

Implementing a Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP) Approach in Early Childhood Tahfidz Education to Enhance Qur'anic Reading Skills

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Abstract

Keywords: Tahfidz Learning; Developmentally Appropriate Practice; Qur'an Reading Skills;

Learning tahfidz in early childhood not only requires the ability to memorize Qur'anic verses, but also requires strengthening reading skills as a basis for more precise and quality memorization. However, in practice, some tahfidz learning is still teacher-centered, repetitive, and too academic, so that it emphasizes verbal memorization more than conformity to the characteristics of the child's development. The Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP) approach offers child-friendly learning strategies through play activities, hands-on experiences, and stimuli tailored to the child's cognitive, language, and social-emotional developmental stages. This study aims to describe the application of DAP-based tahfidz learning and find out its improvement in children's Qur'an reading skills. The method used is descriptive qualitative. The research subjects are children of Tahfidz Kindergarten MQA Banteran, Sumbang District, Banyumas Regency, Central Java Province while the research objects include the tahfidz learning process and the development of Qur'an reading skills. Data was collected through observation of learning activities, interviews with kindergarten principals, teachers, and documentation. The results of the study show that the application of DAP through game-based hijaiyah letter recognition activities, muroja'ah with songs, the use of concrete media, and the habit of reading gradually can improve children's ability to pronounce letters, improve letter meaning, and read short verses more fluently. This model also fosters children's sense of joy and motivation in tahfidz.

Abstrak

Kata Kunci: Pembelajaran Tahfidz; Developmentally Appropriate Practice;

Pembelajaran tahfidz pada anak usia dini tidak hanya menuntut kemampuan menghafal ayat Al-Qur'an, tetapi juga memerlukan penguatan keterampilan membaca sebagai dasar agar hafalan lebih tepat dan berkualitas. Namun dalam praktiknya, sebagian pembelajaran tahfidz

Keterampilan
Membaca Al
Qur'an;

masih bersifat berpusat pada guru, repetitif, dan terlalu akademis, sehingga lebih menekankan hafalan verbal daripada kesesuaian dengan karakteristik perkembangan anak. Pendekatan Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP) menawarkan strategi pembelajaran yang ramah anak melalui kegiatan bermain, pengalaman langsung, dan stimulus yang disesuaikan dengan tahap perkembangan kognitif, bahasa, dan sosial emosional anak. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mendeskripsikan penerapan pembelajaran tahfidz berbasis DAP serta mengetahui peningkatannya terhadap keterampilan membaca Al-Qur'an anak. Metode yang digunakan ialah kualitatif deskriptif. Subjek penelitian adalah anak TK Tahfidz MQA Banteran, Kecamatan Sumbang, Kabupaten Banyumas, Provinsi Jawa Tengah sedangkan objek penelitian meliputi proses pembelajaran tahfidz dan perkembangan kemampuan membaca Al-Qur'an. Data dikumpulkan melalui observasi kegiatan pembelajaran, wawancara dengan kepala TK, guru, dan dokumentasi. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa penerapan DAP melalui kegiatan pengenalan huruf hijaiyah berbasis permainan, muroja'ah dengan lagu, penggunaan media konkret, dan pembiasaan membaca bertahap dapat meningkatkan kemampuan anak dalam menyebut huruf, memperbaiki makharijul huruf, serta membaca ayat pendek lebih lancar. Model ini juga menumbuhkan rasa senang dan motivasi anak dalam tahfidz.

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1. Introduction

Early childhood is often viewed as a golden period when brain growth occurs rapidly and children respond well to stimulation, including religious education. Learning experiences at this stage shape character, habits, and spiritual orientation for later life. Indrawati (2017) explains that early guidance influences behavioral patterns and value formation. One form of early religious stimulation is tahfidz Al-Qur'an or memorizing the Qur'an. This activity is not limited to memorization, but also builds affection toward the Qur'an, emotional attachment, and moral guidance rooted in its teachings.

Suyadi (2019) states that early religious education contributes to shaping moral awareness and spiritual attitudes that influence future behavior. Introducing tahfidz from a young age supports this process through repeated exposure and meaningful interaction with Qur'anic verses. Children gradually become familiar with sound patterns, rhythm, and pronunciation. This familiarity supports internalization of values while strengthening memory and focus. A structured yet enjoyable approach allows children to experience learning as part of daily activities rather than as a demanding obligation.

