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## **Improving Children's Cognitive Abilities through Hijaiyah Letter Puzzle Media in RA Perwanida 1 Banyuwangi**

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### **Abstract:**

Early childhood cognitive development, particularly in recognizing Hijaiyah letter symbols, requires appropriate stimulation through engaging and enjoyable learning media. This study aimed to enhance the cognitive abilities of children aged 4–5 years in recognizing Hijaiyah letters through the use of Hijaiyah letter puzzle media at RA Perwanida 1 Banyuwangi. The study employed Classroom Action Research (CAR) based on the Kemmis and McTaggart model, consisting of three stages: pre-cycle, Cycle I, and Cycle II, with ten children participating. During the pre-cycle stage, learning activities using picture media yielded suboptimal results, with a mastery level of only 37.5%. Following the implementation of Hijaiyah letter puzzle media in Cycle I, the mastery level increased to 62.5%, and further improved to 87.5% in Cycle II. Observational findings indicated a significant improvement in children's ability to recognize the shapes, distinctive characteristics, and meanings of Hijaiyah letters, as well as increased learning enthusiasm. The findings demonstrate that play-based learning using puzzle media effectively stimulates early childhood cognitive development. This study concludes that Hijaiyah letter puzzle media significantly enhances early childhood cognitive skills in recognizing Hijaiyah letters and is highly recommended for application in early childhood education settings.

### **Keywords:**

Early childhood education; Cognitive development; Hijaiyah letter puzzle.

### **Abstrak:**

Kemampuan kognitif anak usia dini, khususnya dalam mengenal simbol huruf hijaiyah, memerlukan stimulasi yang tepat melalui media pembelajaran yang menarik dan menyenangkan. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk meningkatkan kemampuan kognitif anak usia 4–5 tahun dalam mengenal huruf hijaiyah melalui media puzzle huruf hijaiyah di RA Perwanida 1 Banyuwangi. Metode yang digunakan adalah Penelitian Tindakan Kelas (PTK) model Kemmis dan McTaggart yang terdiri atas tiga tahap, yaitu pra-siklus, siklus I, dan siklus II, dengan subjek sebanyak 10 anak. Pada tahap pra-siklus, pembelajaran menggunakan media gambar belum menunjukkan hasil yang optimal dengan tingkat ketuntasan sebesar 37,5%. Setelah dilakukan tindakan pada siklus I menggunakan media puzzle huruf hijaiyah, tingkat ketuntasan meningkat menjadi 62,5%, dan pada siklus II mencapai 87,5%. Hasil observasi menunjukkan peningkatan signifikan dalam kemampuan mengenal bentuk, ciri khas, dan makna huruf hijaiyah, serta meningkatnya antusiasme anak dalam mengikuti pembelajaran. Dengan pendekatan pembelajaran berbasis bermain, media puzzle terbukti efektif dalam merangsang perkembangan kognitif anak secara bermakna. Simpulan penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa penggunaan media puzzle huruf hijaiyah dapat meningkatkan kemampuan kognitif anak usia dini dalam mengenal huruf hijaiyah secara signifikan dan layak direkomendasikan dalam praktik pembelajaran PAUD.

### **Kata Kunci:**

Anak usia dini; Kemampuan kognitif; Puzzle huruf hijaiyah.

## INTRODUCTION

Early childhood education (ECE) serves as a fundamental foundation for children's holistic development, encompassing physical, social-emotional, moral, language, and cognitive domains. This developmental period is commonly referred to as the golden age, a critical phase in which brain development occurs rapidly and is highly sensitive to various forms of environmental stimulation (Hurlock, 2002; Herdiana, 2016). Therefore, education during early childhood plays a strategic role in establishing basic skills and competencies that significantly influence children's future lives. One of the primary developmental aspects emphasized in the ECE curriculum is cognitive development, which includes logical thinking, conceptual understanding, memory, and the ability to solve simple everyday problems (Fauzia, 2022). Strengthening this aspect from an early age is essential to prepare children for more optimal learning processes in subsequent educational stages.

