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Article

The Implementation of the "Message Relay" Game to Improve Listening and Oral Response Skills in Arabic Language Learning for Islamic Boarding School

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ABSTRACT

Listening and oral response skills are crucial in Arabic language learning, especially in Islamic boarding schools where Arabic functions as both an academic subject and a daily communication medium. However, teacher-centered learning models commonly applied in such settings often limit student participation and hinder the development of communicative abilities. This study aims to evaluate the effectiveness of the "Message Relay" game as an instructional strategy to improve students' listening, comprehension and oral responsiveness. The study was conducted at Pondok Pesantren Wali Songo Ngabar with 7th-grade students, using a descriptive qualitative design. Data were collected through classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, and documentation, then analyzed using data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. The results indicate that the "Message Relay" game created a more engaging, interactive, and enjoyable learning environment. Students demonstrated improved focus while listening, as well as faster and more accurate oral responses. In addition, the activity fostered teamwork, increased motivation, and enhanced students' confidence in speaking Arabic, as they were encouraged to practice language use in real-time and meaningful situations. In conclusion, the "Message Relay" game is an effective and innovative strategy for strengthening listening and oral response skills in Arabic language education, particularly within Islamic boarding school contexts.

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INTRODUCTION

Arabic has a very important position in Islamic education because it is the main means of understanding the Qur'an, Hadith, and Islamic scientific treasures. Mastery of this language requires receptive (listening and reading) and productive (speaking and writing) skills so that students can access the sources of Islamic teachings directly without the intermediary of translation (Arifin & Zulkarnain, 2019). In the context of Islamic boarding schools, Arabic learning is applied intensively through the classical system and the habituation of daily communication as part of the scientific tradition and language environment (*bi'ah*

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lughawiyyah) (Irsyadi, 2024). However, the results of initial observations at the Wali Songo Ngabar Islamic Boarding School show that around 60% of students still have difficulty understanding the teacher's oral instructions and responding appropriately in Arabic. This difficulty is seen especially in early grade students who are not used to active communication (Abdullah, 2020).

One of the main causes of these difficulties is a learning approach that still focuses on mastering grammar and memorizing vocabulary theoretically, while communicative activities that train speaking courage and listening accuracy are still limited. Monotonous learning models often have an impact on low motivation and active involvement of students in learning (Mahmud, 2021). Recent studies confirm that interaction-based and hands-on experiences are more effective in improving speaking fluency and the ability to understand spoken messages than traditional methods (Ilyas, 2024). However, most of the research only highlights the application of language games in general without explaining the specifics of effective game mechanisms in integrating simultaneous listening and speaking skills. This is where the research gap that this study aims to fill.

In order to answer these problems, it is necessary to innovate learning strategies that are interactive, fun, and facilitate student participation in a communicative manner. One of the approaches that is considered effective is the application of *game-based learning* . Several recent studies have shown that the use of educational games can improve students' focus, participation, and spontaneous response abilities in language learning (Syamsuddin & Taufiq, 2023). Among the various types of games, *the Message Relay Game* or "Message Relay" stands out because it demands active listening skills, quick understanding, and the ability to relay messages appropriately (Hasibuan et al., 2024). Thus, this method has the potential to be a solution to the low listening and speaking skills faced by students.

This research is focused on **analyzing the effectiveness and implementation process of the "Message Relay" method** in improving the listening and verbal response skills of grade VII students at the Wali Songo Ngabar Islamic Boarding School Ponorogo. Through a game-based approach, it is hoped that students can be more active, motivated, and confident in communicating using Arabic in the pesantren environment (Salim, 2023). In particular, this study aims to: (1) describe the process of applying the "Relay Message" method in Arabic language learning, and (2) assess its impact on improving students' listening and speaking skills.

The significance of this research lies in its contribution to enriching the practice of Arabic language pedagogy in Islamic boarding schools, especially in creating a communicative, creative, and contextual learning model according to the needs of modern learners (Fuadi, 2024; Robbani, 2024). The results of this research are expected to be a reference for teachers and Islamic educational institutions to integrate educational game methods in improving Arabic communication competence in a balanced manner between receptive and productive aspects.

METHOD

This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach with a *case study approach* that aims to describe the phenomenon of learning in depth based on direct experience in the field. This approach was chosen because it provides a thorough understanding of the process of communication, interaction, and student responses in Arabic learning activities through educational games (Creswell, 2018). The case study model is considered appropriate because it allows researchers to observe and analyze contextually how the "Relay Message" game method is applied in Arabic language learning in Islamic boarding school environments that have a distinctive educational culture and are oriented towards direct interaction between teachers and students (Sugiyono, 2021).

