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Reforming Arabic Reading Instruction with Problem-Based Learning: A Classroom-Based Study

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Abstract

Keywords:
Strategy,
Learning,
Arabic,
Problems,
Reading Skills

This study examines the effectiveness of a Problem-Based Learning (PBL) strategy in enhancing the Arabic reading skills of Baitul Qur'an students. The problem addressed in this research is the persistent difficulty students face in memorizing and understanding Arabic vocabulary, which stems from limited practice and insufficient active engagement during learning activities. The main objective of the study is to evaluate how PBL, supported by structured dictionary use, can improve students' reading comprehension. Employing a qualitative experimental approach, the study implemented a learning model that required

students to consistently bring and utilize dictionaries in every Arabic lesson. This practice encouraged students to independently search for meanings and engage with vocabulary more frequently. After identifying the required vocabulary, students applied their understanding through thematic reading tasks, enabling teachers to assess comprehension based on the problems presented. The findings show that eighth-grade students felt more motivated and challenged when engaging in vocabulary-rich reading activities. Overall, the PBL strategy effectively improved students' reading skills and fostered greater learner autonomy. This study contributes to Arabic language pedagogy by demonstrating that integrating PBL with active vocabulary exploration can serve as a practical method for enhancing reading proficiency in similar educational contexts.

Abstrak

Kata Kunci:
Strategi,
Pembelajaran,
Bahasa Arab,
Masalah,
Keterampilan
Membaca

Penelitian ini mengkaji efektivitas strategi Problem-Based Learning (PBL) dalam meningkatkan keterampilan membaca bahasa Arab pada siswa Baitul Qur'an. Permasalahan utama yang diangkat dalam penelitian ini adalah kesulitan siswa dalam menghafal dan memahami kosakata Arab, yang disebabkan oleh kurangnya latihan serta minimnya keterlibatan aktif dalam proses pembelajaran. Tujuan penelitian ini adalah mengevaluasi sejauh mana penerapan PBL, yang dipadukan dengan penggunaan kamus secara terstruktur, dapat meningkatkan kemampuan pemahaman membaca siswa. Dengan menggunakan pendekatan eksperimen kualitatif, penelitian ini menerapkan model pembelajaran yang mewajibkan siswa membawa dan memanfaatkan kamus dalam setiap pembelajaran bahasa Arab. Praktik tersebut mendorong siswa untuk secara mandiri mencari makna dan berinteraksi lebih intensif dengan kosakata. Setelah menemukan kosakata yang dibutuhkan, siswa mengaplikasikan pemahamannya melalui aktivitas membaca teks tematik, sehingga guru dapat mengevaluasi pemahaman berdasarkan masalah yang diberikan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa siswa kelas VIII merasa lebih termotivasi dan tertantang ketika berhadapan dengan kegiatan membaca yang kaya kosakata. Secara keseluruhan, strategi PBL terbukti efektif dalam meningkatkan keterampilan membaca dan mendorong kemandirian belajar. Kontribusi penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa integrasi PBL dengan eksplorasi kosakata aktif dapat menjadi metode praktis untuk meningkatkan kemampuan membaca bahasa Arab di konteks pendidikan serupa.

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Introduction

Basically, the application of problem-based learning strategies (Problem Based Learning) is a strategy that can theoretically be applied to solve problems. In addition, according to Ibrahim in the journal Ainin emphasized that PBL (Problem Based Learning) is designed to help students in developing critical thinking skills, problem solving and intellectual skills (Ainin 2017) . Meanwhile, according to Dewey in his research discussed the effectiveness of Arabic language learning methodology for students, and his research was also considered effective, because by utilizing the PBL (Problem Based Learning) method it can help students to think more critically in facing and solving a problem. In addition, in the journal Hanik Mahliatussikah it is explained that PBL (Problem Based Learning) was introduced by John Dewey. He explained that learning while seeking experience is important. Not only that, Dewey also explained that learning based on existing problems can involve two directions, namely stimulus and response interactions, such as the environment presents problems while the brain can interpret, investigate, and analyze these problems (Mahliatussikah, 2023) . In Lilik Aisatul Husnah's journal , the Problem Based Learning method is understood to be able to help increase students' motivation to learn and interest, especially in learning Arabic.