However, in practice, early childhood cognitive development still faces numerous challenges, particularly in introducing language symbols such as Hijaiyah letters in Islamic educational institutions like *Raudhatul Athfal* (RA). Preliminary observations conducted at RA Perwanida 1 Banyuwangi revealed that only 37.5% of learners were able to accurately recognize Hijaiyah letters. This finding indicates that the majority of children have not yet achieved the expected basic competencies in letter recognition, which serve as an essential foundation for reading the Qur'an. Several factors are believed to contribute to this low achievement, including the use of conventional, teacher-centered instructional methods, limited availability of engaging and developmentally appropriate learning media, and insufficient implementation of play-based approaches, which should be a core principle in ECE learning (Mu'min & Yultas, 2020). This situation highlights the need for innovative learning strategies that integrate visual, motor, and cognitive elements through enjoyable and educational media.

One potential innovation to address these challenges is the use of puzzle media in learning activities. Learning media play a central role in enhancing the effectiveness of teaching and learning processes in ECE, as young children tend to understand concepts more easily through visual approaches and concrete play-based activities (Yasmin et al., 2022). Puzzles, as constructive learning tools, have been shown to simultaneously develop children's concentration, visual accuracy, fine motor

coordination, and thinking skills (Purnamasari & Bariah, 2022). In the context of Islamic education, the development of Hijaiyah letter puzzles represents an innovative approach that not only supports cognitive development but also introduces Islamic values in a meaningful and enjoyable manner. This medium integrates play and learning (*edutainment*), aligning with both ECE pedagogical principles and the religious values inherent in RA institutions.

The use of interactive and visually rich learning media has been shown to significantly enhance students' engagement and cognitive processing. Interactive animated media encourage active participation and improve learners' comprehension by integrating visual, auditory, and motor elements into the learning experience (Kiptiyah et al., 2025).

From a theoretical perspective, the use of puzzle media in early childhood learning can be examined through several developmental and learning theories. According to Jean Piaget, children aged 4–5 years are in the preoperational stage, during which they begin to use symbols but still require concrete experiences to understand their environment (Piaget, as cited in Santrock, 2011). Consequently, manipulative media such as puzzles are highly suitable for the cognitive characteristics of children at this age. Constructivist theories proposed by Bruner (1966) and Fosnot (2013) emphasize that children actively construct knowledge through interaction with their environment and learning media. In this regard, puzzles function as tools that support independent and meaningful knowledge construction. Furthermore, Gardner's (2006) theory of multiple intelligences suggests that children possess diverse intellectual potentials, including logical-mathematical, visual-spatial, and kinesthetic intelligences, all of which can be stimulated through puzzle-based activities. These theoretical perspectives collectively reinforce the importance of using concrete, engaging, and educational media in teaching Hijaiyah letters in RA settings.

Several previous studies have supported the effectiveness of game-based media in enhancing early childhood cognitive abilities. Nurhasanah and Rachmawati (2021) found that the use of alphabet puzzles significantly improved children's recognition of Latin letters. Mu'min and Yultas (2020) developed visually based Hijaiyah cards that effectively helped children remember letter shapes and names more easily. Meanwhile, Purnamasari and Bariah (2022) demonstrated that thematic puzzles stimulated logical thinking skills and concentration among children aged 4–5 years. Collectively, these studies emphasize the importance of interactive and enjoyable learning media that align with the developmental characteristics of young children. Most of these studies

employed quasi-experimental approaches, using observation and cognitive ability tests as research instruments.

This study offers novelty compared to previous research by specifically developing and examining the effectiveness of Hijaiyah letter puzzle media designed contextually in accordance with Islamic values and the cultural environment of RA institutions. The media function not only as instructional tools for letter recognition but also as a means of internalizing religious values from an early age. Another distinctive feature lies in the integration of constructivist and multiple intelligence approaches in the learning design, combining motor, spatial, and logical aspects holistically. This study focuses on children aged 4–5 years in RA settings, a population that remains relatively underrepresented in studies on the development of Hijaiyah puzzle-based learning media.

Therefore, this study aims to explain and analyze the effectiveness of Hijaiyah letter puzzle media in improving early childhood cognitive abilities, particularly in recognizing Hijaiyah letters. This research not only complements previous findings that highlight the importance of play-based learning media in early childhood education but also provides practical contributions for RA and ECE teachers who encounter challenges in introducing Hijaiyah letters. The Hijaiyah letter puzzle developed in this study is designed to be engaging, educational, and aligned with children's cognitive developmental stages, while being integrated with Islamic values. Moreover, the findings of this study are expected to serve as a reference for the development of innovative and adaptive learning models that address the needs of learners in early childhood education settings.

