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Maharah al-Kalam Learning Using the Word Chain Game in Madrasah

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to reveal the use of word chain games as a strategy in teaching maharah al-kalam. According to observers and practitioners of Arabic language education, word chain has an impact in teaching speaking skills, therefore, it is important to explain its use in Madrasah Tsanawiyah. This study used a qualitative approach where data were collected through observation, interviews and documentation studies. Based on the results, maharah al-kalam learning using word chain games has an impact on the quality of the process as evidenced by increased results, students become more active and their motivation increases. Improving the quality of the learning process is evidenced by the active participation of students in responding to teacher statements, as well as their enthusiasm in perfecting sentences spoken by other groups. Learning outcomes are getting better, but fluency and memorization of vocabularies cannot be improved using the word chain game.

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Keyword

Language Game; *Maharah al-kalam*; Word Chain

مستخلص البحث

هدفت هذه الدراسة إلى الكشف عن استخدام ألعاب سلسلة الكلمات كاستراتيجية في تدريس مهارة الكلام. وفقاً للمراقبين والممارسين لتعليم اللغة العربية، فإن سلسلة الكلمات لها تأثير في تعليم مهارات التحدث، لذلك من المهم شرح استخدامها في مدرسة التسنوية. استخدمت هذه الدراسة مقارنة نوعية حيث تم جمع البيانات من خلال الملاحظة والمقابلات والدراسات التوثيقية. بناءً على النتائج، فإن تعلم مهارة الكلام باستخدام ألعاب سلسلة الكلمات له تأثير على جودة العملية كما يتضح من زيادة النتائج، حيث يصبح الطلاب أكثر نشاطاً ويزداد تحفيزهم. يتضح تحسين جودة عملية التعلم من خلال المشاركة النشطة للطلاب في الاستجابة لبيانات المعلم، فضلاً عن حماسهم في إتقان الجمل التي تتحدثها المجموعات الأخرى. تتحسن نتائج التعلم، لكن لا يمكن تحسينطلاقة وحفظ المفردات باستخدام لعبة سلسلة الكلمات.

الألعاب اللغة: المفردة التسلسل: مهارة الكلام

كلمات أساسية

INTRODUCTION

Maharah al-kalam is one of the four important skills for language learners to have because language is a communication tool. However, in reality, *maharah al-kalam* is difficult for Arabic learners at the elementary, middle, and even university levels. Many factors contribute to the slow achievement of *maharah al-kalam* among students such as the inaccuracy of the method (Aprianto et al., 2020; Khaira, 2021) as well as errors in using strategies according to the student's abilities (Mardiah, 2015; Suharyanti & Fauziati, 2020). Thus, innovative teaching strategies are required to overcome these emerging problems. Learning innovations can take various forms (bin Samah et al., 2016; Ukhrawiyah & Damayanti, 2021) and utilise technological devices (Ilomäki & Lakkala, 2019; Ritonga, Zulmuqim, et al., 2022; Haleem et al., 2022; Valverde-Berrocoso et al., 2021).

Maharah al-kalam or speaking skills have been widely studied by academics. Bariyah and Muassomah (2019) emphasised that the *ta'bir al-Shuwar al-'Aswai* method can improve the students' speaking skills, while Insani et al. (2021) revealed that speaking skills can be improved through *muhadharah* activities. It has also been emphasised that developing and organising language activities improves students' speaking skills (Amin et al., 2022). Other studies showed that *bi'ah al-lughawiyah* develops Arabic speaking skills because speaking Arabic becomes a culture (Marlius et al., 2021; Fattah et al., 2022).

Rosid et al. (20121) evaluated the learning model of Arabic speaking skills in higher education, confirming that educators have a low ability to use online media. Mohammed (2022) conducted a study related to the learning design for speaking and listening skills, finding that learning design improves the quality of the learning processes of Arabic speaking and hearing skills. Marlius et al. (2021) focused on the Arabic language environment in improving Arabic speaking skills. Sueraya Che Haron et al. (2012) conducted studies related to several strategies for learning speaking skills in the classroom. Takdir et al. (2022) also revealed that the language environment is important to improve the ability to speak Arabic. However, no studies have focused on methods, strategies, and techniques for learning Arabic speaking skills using word games.

