script used in daily life. When the teacher asks the children to write the Hijaiyah letters on their own, some of them start writing in the wrong direction, resulting in incorrect letter forms. Interviews with Arabic teachers indicate that the difference in

writing systems between the Latin and Arabic alphabets is one of the causes of learning difficulties in *al-kitābah* among young children. The Arabic teacher stated:

“Because children use the Latin alphabet more frequently in their daily lives, they are still accustomed to writing from left to right. So when learning Arabic, children need continuous guidance to get used to writing from right to left (Informant 2).”

This indicates that learning *al-kitābah* requires continuous practice so that children can fully grasp the patterns of Arabic writing. In Arabic language instruction, this practice can be achieved through various activities, such as tracing the Arabic alphabet, copying letters, using letter cards, playing educational games, and learning to write through songs and visual aids. The use of engaging methods can help children more easily grasp Arabic writing patterns while simultaneously boosting their interest in learning (Aprilia et al., 2024; Siregar, 2025).

According to Ahmad, Arabic writing skills are productive skills that require continuous practice so that students are able to write Arabic letters and words correctly in accordance with writing rules. The more often children practice writing, the more their motor and visual coordination skills, as well as their memory of letter shapes, will develop (Ahmadi, 2020).

Children’s Poor Fine Motor Skills

In addition to difficulties recognizing letters and writing direction, the research findings also indicate that the children’s fine motor skills have not yet developed optimally. This is evident in the way the children hold their pencils, which is still not quite correct, and in their messy handwriting. Some children still struggle to control their hand movements when writing Hijaiyah letters, resulting in inconsistent letter size and shape. Interviews with the principal revealed that the fine motor development of young children significantly impacts their ability to write Arabic. The principal stated:

“Since the children are still young, their fine motor skills have not yet fully matured. Some children are already able to write well, but others still require practice and guidance. This is evident when the children hold a pencil; some children are still unsteady and unable to control their hand movements well when writing Hijaiyah letters. Some children press too hard on the pencil, while others are still stiff when tracing the letter shapes. As a result, the children’s writing often goes outside the lines, the letter sizes are inconsistent, and some letters are difficult to recognize (informant 3)”

Based on the results of these interviews, it can be concluded that the fine motor development of young children significantly influences their ability to write in Arabic. Children whose fine motor skills have not yet developed optimally tend to have difficulty holding a pencil, controlling hand movements, and forming Hijaiyah letters neatly and accurately. This often results in writing that goes outside the lines, inconsistent letter sizes, and letters that are difficult to recognize. Therefore, young children require writing practice that is conducted gradually and repeatedly, along with intensive guidance from teachers, so that their fine motor skills and ability to write Hijaiyah letters can develop more effectively.

CONCLUSION

Based on the research findings, it can be concluded that there are three main challenges faced by young children in learning *al-kitābah* (Arabic writing): difficulty recognizing and distinguishing the Arabic alphabet, difficulty understanding the right-to-left direction of Arabic writing, and poor fine motor skills. Children often experience confusion in distinguishing letters that have similar shapes, particularly regarding the placement and number of dots, which affects the accuracy of letter writing. Additionally, the habit of using the Latin alphabet causes children to remain accustomed to writing from left to right, requiring continuous practice and adaptation to understand the patterns of Arabic writing. Another contributing factor

is suboptimal fine motor skill development, leading to difficulties in holding a pencil, controlling hand movements, and producing neat, properly formed writing. Therefore, teaching *al-kitabah* to young children requires engaging methods, exercises conducted gradually and repeatedly, the use of visual aids, and intensive guidance from teachers to ensure that their ability to write the Hijaiyah letters develops optimally.

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