Maskur (2018) reports that early tahfidz activities can improve memory capacity, concentration, and consistency in worship habits. Learning designed with suitable methods helps children recognize hijaiyah letters, pronounce verses accurately, and memorize step by step. Activities such as repetition, listening, and guided imitation support gradual mastery. A pleasant atmosphere encourages active participation and reduces pressure. PAUD institutions need to align tahfidz programs with developmental stages so that spiritual growth and cognitive development progress in harmony.

Field observations show that tahfidz learning is sometimes implemented without considering children's readiness. Some institutions set high memorization targets within limited time frames. This approach shifts focus toward achievement rather than process and comfort. As a result, children may experience fatigue, decreased interest, and reluctance to participate. Dini (2022) notes that early religious education often emphasizes cognitive outcomes and memorization, while play as a primary characteristic of early childhood receives less attention. A more balanced approach is required to maintain engagement and emotional well-being.

A formal and rigid approach may lead children to memorize verbally without understanding letter sounds or articulation points. Limited readiness in reading skills can cause confusion and repeated pronunciation errors. Amrindono (2022) explains that excessive memorization demands may create cognitive overload and reduce accuracy in recitation. Over time, this condition affects fluency and confidence. Learning needs to provide flexibility, enjoyment, and opportunities for exploration so that children can develop skills naturally through guided practice and interaction.

Developmentally Appropriate Practice or DAP is an approach that aligns learning with children's developmental stages, needs, and characteristics. Lettington (2022) describes DAP as emphasizing active, enjoyable, and concrete experiences. Children are encouraged to explore their environment and engage in meaningful activities. Ridlo and Asep Ardiyanto (2024) explain that learning becomes more effective when it integrates play, repetition, and interaction. The National Association for the Education of Young Children, cited in Helm and Katz (2011), states that DAP supports balanced growth across cognitive, language, social, emotional, and spiritual aspects.

Application of DAP in tahfidz learning opens opportunities for varied and flexible strategies. Activities may include chanting, letter games, rhythmic movement, visual aids, and structured muroja'ah sessions presented as play. These strategies create a relaxed atmosphere and encourage active engagement. Hidayati (2023) shows that playful approaches increase children's motivation and accelerate recognition of letters and pronunciation accuracy. Learning becomes more meaningful when children experience joy and curiosity during the process.

Despite these advantages, many tahfidz programs still rely on teacher-centered methods with fixed memorization targets. Children are often positioned as passive recipients who must achieve a certain

number of verses within a set period. Such conditions may reduce intrinsic motivation and overlook individual differences in learning pace. A shift toward approaches that prioritize children's experiences is needed so that learning becomes more adaptive and responsive to developmental readiness.

Child-centered learning within DAP offers a practical direction for improvement. Teachers can adjust targets based on each child's rhythm, interest, and readiness. Memorization activities can be transformed into exploratory experiences using gestures, visual cards, and interactive media. Lee (2024) highlights that playful engagement supports deeper retention and enjoyment. Children perceive memorization as part of meaningful activity rather than as a burden. This shift enhances participation and supports long-term learning outcomes.

Reading ability plays a key role before children engage in tahfidz activities. Recognition of hijaiyah letters, understanding of shapes and sounds, and correct articulation support accurate memorization. Maskur (2018) emphasizes that reading proficiency helps maintain correctness in pronunciation and tajweed. Faizah et al. (2020) add that reading skills reduce errors and prevent distortion of meaning. Without these skills, memorization may become imitative and less reliable.

Murtafiah et al. (2025) report that children introduced to phonetic hijaiyah methods show more stable memorization progress compared to those who memorize without reading preparation. The process of identifying letters, combining sounds, and reading short passages strengthens visual and auditory memory. This sequence supports gradual mastery and confidence. Reading skills serve as a strong base that improves fluency and sustainability in memorization.

Empirical studies that integrate DAP principles into tahfidz learning to improve early Qur'anic reading competence are still limited. This gap indicates the need for further research that combines developmental approaches with religious education practices. A well-designed model can support balanced growth and provide effective strategies for teachers in PAUD settings.

2. Methods

This study uses a qualitative approach with a descriptive design to explore in depth the implementation of early childhood tahfidz learning using the Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP) approach in improving Qur'an reading skills. The research participants consisted of one principal, four teachers, and 31 students at Tahfidz MQA Banteran Kindergarten, Sumbang District, Banyumas Regency, Central Java Province who were directly involved in the tahfidz learning program. Data were collected through direct observation of learning activities involving 31 students, semi-structured interviews with the principal and four teachers, and documentation in the form of activity photos, activity notes, and learning tools. Data analysis is carried out through the stages of data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions. To increase the validity of the findings, source triangulation techniques and triangulation methods are used.