Although efforts to improve the quality of Arabic learning have been implemented, Arabic learning is still lagging compared to other languages taught in Indonesia (Albantani & Madkur, 2019). Therefore, the researchers were interested in studying *maharah al-Kalam* learning using a word chain game, as our previous studies focusing on pantonyms and other methods concluded that word games have a positive impact on memorising vocabulary (Miftah et al., 2020).

Language games can be categorised as Active, Creative, Effective and Joyful Learning (ACEJL) because they can increase effectiveness and be fun for students (Mardiah, 2015). Baroroh et al. (2016) studied the word and phrase index confirming that this strategy improved the students' Arabic learning outcomes. Language games provide benefits in improving the students' speaking skills (Kaur & Abdul Aziz, 2020; Ibrahim, 2017) and can also be used to help students acquire grammatical (Syafiqah Yaccob & Md Yunus, 2019) and speaking skills (Syahrani, 2010; Adansia & Oringo's, 2022). Language games increase students' motivation (Lubis et al., 2021), allowing them to acquire theoretical abilities and use the language in daily activities (Casañpitarch, 2018). Several language games that can be used to improve students' speaking skills are available on various learning platforms (Madya & Meiningsih, 2021; Ritonga, Febriani et al., 2022; Adansia & Oringo, 2022). Word chain games can be used to improve students' English vocabulary (Maulani, 2021; Novi Rina Dewi & Alfany Fardan Syahuma, 2022; Bahang, 2022). Research related to puns in the literature focused on improving language vocabulary for learners and was linked to English language learning, so this study evaluated the use of the word game strategy in improving the *maharah al-kalam* of students at Madrasah Tsanawiyah.

METHOD

This study was conducted in compliance with academic and research ethics that apply in Indonesia in general and the Muhammadiyah University of West Sumatra in particular. It was approved by the postgraduate programme of the University of Muhammadiyah West Sumatra (Ref: PPs-1023/II.3.AU/B/2022).

A qualitative approach was used as it was considered relevant to the study's aim to evaluate the use of word chain games in *mufradat* learning. The data were collected from students at *Madrasah Tsanawiyah Tarbiyah Islamiyah* Batang Kabung from February to July 2022 recruited via snowball sampling. The key informants were the Arabic teachers at *Madrasah Tsanawiyah Tarbiyah Islamiyah* Batang Kabung because they have extensive knowledge related to Arabic learning, especially in the aspect of *maharah al-kalam*.

The data were collected through observation, interviews, and documentation studies. Non-participatory observations on the activities of informants relevant to the study were recorded (Baker, 2006) and unstructured interviews were conducted to obtain data related to *maharah al-Kalam* learning and the use of word chain games. All responses were recorded and then the statements were classified according to the study content (Adhabi & Anozie, 2017; Philipps & Mrowczynski, 2021). Data were collected through the

documentation study technique to obtain data related to *maharah al-kalam* learning and the use of word chain game strategies.

The survey data were descriptively analysed (Armstrong, 1999; Chapman *et al.*, 2001) and qualitatively analysed using the methodologies of Miles and Huberman (Miles *et al.*, 2014) in three steps: data condensation, data presentation, and conclusion drawing/verification. First, the data were classified based on the specified research problem and then presented according to the specified problem to draw conclusions.