With the cooperation between one group and another group, problems will be easier to overcome, as in Arabic, of course, students can practice their abilities in improving four skills starting from reading, writing, speaking and even listening (Lilik Aisatul Husnah, 2025) . This statement was also emphasized by Wahyuni & Takwim in the journal Moh Iqbal Rizky Fachruddin that all these skills cannot be separated, because if they are ordered as usual, students are taught to read, write, speak until the listening stage. and among the four skills, the more important is reading or in Arabic it is called Qiroáh (Fachruddin 2024, 144) . In addition, Darwati & Purana, 2021 in the journal Al-Rafií et al. 2024 explained that it is a must for a teacher to have the ability to master this PBL method, because with it students can more freely express themselves according

to the experiences they have gone through, with this PBL can also make Arabic language learning less monotonous and increase more creative thinking (Al-Rafi'i et al. 2024).

In addition to its theoretical foundation, the implementation of PBL in Arabic language learning is closely related to contemporary educational demands that emphasize learner autonomy and active participation. Modern pedagogical frameworks highlight that students must not remain passive recipients of information, but should be encouraged to construct knowledge through meaningful interaction with learning materials and their peers. PBL supports this shift by placing students at the center of inquiry activities, where they are required to identify challenges, generate hypotheses, seek relevant information, and evaluate solutions. Such processes are especially important in Arabic learning, where linguistic structures, morphology, and vocabulary richness require ongoing exposure and contextual practice. By engaging with problems that mirror authentic linguistic situations, students gain opportunities to internalize vocabulary and strengthen comprehension in a more natural and integrated manner.

Furthermore, the relevance of PBL becomes increasingly significant in the context of students' difficulties in mastering Arabic vocabulary and reading comprehension. Many students struggle due to limited exposure to contextualized texts and a lack of strategies for decoding and interpreting meaning. Traditional methods that rely heavily on memorization often fail to equip students with the ability to understand Arabic in real contexts. PBL offers an alternative by encouraging students to use tools such as dictionaries, contextual clues, and peer discussions as part of their problem-solving process. This approach aligns with cognitive learning theories which argue that deeper understanding emerges when learners engage actively with problems rather than receiving solutions passively. As a result, the learning process becomes more meaningful and sustainable because students develop both the skills and the habits necessary for independent learning.

701 | Ratna Komalasari, Muhammad Al-Kaosari, Liazi Maulidi, Ardia Pramesti Regita Cahyani, Fathul Maujud; Reforming Arabic Reading Instruction with Problem-Based Learning: A Classroom-Based Study

Finally, the integration of PBL in Arabic language instruction also contributes to the improvement of classroom dynamics and teacher-student interactions. When teachers adopt PBL, their role transforms from a mere transmitter of knowledge into a facilitator who guides inquiry, supports exploration, and stimulates discussion. This transformation fosters a more collaborative and dialogical learning environment, where students feel more responsible for their learning outcomes. Additionally, PBL encourages students to articulate their reasoning, justify their answers, and reflect on their learning processes. Such reflective practices are essential for building metacognitive awareness, which is crucial for mastering complex languages like Arabic. Therefore, the use of PBL not only enhances linguistic proficiency but also promotes broader educational goals such as learner independence, creativity, and critical engagement with knowledge.

Despite the growing body of literature supporting the effectiveness of Problem Based Learning in language education, empirical studies that specifically examine its implementation in Arabic reading comprehension among students of religious institutions remain limited. This gap highlights the need for focused research that explores how PBL can address students' linguistic challenges in vocabulary mastery and text interpretation within the unique context of Arabic as a language of religion and scholarship. Therefore, this study aims to analyze the application of PBL in enhancing reading skills among Baitul Qur'an students and to identify the extent to which problem-based activities contribute to their learning motivation and comprehension outcomes. By situating this investigation within both theoretical and practical perspectives, the study seeks to offer meaningful contributions to Arabic language pedagogy and to provide educators with insights into innovative strategies that can support more effective and engaging learning experiences.