## **METHOD**

This study employed a qualitative approach using a Classroom Action Research (CAR) design. This method was selected because it aims to improve classroom learning processes and outcomes through planned, systematic, and continuous actions (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988; Arikunto, 2013). The research was conducted in two cycles, with each cycle consisting of four stages: planning, action implementation, observation, and reflection. This approach is considered appropriate for addressing practical classroom needs in early childhood education, particularly in efforts to enhance cognitive abilities through the use of educational media.

The research participants were children in Group B at RA Perwanida 1 Banyuwangi, totaling 16 children, consisting of 9 boys and 7 girls aged 5–6 years. The study was carried out over a period of two months and focused on the use of Hijaiyah

letter puzzle media designed contextually and aligned with the cognitive developmental characteristics of early childhood learners. The learning media were prepared to support a *learning through play* approach that stimulates children's logical reasoning, visual memory, and motor coordination (Hurlock, 1978; Bredekamp & Copple, 2009).

Data were collected through observation, interviews, documentation, and learning outcome evaluation. Observation was used to record children's activities during the learning process, including their participation and interaction with the learning media. Interviews were conducted with the classroom teacher to obtain additional information regarding changes in children's behavior throughout the learning process. Documentation in the form of photographs, videos, and field notes was used to support the validity of the observational data. Evaluation of learning outcomes was conducted using cognitive assessment sheets developed based on indicators of Hijaiyah letter recognition skills.

Data analysis was conducted using both qualitative descriptive and quantitative approaches. Qualitative data obtained from observations and interviews were analyzed through data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing, while quantitative data in the form of children's cognitive evaluation scores were analyzed by calculating mean scores and the percentage of learning mastery achieved in each cycle. The success of the intervention was determined by an increase in the number of children who met the Minimum Mastery Criteria (MMC) established collaboratively with the classroom teacher. To ensure data trustworthiness, source and technique triangulation were employed (Moleong, 2019), along with instrument validation conducted by early childhood education experts.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Improvement of Cognitive Abilities through Hijaiyah Letter Puzzle Media at RA Perwanida 1 Banyuwangi: Pre-Cycle Phase**

The pre-cycle phase represents the initial stage prior to the implementation of instructional improvement actions. The purpose of this phase was to identify the actual condition of children's abilities in recognizing Hijaiyah letters, which served as the basis for determining appropriate interventions in subsequent cycles. Observations were conducted at RA Perwanida 1 Banyuwangi in April 2025 and involved ten children aged 4–5 years. This stage was carried out in the form of an initial assessment that included direct observation and evaluation of children's learning outcomes through activities focused on recognizing and pronouncing Hijaiyah letters.

N0	Child Initials	BB	MB	BSH	BSB	Total Score	Description
1.	AD	√				1	
2.	AH	√				1	
3.	AN	√				1	<b>BB = Not Yet Developed</b>
4.	AZ		√			2	
5.	HF		√			2	<b>MB = Beginning to Develop</b>
6.	IB	√				1	
7.	KF		√			2	<b>BSH = Developing as Expected</b>
8.	KZ	√				1	
9.	RB		√			2	<b>BSB = Very Well Developed</b>
10.	YN		√			2	
						15	

**Table 1. Pre-Cycle Assessment of Children’s Cognitive Ability in Recognizing Hijaiyah Letters**

Based on the initial observation results, it was found that 5 out of 10 children still experienced difficulties in recognizing Hijaiyah letters, while the remaining 5 children were only at the *beginning to develop* stage. This condition is reflected in the class mean score, which reached only 15 out of a maximum score of 40, equivalent to 37.5%. Furthermore, the evaluation results indicate that most children were classified into the “Not Yet Developed” (BB) and “Beginning to Develop” (MB) categories. None of the children achieved the “Developing as Expected” (BSH) or “Very Well Developed” (BSB) categories.

These findings indicate that children’s basic understanding of the shapes and sounds of Hijaiyah letters remained very limited. This low level of mastery may be attributed to the limited instructional strategies employed by the teacher, which tended to rely on conventional methods such as lecturing and copying letters from the board. This condition can be explained through Piaget’s theory of cognitive development, which states that children aged 4–5 years are in the preoperational stage, a phase in which they begin to develop symbolic representation abilities but still require support from concrete media to understand abstract concepts such as letters (Santrock, 2011). In this context, the lack of stimulation through concrete and interactive media resulted in Hijaiyah letter learning being less engaging and ineffective.