RESULTS & DISCUSSION

Maharah al-Kalam learning at Madrasah Tsanawiyah Tarbiyah Islamiyah Batang Kabung using word games is described in Table 1. The teachers first guide students to start learning by praying (Observation; 2022), usually led by the teachers directly (Observation, 2022) but sometimes the teachers instruct the prayer to be led by one of the students (Observation, 2022). This is in line with the statement of the informant that Arabic teachers often instruct students to lead the prayer when the lesson is about to start (Informant, Interview, 2022). Starting a lesson by praying is a human awareness that knowledge belongs to Allah, and Allah only grants it to people who have sincere intentions (Huda *et al.*, 2016; Dickinson, 2019). This is also the basis for teachers and students at *Madrasah Tsanawiyah Tarbiyah Islamiyah* Batang Kabung, as they ask for convenience in receiving lessons through prayer (Informants, Interviews, 2022). Then, the previously taught material is explained (Informant, Interview, 2022), usually by verbally repeating the material (Informant, Interview, 2022). The teachers repeat pieces of sentences that the students had learned, and the students continue the sentences (Observation, 2022). These activities are per the theory expressed by educational experts, namely apperception. Educators repeat learning materials that have been taught previously (Simons & Ruijters, 2008). Apperception is an important step to take before learning begins (Puteri, 2018). Likewise, in Arabic learning, it is important to repeat briefly the subject matter that has been learned (Yazigy, 1994). Furthermore, the apperception activity in Arabic learning conducted at Madrasah Tsanawiyah Tarbiyah Islamiyah Batang Kabung was according to the content of the material to be taught.

The teachers then explain the learning objectives so that the students will know what they are about to be taught. This step is important because it will focus students on what they will achieve (Mitchell & Manzo, 2018). Arabic teachers at Madrasah Tsanawiyah Tarbiyah Islamiyah also explained learning objectives (Observation, 2022) before starting the maharah al-kalam lesson by reciting basmalah (Observation, 2022). During the core activities, maharah al-

kalam learning is usually performed by the Arabic teachers first reciting Arabic sentences in full, the students listen and then repeat what was spoken by the teachers. When students are deemed able to pronounce the sentence, the teachers pronounce the incomplete sentence and allow the students to complete it (Observation, 2022).

Table 1. Learning Through a Word Chain Game

| No | Learning Activities | Student and Teacher Activities | Source |
|----|---------------------|---|--|
| 1 | Introduction | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Students pray led by Arabic teachers but sometimes led by students on the teacher's instruction - Teachers explain the previous learning outcomes - Teachers explain the learning objectives - Teachers start learning with basmalah | Observation, interview, and documentati on study |
| 2 | Core | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Teachers recite Arabic text orally - Students repeat the text - Teachers recite Arabic text orally - Students continue the text spoken by the teachers - Students are divided into several groups - The groups recite the sentences and other groups follow them | Observation and interview |
| 3 | Closing | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Teachers evaluate by reciting sentences - Students continue the word - The lesson is closed with hamdalah | Observation and interview |

The *maharah al-kalam* learning using a word chain game is described in Table 1. First, the Arabic teachers recite the complete sentence, and the students listen carefully. Arabic teachers explain that when listening, students should not only listen but also require an apperception of every word spoken in the sentence (Informant, Interview, 2022). Students also emphasised that when the teachers recited complete sentences, they focused on all the words, because at the next stage, students had to recite them together (Informants, Interviews, 2022).

Conclusions from interviews and observations on learning Arabic using word chain games as in the Figure 1.