3. Result and Discussion

Overview of the implementation of tahfidz learning using the DAP approach

Based on the results of observations of the implementation of tahfidz learning at Tahfidz MQA Kindergarten, learning activities are designed by integrating the principles of Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP) which adjust the method to the stages of cognitive development, language, and characteristics of early childhood play. (Dhida et al., 2024) Teachers implement tahfidz activities not only through verbal memorization, but through games, multisensory activities, and strengthening Qur'anic reading skills before entering the memorization of verses. This is in line with the concept of DAP according to NAEYC (2020) that children's learning needs to be provided through concrete, active, and exploratory activities.

In the context of tahfidz, children are introduced to hijaiyah letters through media that can be touched, seen, and played so that the process of letter recognition is easier to remember and meaningful for children. Teachers also provide repetitive stimulation through murojaah activities with murottal, makhraj pats, letter cards, and phonetic games to train hearing and makhraj articulation. With this approach, learning becomes fun, does not pressure children, and fosters their intrinsic interest to continue learning the Qur'an. In addition, reading skills develop gradually so that children are more prepared phonologically when entering the stage of memorizing verses of the Qur'an.

In the initial activity, children were introduced to hijaiyah letters through sand media, picture cards, and illustrations of letter shapes. For example, the letter ba is described as a bowl with one meatball, while the letter ta is like a bowl with two meatballs, so that children can easily distinguish the shape of the letters. This activity supports the multisensory theory that states that reading skills will develop faster if children learn through touch, visuals, and the association of concrete symbols (Pakpahan & Herawati, 2023). Furthermore, learning continued with a game of patting makhraj, letter puzzles, repetition of letter sounds, and simple chanting. This game activity helps children understand the position of the letters (makhraj) through motor activities and repetitions. According to Wasik et al., (2023) game-based repetition can improve phonological ability in reading the Qur'an because children learn through rhythms, movements, and repetition that are not.

In the next stage, the teacher performs a short verse muroja'ah while listening to the murottal with the Hijaz tone according to the Wafa method used in schools. The rhythmic sound of murottal makes it easier for children to catch the melodic patterns of the verses, so that memorization is recorded faster in memory. The auditory learning theory states that children will be easier to memorize through repetitive sound stimuli with a consistent rhythm (Afryanto, 2021).

In addition, muroja'ah is done casually, children can follow while moving, singing, or holding letter cards as an auxiliary medium. Verse memorization is carried out in stages and packaged in the form of

games such as competitions to find the first letter of a sentence, compiling puzzles of verse pieces, to memorization relay games. Teachers give positive rewards in the form of stickers, praise, and gestures of appreciation when children succeed in memorizing or improving reading. This strategy is in line with the operant conditioning theory which states that the child's positive behavior will be repeated when given reinforcement (Skinner, 1953). Rewards are not pressure, but motivation to make children happy to learn tahfidz.



Figure 1. Murojaah's Documentation

This learning activity shows that the DAP approach can make the tahfidz process more fun, less stressful, and provide space for children's exploration. Through activities that are appropriate to the developmental stage, children can recognize hijaiyah letters gradually, understand the visual shape of the letters, distinguish the makhraj, and imitate the sounds of the letters more accurately before entering the verse memorization stage. This has an impact on improving basic Qur'an reading skills because children are used to doing repetition through phonetic games, murojaah with murottal, and multisensory activities that stimulate memory. With good reading readability, the memorization process becomes easier and memorization is more naturally attached. This approach emphasizes that tahfidz ability in early childhood cannot be separated from the formation of a strong foundation of reading the Qur'an, so that development-friendly learning is the key for children to love the Qur'an from an early age. This finding corroborates the statement Dini (2022), that religious learning in PAUD will be more effective if packaged through play so that children are actively involved and feel that learning is not a burden

Development of Qur'an reading skills before-after the implementation of DAP

Based on the results of observations during the tahfidz learning process using the DAP approach, it can be seen that there is an increase in the ability to read the Qur'an in children. In the initial condition (pre-action), most children are not able to distinguish hijaiyah letters that have almost similar shapes, such as ba-ta-tsa, and still experience makhraj pronunciation errors in certain letters. Children's reading ability is more in the form of verbal repetition

following the teacher without recognizing the letters independently. This is in accordance with findings Faizah et al., (2020) which state that children who memorize without reading tend to remember sounds, not verse texts.

The results of initial observations in class show that some students still have difficulty in pronouncing hijaiyah letters correctly and tend to rely only on repetition without understanding the pronunciation pattern. Of the 31 students observed, more than half still needed direct correction from the teacher when reading short verses, and only a small percentage were confident in reading independently. Memorization activities in the early stages tend to be teacher-centered with limited student interaction.