From a developmental psychology perspective, early childhood learners tend to demonstrate strong visual and kinesthetic learning styles. Therefore, a mismatch between instructional methods and children’s learning characteristics may become a major inhibiting factor in mastering Hijaiyah letters (Hurlock, 2002). Based on this analysis, it can be concluded that a more innovative, engaging, and developmentally appropriate learning intervention is required. The use of Hijaiyah letter puzzle media, which is concrete, manipulative, and educational, is considered a potential alternative solution to be implemented as an improvement action in the first research cycle.

## Improvement of Cognitive Abilities through Hijaiyah Letter Puzzle Media at RA Perwanida 1 Banyuwangi: Cycle I

Cycle I represented the initial implementation of the instructional intervention using Hijaiyah letter puzzle media. This stage was conducted over five instructional sessions, held on 28–30 April and 2–3 May 2025, at RA Perwanida 1 Banyuwangi. The purpose of this implementation was to increase children’s interest in learning and to strengthen their ability to recognize the shapes and sounds of Hijaiyah letters through enjoyable manipulative activities. Puzzle media were selected because they stimulate fine motor skills while simultaneously supporting the visual and tactile recognition of symbols.

NO	Child Initials	BB	BBSH	BSB	Total Score	Description
1.	AD	√			2	<b>BB = Not Yet Developed</b>
2.	AH	√			2	
3.	AN	√			2	<b>MB = Beginning to Develop</b>
4.	AZ		√		3	
5.	HF		√		3	<b>BSH = Developing as Expected</b>
6.	IB	√			2	
7.	KF		√		3	<b>BSB = Very Well Developed</b>
8.	KZ	√			2	
9.	RB		√		3	
10.	YN		√		3	
					25	

**Table 2. Cycle I Results of Children’s Cognitive Ability in Recognizing Hijaiyah Letters**

The evaluation results at the end of Cycle I demonstrated a fairly significant improvement. Out of a total of ten children, six children were categorized as *Beginning to Develop* (MB), while four children had reached the *Developing as Expected* (BSH) category. The class mean score increased to 25 out of a maximum score of 40, equivalent to 62.5%. This improvement indicates that the implemented intervention began to produce positive effects on children’s cognitive development, particularly in the recognition of Hijaiyah letters.

These findings suggest that puzzle media contributed to increased children’s engagement in the learning process. Learning activities were no longer passive as observed during the pre-cycle phase. Children appeared more enthusiastic, actively arranged the letters, and pronounced the Hijaiyah letters with greater confidence and interest. The visual and kinesthetic elements of the puzzle made the learning experience more concrete and meaningful for early childhood learners.

From the perspective of constructivist theory proposed by Bruner (1966), children’s learning experiences should be constructed through direct interaction with concrete objects so that the acquired concepts can be retained in long-term memory. This view is supported by Yasmin et al. (2022), who emphasize that concrete media such as puzzles enhance children’s attention, motivation, and memory by engaging

visual, kinesthetic, and sensory aspects. Therefore, such media are highly suitable for use during the preoperational stage, as described in Piaget’s theory of cognitive development, particularly for children aged 4–5 years.

Nevertheless, the observed improvement had not yet reached an optimal level, as several children remained in the MB category. This indicates that although puzzle media were effective in increasing learning interest and engagement, the implementation strategy still requires refinement. Teachers need to pay closer attention to differentiated learning needs among children and strengthen auditory and verbal stimulation during guided puzzle activities. Through these adjustments, learning outcomes are expected to improve more substantially in the subsequent cycle.

### Improvement of Cognitive Abilities through Hijaiyah Letter Puzzle Media at RA Perwanida 1 Banyuwangi: Cycle II

Following the implementation of the pre-cycle and Cycle I, which showed positive yet not optimal development, Cycle II focused on strengthening the instructional intervention by enriching the variety of children’s learning activities. The actions were expanded beyond assembling Hijaiyah letter puzzles to include activities that involved identifying the shapes and distinctive features of Hijaiyah letters and associating them with animal images whose names begin with the corresponding letters. These activities were integrated with the weekly learning theme, “Stars,” used at RA, in order to make the learning process more contextual and engaging.

The activities in Cycle II were conducted on 14–17 and 19 May 2025. The primary objective of this cycle was to increase children’s active engagement and to deepen their meaningful recognition of Hijaiyah letters.