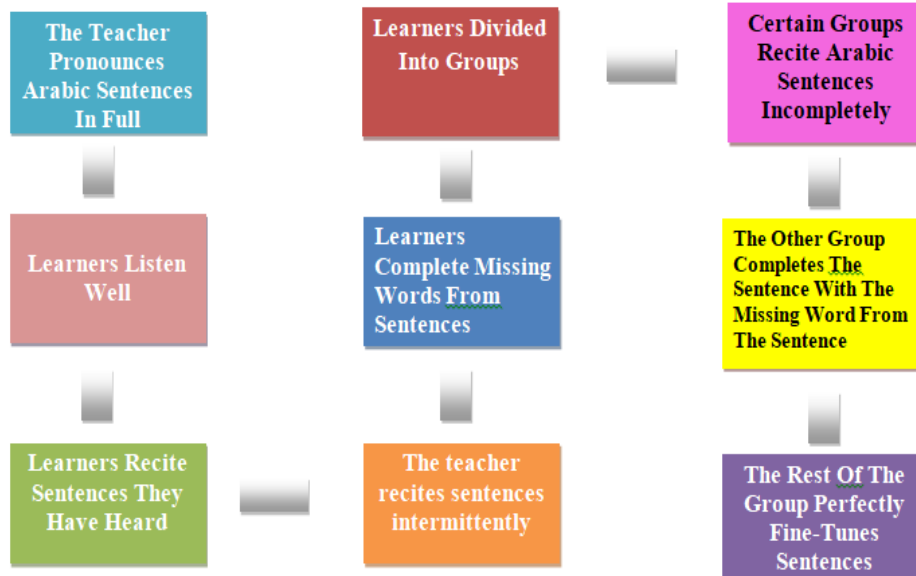


Figure 1. Maharah al-Kalam learning model using a word chain game

Arabic sentences for maharah al-kalam taught by Arabic teachers at Madrasah Tsanawiyah Tarbiyah Islamiyah taken from textbooks are shown in Figure 2

فاطمة : هَوَايَةَ نَافِعَةٍ. أَي مَوْضُوعٍ تَقْرَأِينَ؟
 رتنا : أَحِبُّ أَنْ أَقْرَأَ فِي مَوَاضِعٍ كَثِيرَةٍ مُخْتَلِفَةٍ مِثْلَ التَّارِيخِ، وَعِلْمِ النَّفْسِ، وَالرِّوَايَاتِ
 فاطمة : مِنْذُ مَتَى تُمَارِسِينَ هَوَايَةَ الْقِرَاءَةِ؟
 رتنا : اسْتَمْتَعْتُ بِالْقِرَاءَةِ مِنْذُ زَمَنِ طَوِيلٍ، وَالِدَتِي تُحِبُّ الْقِرَاءَةَ، وَأَنَا تَعَلَّمْتُ الْقِرَاءَةَ مِنْهَا
 فاطمة : وَهَلْ تُحِبِّينَ التَّصْوِيرَ؟
 رتنا : نَعَمْ، أَهْوَى التَّصْوِيرَ أَيْضًا، وَهَذِهِ صُورَةٌ عَائِلَتِي، اإِتَّقَطْتُهَا بِنَفْسِي وَأَهْدِيهَا لَكَ. لَدَيَّ
 كَامِيرَا وَالكَثِيرُ مِنَ العَدَسَاتِ الَّتِي اسْتَخْدِمُهَا فِي مَنَاسِبَاتٍ مُخْتَلِفَةٍ. وَمَا هَوَايَتُكَ؟
 فاطمة : جِزَاكَ اللهُ خَيْرًا، هَوَايَتِي الرَّسْمُ وَالطَّبِيخُ.
 رتنا : وَإِيَّاكَ. وَهَلْ هَذِهِ صُورَةُ مَدْرَسَتِكَ؟
 فاطمة : نَعَمْ، رَسَمْتُهَا بِيَدِي، وَأَهْدِيهَا لَكَ، هَذَا رُؤْمٌ مَحَبَّتِي لَكَ
 رتنا : شُكْرًا كَثِيرًا. وَهَلْ تُحِبِّينَ الطَّبِيخَ؟
 فاطمة : لَا شُكْرَ عَلَيَّ وَاجِبٌ. نَعَمْ، أَهْوَى الطَّبِيخَ أَيْضًا، وَأُرِيدُ أَنْ أَكُونَ طَبَاخَةً مَاهِرَةً
 رتنا : هَلْ لَدَيْكَ وَصْفَةٌ لِصُنْعِ عَصِيرِ اللَّيْمُونِ

Figure 2. Learning materials taught with the word chain game (Masrukhin, 2020)