Method

In this discussion, this article uses a qualitative experimental approach to explain an experiment in learning. Qualitative methods are focused on describing or elaborating on all explanations. An experiment is usually defined as an attempt to measure something. Furthermore, in this case, researchers obtain data through the results of experiments conducted and strengthen them with the results of previous research obtained from several related references. The researchers chose a qualitative method and an experimental approach to facilitate the researcher in describing all processes that occur factually. With this approach, researchers can easily collect data or information from literature sources from related sources because the researchers are full participants and actors in this research.

The data collection techniques for this study include observation, interviews, and focus groups (FGDs). Observations are conducted to directly observe the problem-solving process, which includes several interactions in the research situation between several groups. Meanwhile, interviews are conducted to strengthen the data obtained, both from the experimenters to obtain in-depth data, views, experiences, and perceptions. Furthermore, within the FGD (Forum Group Discussion) groups, structured discussions between groups are necessary to resolve the problems being experienced.

Result and Discussion

Problem Based Learning Strategy in Arabic language learning

The discussion on the implementation of the Problem-Based Learning (PBL) strategy in Arabic language instruction demonstrates that the learning process can run effectively when teachers are fully prepared with the necessary instructional tools. The application of PBL for the students of Baitul Qur'an follows several sequential steps designed to ensure systematic learning. In general, the PBL stages align with Taufiq Amir (2009), which include clarifying unclear terms, formulating problems, analyzing the problems, organizing ideas

systematically, determining learning objectives, gathering relevant information, and presenting the findings in the form of a report. These stages correspond to classroom practice in which teachers must first provide clear explanations so that students are able to complete tasks properly. Other studies, such as those by (Rombe dkk. 2021), reinforce that problem-based learning positively influences students' learning outcomes, enhances their critical thinking skills, and habituates them to solving real-life problems during learning.

Despite these advantages, implementing PBL also encounters challenges, particularly due to the low motivation and limited ability of some students to understand Arabic materials. Many students perceive Arabic as difficult because they lack consistent study habits and intrinsic motivation. As (Nisa et.al. 2024) argue, problem-based learning actually provides opportunities for students to develop problem-solving skills and construct knowledge independently. A major issue that students commonly face at Baitul Qur'an is the difficulty in memorizing Arabic vocabulary (*mufradat*), which is essential for understanding texts. These difficulties are often compounded by forgetfulness, confusion when applying vocabulary in sentences, and boredom during memorization activities (Tampubolon dkk. 2024). However, vocabulary mastery and frequent reading are indispensable initial steps in learning Arabic effectively.

The teacher implements PBL in vocabulary instruction through several structured stages: 1) The teacher introduces a theme related to the lesson, assigning different themes to each group to avoid monotony and excessive workload. 2) The teacher divides students into four mixed groups of male and female students to encourage more dynamic idea exchange. 3) After groups are formed, the teacher explains the task procedures and instructs students to use Arabic dictionaries to identify vocabulary agreed upon by the teacher and students. For example, when learning the theme "house," each group searches for vocabulary related to household items and spaces. 4) After collecting the vocabulary, the groups practice reading Arabic texts related to the theme. This method trains students to regularly consult dictionaries, enriches their

knowledge, and increases their vocabulary memorization. 5) Finally, each group presents its findings, and the teacher provides evaluation and feedback on their performance.

These stages must be continued consistently to prevent boredom and maintain student engagement. The development of such activities must also be accompanied by an understanding of reading skills, including strategies and approaches that help students comprehend Arabic texts (Verawati dan Syarfuni 2023). This aligns with (Harianto 2020), who emphasizes that reading is one of the four fundamental language skills and forms an essential component of written communication. Therefore, the implementation of PBL in Arabic language learning not only assists students in solving problems but also strengthens their literacy competence, which is crucial for mastering the Arabic language.

In addition to enhancing vocabulary acquisition and reading comprehension, the implementation of PBL also cultivates a student-centered learning culture that is essential for foreign language acquisition. When students are placed in situations where they must identify, analyze, and resolve linguistic problems, they gradually develop autonomy in learning. This autonomy is a crucial component of successful language learning, particularly in Arabic, which demands consistent exposure and repeated practice. PBL allows students to build confidence through self-directed inquiry, enabling them to confront unfamiliar vocabulary, interpret text structures, and negotiate meaning collaboratively. Such learning experiences significantly contribute to long-term retention and deepen students' engagement with the language.