NO	Child Initials	BB	MB	BBSH	BSB	Total Score	Description
1.	AD			√		3	<b>BB = Not Yet Developed</b> <b>MB = Beginning to Develop</b> <b>BSH = Developing as Expected</b> <b>BSB = Very Well Developed</b>
2.	AH			√		3	
3.	AN			√		3	
4.	AZ				√	4	
5.	HF				√	4	
6.	IB			√		3	
7.	KF				√	4	
8.	KZ			√		3	
9.	RB				√	4	
10.	YN				√	4	
						35	

Table 3. Cycle II Results of Children’s Cognitive Ability in Recognizing Hijaiyah Letters

The results of the intervention in Cycle II demonstrated a significant improvement compared to the previous cycle. Of the ten participating children, six children (60%) reached the *Very Well Developed* (BSB) category, while the remaining four children

(40%) were classified as *Developing as Expected* (BSH). The class mean score increased from 31.5 in Cycle I to 35 out of a maximum score of 40, equivalent to 87.5%.

The increase in the mean score and the number of children achieving the BSB category indicates a substantial improvement in cognitive abilities. Children were not only able to assemble the puzzle pieces correctly but were also capable of accurately naming Hijaiyah letters and associating them with visual vocabulary, such as “*Alif for Asad (lion)*” and “*Ba for Baqar (cow)*”. Learning activities that integrated letters, images, and meanings strengthened the association between symbols and sounds, enabling children not merely to memorize but to develop functional understanding.

These findings support Howard Gardner’s theory of Multiple Intelligences, which posits that children possess diverse forms of intelligence and that learning becomes more effective when multiple intelligences are engaged simultaneously (Armstrong, 2013). In this learning context, visual–spatial intelligence (through puzzles and images), linguistic intelligence (through letter sounds and vocabulary recognition), and kinesthetic intelligence (through manipulative activities) were stimulated concurrently. In addition, this instructional strategy aligns with the integrative thematic approach emphasized in the early childhood education curriculum, in which learning content is delivered holistically and contextually to strengthen connections between knowledge and children’s real-life experiences (Kemendikbud, 2014).

Furthermore, the use of visual-based learning media reinforces Piaget’s theory of cognitive development, which emphasizes that young children are in the preoperational stage, where learning occurs through symbols, images, and concrete activities (Piaget, 1964). Accordingly, the use of Hijaiyah letter puzzle media accompanied by meaningful images is well aligned with children’s developmental stages.

The improvement in learning outcomes observed in Cycle II not only demonstrates the effectiveness of the implemented intervention but also indicates that contextual, multimodal, and meaningful learning models are highly suitable for early childhood education. The integration of Hijaiyah letter puzzle media with animal images and visual language reinforcement successfully created a learning experience that was enjoyable, memorable, and positively impactful on children’s cognitive development. Therefore, this approach can be broadly recommended as an alternative method for teaching Hijaiyah letters in RA or Islamic-based early childhood education institutions, particularly those emphasizing thematic learning and the holistic development of children’s multiple intelligences.

## CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that Hijaiyah letter puzzle media are effective in enhancing early childhood cognitive abilities, particularly in the recognition of Hijaiyah letters. Through two action cycles, it was evident that an educational play-based approach integrating visual, verbal, and motor elements provided learning experiences that were both enjoyable and meaningful. The improvement in the average score from 62.5% in Cycle I to 87.5% in Cycle II indicates that contextual and activity-based learning can optimally support children's cognitive development. This instructional strategy is aligned with Gardner's Multiple Intelligences theory, which emphasizes the importance of stimulating visual-spatial and kinesthetic intelligences in early childhood learning.

The essence of the success of this intervention lies not merely in the use of learning media as instructional tools, but in the learning design that addresses children's developmental needs and learning styles in a holistic manner. Therefore, the findings of this study offer prospects for further development, particularly in enriching interactive puzzle media that are adapted to Islamic learning themes and local cultural values. In addition, this approach may be extended to other learning materials, such as Arabic numerals, Arabic vocabulary, and early literacy development grounded in Islamic values.

Early childhood and RA teachers are encouraged to develop learning models that are not solely oriented toward academic outcomes but also prioritize cognitive development through enjoyable and contextual approaches. The use of educational media such as Hijaiyah letter puzzles can be creatively modified to accommodate the diverse learning needs of children. Future research may involve a broader range of participants and focus on examining the effectiveness of this media in fostering other developmental domains, including language, socio-emotional skills, and spiritual values in early childhood education.

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