The implementation of *maharah al-Kalam* using a word chain game is described in Figure 3. The word chain game makes the learning process more active and helps motivate students (Observation, 2022). Students also explained that Arabic learning with the word chain game increased their enthusiasm (Informant, Interview, 2022). These findings corroborate a study by Su et al. (2021) on a comparative analysis of the use of cellular games and non-cellular games in language learning showing that the use of non-cellular games should be maintained in language learning in the digital era. Chen and Hsu (2020) also concluded that the use of games can significantly improve the ability of students

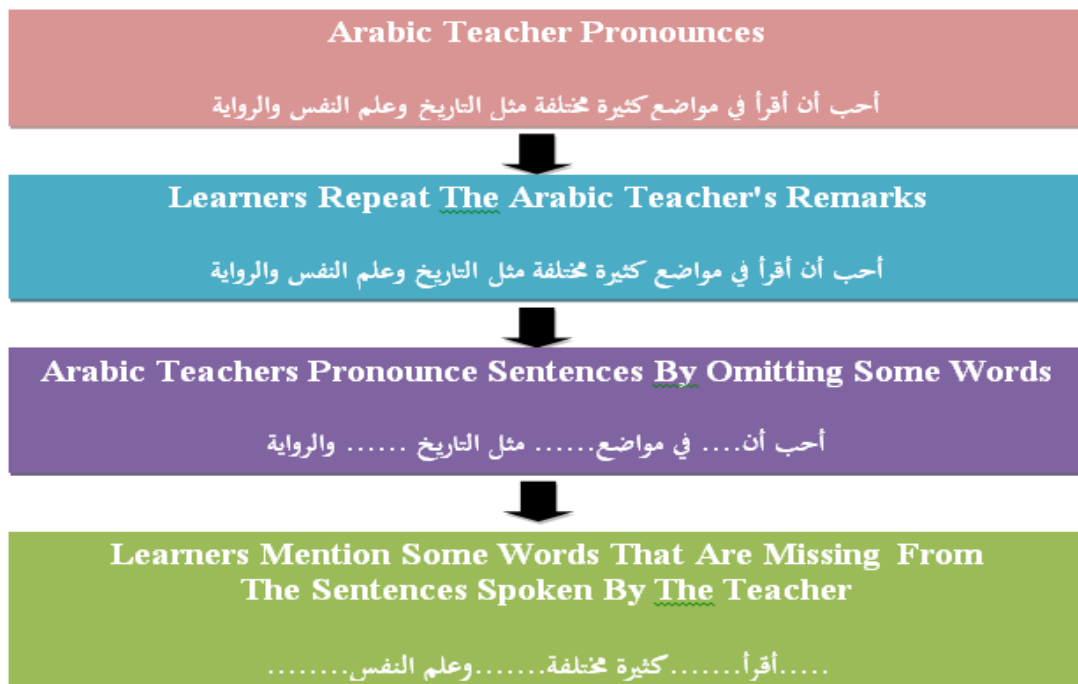


Figure 3. Maharah al-Kalam with Word Chain Game

to master vocabulary. Language learning using language games generally relates to technology-based forms (Ware & Hellmich, 2014; Fithriani, 2021; Ritonga, Sobhan, et al., 2022) but these findings suggest that games in traditional forms, such as the word chain game, are still worthy of use.

Maharah al-Kalam is an Arabic speaking skill that must be possessed by every Arabic learner as well as students at Madrasah Tsanawiyah Tarbiyah Islamiyah Batang Kabung. However, in reality, speaking skills among students, especially in speaking Arabic, are still faced with serious problems. In accordance with the existing concept that *maharah al-kalam* of students is characterised by linguistic aspects. Therefore, the *maharah al-kalam* of students at Madrasah Tsanawiyah Tarbiyah Islamiyah can be described as shown in Table 2, showing that they have good skills in pronouns or *al-nuthq*. This statement is based on the way students pronounce Arabic letters according to *makhraj* (Observation,

2022). The *al-nuthq* aspect shows the ability of students to speak Arabic according to correct recitation such as *izhar*, *ikhfa*, *ghunnah*, *tafkhim*, *tarqiq*, etc. Correct *tajwid* shows the ability of students in the Arabic pronouns (As-Sammer, 2010; Ziafat et al., 2021; Aljojo et al., 2019; Al Huneety et al., 2021).