Figure 2. Learning Documentation Before the Implementation of DAP

After the implementation of the DAP-based approach, significant changes were seen. Students become more actively involved in muroja'ah sessions using the Wafa murotal method with the rhythm of the Hijaz. Rhythmic repetition helps students maintain focus and improve reading fluency. The number of students who are able to read the verse cards independently is increasing, the pronunciation of makhraj has become clearer, and voluntary participation in reading activities is becoming more visible. Teachers also reported that students showed better confidence and longer duration of concentration in Qur'anic literacy sessions.

These findings reflect the principles of Developmentally Appropriate Practice NAEYC, (2020) which emphasizes active engagement, meaningful learning experiences, and learning tailored to the child's developmental characteristics. By integrating play strategies, multisensory stimulation, and positive reinforcement, tahfidz learning shifts from passive memorization to an interactive literacy process. In line with Murtafiah et al. (2025), the rhythmic play and repetition approach supports memory strengthening, phonological awareness, and attention resilience. Thus, this evidence suggests that DAP not only improves memorization outcomes, but also strengthens the foundation of Qur'anic reading skills on an ongoing basis.



Figure 3. Learning Tahfidz while playing outside the classroom

Table 1. Changes in Qur'an Reading Skills After the Implementation of DAP

Indicator	Before DAP	After DAP	Proof of Change	Theoretical Relevance
Makhrāj Accuracy	Some children still mispronounce hijaiyah letters and often need correction from teachers	Most children pronounce letters more clearly and rarely need correction	Children are able to improve pronunciation after hearing the repetition of the rhythm of the Hijaz	Rhythmic repetition strengthens phonological awareness and articulation accuracy
Reading Fluency	Children's reading is still intermittent and hesitant	Reading becomes more rhythmic and fluent	During a verse card session, the reading pattern is more continuous	Auditory scaffolding helps consolidate verbal memory
Learning Engagement	Some children appear passive in memorization activities	Children show enthusiasm in DAP-based verse games	Increased participation in Qur'anic games	In accordance with the principle of DAP: active learning through play
Self Reading Confidence	Few children dare to read in front of the teacher	More children read with confidence	The child voluntarily raises his hand to read	Scaffolding theory: gradual support promotes independence
Attention Range	Children are easily distracted during muroja'ah	The child is able to maintain focus for longer	Ongoing engagement during structured iteration sessions	Play-based learning improves attention regulation

After the application of the DAP approach, the child shows positive development in reading skills. Multisensory learning such as writing letters in the sand, putting together letter puzzles, and picture card helps children get to know letter shapes faster. Children begin to be able to read single hijaiyah letters, then progress to a simple series of letters in short syllables (ba-bi-bu). This progress is in line with the theory of children's language development according to Vygotsky, (2018) that stimulation through play and social interaction can strengthen phonological skills and early literacy.



Figure 4. Implementation of Tahfidz learning using the DAP approach

The image illustrates a tahfidz learning activity implemented through the Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP) approach, where instruction is aligned with the developmental stage of the children. The teacher plays an active role by modeling the pronunciation of hijaiyah letters, while the children follow in sequence within a structured yet supportive classroom environment. The standing formation reflects organized classroom management, ensuring that each child has an equal opportunity to participate. Direct interaction between the teacher and the children serves as a key medium for gradually introducing and reinforcing letter sounds.

The children's engagement in this activity indicates stimulation of phonological skills through concrete and repetitive learning experiences. They are not only listening but also imitating and observing the visual representation of the letters presented by the teacher. This condition supports memory retention and strengthens understanding of both the forms and sounds of hijaiyah letters. Group-based participation also contributes to building children's confidence in articulating sounds, allowing reading skills to develop progressively in accordance with individual readiness.

4. Conclusion

The findings of this study show that the implementation of the Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP) approach in tahfidz learning supports the development of early childhood Qur'an reading skills more optimally and according to its developmental stage.

Learning is arranged according to the child's developmental stage, with the use of concrete media, phonetic games of hijaiyah letters.

Multisensory activities (letter sand, puzzles, picture cards), as well as murottal-based murojaah and positive rewards, make tahfidz activities more interesting and do not pressure children. Children show improved ability to recognize hijaiyah letters, distinguish makhraj, and read fluently before memorizing verses. The results of the observation showed that children were more enthusiastic, actively participated, and had better memorization memory than before the implementation of DAP. Thus, development-friendly tahfidz learning not only increases memorization achievements, but also fosters children's love for the Qur'an through a fun learning process.

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