Moreover, PBL encourages the development of higher-order thinking skills, which are fundamentally linked to students' success in understanding complex Arabic texts. Through group discussions, problem interpretation, and exploration of multiple solutions, students learn to evaluate information critically rather than relying solely on memorization. This shift from rote learning to analytical engagement aligns with contemporary views on foreign language

pedagogy, which emphasize understanding over repetition. Additionally, PBL exposes students to diverse perspectives within their groups, fostering social interaction and communication skills that are essential components of language learning. Cooperative inquiry not only strengthens linguistic competence but also enhances students' ability to reason, argue, and justify their conclusions in a meaningful way.

Challenges and Obstacles in Implementing Problem-Based Learning

The implementation of Problem Based Learning (PBL) in Arabic language instruction presents a series of challenges and obstacles that significantly affect the learning process. One of the primary challenges concerns students' readiness to engage in cognitively demanding tasks. Not all students respond positively to the PBL approach, as some find it difficult to adjust to learning activities requiring intensive reasoning and active problem solving. This resistance is often expressed through complaints about increased cognitive load and diminished engagement during lessons. Such reactions indicate that transitioning from traditional instructional practices to inquiry-based learning demands considerable adaptation on the part of students.

Another major obstacle relates to students' limited preparedness and access to essential learning resources. In the context of grade eight students at Pondok Pesantren Baitul Qur'an, only a portion of learners demonstrate the ability to follow PBL activities effectively. Others hesitate to participate because they lack basic tools such as dictionaries or are unfamiliar with how to use them. These limitations hinder students' ability to independently search for information, interpret texts, and apply appropriate problem-solving strategies. As a result, the successful implementation of PBL depends not only on instructional design but also on the availability of adequate learning materials and the foundational skills students bring to the classroom.

Students' entrenched learning habits within the pesantren environment further complicate the adoption of PBL. Many students have long been accustomed to memorization-based and teacher-centered learning methods that

706 | Ratna Komalasari, Muhammad Al-Kaosari, Liazi Maulidi, Ardia Pramesti Regita Cahyani, Fathul Maujud; Reforming Arabic Reading Instruction with Problem-Based Learning: A Classroom-Based Study

emphasize repetition rather than analytical engagement. When confronted with PBL activities that require investigation, collaboration, and critical reasoning, students often experience discomfort and confusion. The transition to more autonomous and inquiry-driven learning therefore requires systematic guidance, gradual familiarization, and sustained support. Without these components, students may resist the approach, thereby limiting its pedagogical effectiveness.

The limitations of instructional facilities also contribute to the challenges of implementing PBL. Restricted access to dictionaries, reference books, and other linguistic resources reduces students' opportunities to explore problems in depth. Large class sizes further hinder teachers' ability to provide individualized assistance, resulting in uneven participation and learning outcomes. Under these conditions, the collaborative nature of PBL becomes difficult to sustain consistently throughout the classroom, thereby diminishing the model's intended impact.

In addition, the transformation of the teacher's role into that of a facilitator adds another layer of complexity. PBL requires teachers to design meaningful problem scenarios, guide group discussions, monitor collaborative activities, and conduct formative assessments that evaluate both the learning process and outcomes. Teachers accustomed to lecture-based instruction may require additional pedagogical training to effectively manage these responsibilities. Without adequate professional preparation, the implementation of PBL risks becoming fragmented or misaligned with its theoretical foundations. Thus, the success of PBL is closely tied to the teacher's competence in managing the learning environment, stimulating student inquiry, and sustaining meaningful engagement throughout the instructional process.

Advantages and Disadvantages of Problem-Based Learning

In the implementation of Problem Based Learning (PBL), several important aspects emerge concerning its advantages and disadvantages, each of which influences the overall effectiveness of the learning process. On the positive side, PBL encourages students to become more active, engaged, and critical in

addressing the challenges presented to them. This model shifts the learning paradigm from teacher-centered instruction to student-centered inquiry, allowing learners to construct their own understanding through exploration and problem solving. As highlighted by Yadi and Dinata in Nurul Handini et al. (2024), PBL broadens students' knowledge, deepens comprehension, and offers opportunities to refine their reasoning skills through collaborative discussions, teamwork, and structured academic debates.