Tabel 2. Maharah al-Kalam Students

| Aspect | Description |
|-----------------------------|--|
| النطق/ uttering | Students at Madrasah Tsanawiyah Tarbiyah Islamiyah Batang Kabung have good skills in speaking Arabic according to makhrāj and tajwid |
| القواعد/ grammar | Students can use Arabic grammar according to the context of the sentence |
| المفردات/ vocabulary | The vocabulary memorised by students is limited |
| الاطلاقية/ absolute | The Arabic speaking skills of students are not in line with their grammatical abilities |
| الفهم/ undersanding | The understanding of students on every sentence spoken is quite good |

Maharah al-kalam of students at Madrasah Tsanawiyah Tarbiyah Islamiyah Batang Kabung is evident in their ability to apply grammar (*qawa'id*) during communication. Students can choose and apply grammar to every spoken sentence (Observation, 2022). This reality is closely related to the learning culture at Madrasah Tarbiyah Islamiyah Batang Kabung with Arabic grammatical abilities both syntax (*nahwu*) and morphology (*sharaf*) (Observation; 2022). It is also in line with the findings of Ansyah et al. (2020) stating that students at Madrasah Tarbiyah Islamiyah Batang Kabung can read Arabic scripts based on their ability in grammatical aspects (*nahwu* and *sharaf*).

Regarding *mufradat* ability, students at Madrasah Tsanawiyah Tarbiyah Islamiyah Batang Kabung have not improved with the use of word chain game strategies. This is based on the students' vocabulary being limited to the vocabulary taught in the classroom, as they do not have the initiative to enrich this vocabulary outside of classroom learning. This is different from the results of Derakhshan and Davoodi Khatir (2015) who concluded that language games impact vocabulary memorised by students and Vu et al. (2021) who concluded that vocabulary is memorised with the word game. This difference may be attributed to the type of study conducted related to the word chain game strategy for *maharah al-kalam*.

Vocabulary memorised by students as described above is in line with fluency or *al-ithlaqiyah*. Students do not have *maharah al-kalam* for content outside of the material studied due to the limited Arabic vocabulary memorised by students. Madrasah also have not familiarised students with Arabic as a means of daily communication. This is in line with studies which highlighted the importance of

memorised vocabulary to support *maharah al-kalam* (Khan et al., 2018; Aprianto et al., 2020; Marlius et al., 2021; Amin et al., 2022; Ritonga, Febriani, et al., 2022; Wati & Maula, 2021).

Maharah al-kalam of students at Madrasah Tsanawiyah Tarbiyah Islamiyah Batang Kabung can also be measured from their understanding of Arabic expressions. Based on the observations, the students have a good understanding of Arabic expressions (Observation, 2022). Their speaking skills are evident in their ability to understand each expression (Mat et al., 2020; Ilhami & Robbani, 2021; El-Tingari, 2016).

CONCLUSIONS

The use of word game strategies in *maharah al-kalam* learning can develop a good learning environment for students to actively learn. However, the *maharah al-kalam* of students at Madrasah Tsanawiyah Tarbiyah Islamiyah Batang Kabung has not lived up to expectations, as they have not memorised sufficient vocabulary to be fluent in communicating using Arabic but they have good abilities in *al-nuthq*, *al-qawa'id*, and *al-fahm*. Thus, the word chain game strategy requires strengthening to increase its impact in increasing the *maharah al-kalam* of students. It is recommended that Arabic teachers further improve their ability to innovate in learning and students learning Arabic should apply their vocabulary in their daily communication activities.

This study is limited as it did not evaluate the use of word games in learning Arabic speaking skills. Therefore, further research related to the use of puns in the learning of Arabic speaking skills should be conducted using different methods and approaches. In addition, researchers can also explore studies on wordplay objects in learning Arabic speaking skills.

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