However, PBL also presents certain limitations that must be recognized. Some students may struggle to participate fully in problem-based activities, particularly if they are unfamiliar with the demands of independent inquiry and critical thinking. Low motivation, passive learning habits, or a lack of confidence often hinder students' engagement, making the method less effective for certain groups. These challenges illustrate that the success of PBL is highly dependent on learners' readiness, the teacher's ability to guide the class dynamically, and the overall learning environment that supports active participation.

Another important consideration is the increased responsibility placed on teachers when implementing PBL. Unlike conventional teaching methods that rely heavily on direct instruction, PBL requires teachers to assume the role of facilitators who design relevant problems, guide discussions without dominating them, and ensure that all students are involved meaningfully. This shift in role demands greater preparation, classroom management skills, and continuous monitoring of group dynamics. Teachers must not only evaluate the final answers but also assess the cognitive processes students use while engaging with the problem.

Despite these challenges, PBL contributes positively to cultivating independent learning habits among students. Those engaged in problem-solving activities naturally develop the initiative to seek additional information, use resources such as dictionaries and reference materials, and break down complex problems into manageable steps. Such habits are especially beneficial in Arabic language learning, where students often struggle with vocabulary acquisition,

708 | Ratna Komalasari, Muhammad Al-Kaosari, Liazi Maulidi, Ardia Pramesti Regita Cahyani, Fathul Maujud; Reforming Arabic Reading Instruction with Problem-Based Learning: A Classroom-Based Study

linguistic structures, and comprehension of contextual meaning. PBL provides the opportunity for authentic engagement with language tasks, enabling learners to apply vocabulary in meaningful contexts.

In conclusion, the effectiveness of PBL cannot be determined solely by its application in a single classroom but must be evaluated in relation to student readiness, teacher competence, and the broader learning environment. No single method can be universally applied to all learners, and PBL is no exception. Teachers must exercise pedagogical flexibility and adapt their strategies to meet the diverse needs of their students. When supported by appropriate conditions, PBL can serve as a powerful approach that enhances students' reading comprehension, fosters deeper understanding, and develops higher-order thinking skills essential for mastering Arabic as a complex and multifaceted language.

Conclusion

Based on the discussion above, it can be concluded that Problem-Based Learning (PBL) is an effective method for enhancing student motivation and improving learning outcomes, particularly in Arabic language instruction. This approach helps re-engage students who have lost interest by involving them directly in problem-solving and independent exploration. By providing opportunities for active participation, PBL becomes a relevant strategy to address the persistently low literacy levels among students, especially in reading comprehension.

A surprising finding of this study is that although students often feel supported through guided instruction, they actually become more motivated when given structured challenges that require critical and independent thinking. This indicates that over-scaffolding or overly pampering students may weaken their ability to think deeply. In contrast, presenting meaningful challenges within the PBL framework encourages greater curiosity, initiative, and engagement in understanding Arabic texts.

Despite its positive outcomes, this study has certain limitations. Implementing PBL requires more instructional time and careful teacher preparation to design authentic problems that match students' proficiency levels. Moreover, the study was conducted within a limited educational setting, which may affect the generalizability of its findings. Future research is encouraged to apply PBL in broader contexts and examine its long-term impact on Arabic language learning.

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Authors' Contribution Statement

Ratna Komalasari contributed to the conceptualization of the study, data collection, and drafting of the manuscript. Muhammad Al-Kaosari assisted in the methodology design, classroom implementation, and literature review. Liazi Maulidi contributed to data analysis and the refinement of the research framework. Ardia Pramesti Regita Cahyani participated in organizing the findings and preparing the final manuscript. Fathul Maujud supervised the overall research process, provided critical revisions, and ensured the academic quality of the study. All authors reviewed and approved the final version of the manuscript.

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- 713** | Ratna Komalasari, Muhammad Al-Kaosari, Liazi Maulidi, Ardia Pramesti Regita Cahyani, Fathul Maujud; Reforming Arabic Reading Instruction with Problem-Based Learning: A Classroom-Based Study

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