The research subjects consisted of 25 students in grade VII of the Wali Songo Ngabar Islamic Boarding School in Ponorogo. The selection of participants was carried out by purposive sampling, as this group represented the basic learning level in listening skills (*istimā'*) and speaking (*kalām*) Arabic (Arikunto, 2020). The number of 25 participants is considered adequate because they have reached the data saturation point, where the behavior patterns and responses of students begin to repeat and be consistent in the fourth observation session (Hasibuan et al., 2024). The research was carried out over four meetings, each lasting 90 minutes, which included the planning stage, game implementation, activity observation, and evaluation of learning outcomes.

Data were collected through three main techniques: **1) Participatory observation** was carried out to directly observe the process of implementing the "Message Relay" game, recording student communication patterns, group interactions, and responses to teacher instructions (Miles et al., 2020). **2) In-depth interviews** were conducted with Arabic teachers and several students to explore information about the learning experience, perception of the effectiveness of the game, and motivational factors that emerged during the activity. **3) Documentation** includes the collection of photographs, video recordings, and field notes as empirical evidence that strengthens the results of observations and interviews (Rahmawati, 2021).

Each data collection technique makes complementary contributions: observation provides real behavioral data in the classroom, interviews provide reflective and interpretive data, while documentation serves as visual and contextual evidence to validate field findings. Data analysis was carried out descriptively by following three main stages as stated by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2020), namely data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawn. Data reduction is carried out by sorting and grouping relevant data based on themes that arise during observation and interviews. The data that has been filtered is then analyzed using thematic analysis, which is the process of coding data to identify patterns of meaning and main themes related to the effectiveness of games on students' listening and speaking skills. The presentation of data is carried out in the form of narrative descriptions that describe the learning process, participant interaction, and systematic observation results.

To maintain validity and reliability, this study uses triangulation of sources and techniques. Triangulation is carried out by comparing observation, interview, and documentation data, and ensuring the consistency between direct observation results and participant statements (Sugiyono, 2021). This process ensures that research findings are consistent, credible, and reflect empirical realities in the field.

With this design, this research methodology is expected to be able to provide an in-depth and comprehensive picture of how the application of the "Relay Message" game can improve students' listening skills and verbal responses in learning Arabic in Islamic boarding schools.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The Process of Implementing the "Message Relay" Game in Arabic Learning

The application of *the Message Relay* game was carried out systematically during four meetings, each lasting 90 minutes. Each session is designed to integrate elements of play with communicative Arabic learning. Before the activity started, the teacher gave a briefing on the game procedures in simple Arabic, so that all participants understood the flow of the activity without having to switch to Indonesian. Each group consists of five to six students who have different levels of ability so that the process of learning from each other can occur naturally.

In the early stages, the teacher gives instructions in the form of simple sentences or messages such as *"اِذْهَبْ إِلَى الْمَكْتَبَةِ ثُمَّ خُذِ الْكِتَابَ الأَخْضَرَ"* (Go to the library, then pick up a green book). The message was only conveyed once to the group leader, then passed in a chain from one member to the next until the last participant in charge of relaying it in front of

the class. The observation results showed that as many as 80% of the students were actively involved and showed high enthusiasm in each session, especially when listening to the teacher's instructions or correcting the mistakes of other teams.

The atmosphere of the classroom seemed lively, full of laughter and concentration. In the field notes, one of the students said with a laugh, *"It turns out that it's hard to convey quickly without mistakes, but it's fun!"* The teacher observed that compared to conventional methods such as *dictation* or *listen and repeat*, students were much more focused when the activities were packaged in the form of games. Dynamics like this support the findings of Syamsuddin & Taufiq (2023) who state that *gamification* encourages emotional participation and creates positive social interactions between students.

The game also fosters collective responsibility among group members, as the success of the group is determined by the accuracy of each individual in conveying the message. The principle of role rotation allows all students to switch positions, both as receivers and conveyors. Thus, each student is directly involved in two main language skills: *receptive skills* (listening) and *productive skills* (speaking). This is a concrete form of the application *of Communicative Language Teaching* (CLT), which emphasizes the use of language in a real context, not just memorizing rules.

In addition, the results of the interviews showed that the teacher felt that this game was very helpful in melting the learning atmosphere. "Usually students are tense during listening practice, but this way, they actually laugh and stay focused," said the Arabic teacher. Pedagogically, this method shows how innovative strategies such as *Message Relay* are able to transform the learning process from passive to interactive, from cognitive to communicative, and from instructive to participatory.

Impact on Listening Skills (Istimā')

Improving listening skills (*istimā'*) is one of the most prominent impacts of implementing *Message Relay*. Based on the observation results, the accuracy of conveying the forwarded message consistently increased from around 60% in the first meeting to 85% in the fourth meeting. This improvement shows that students are increasingly able to grasp and understand the meaning of oral instruction in Arabic quickly and accurately.

In the first meeting, many students miss part of the message because they are not used to focusing on long speeches without repetition. However, by the third and fourth sessions, most students were already able to grasp the complete message even with more complex sentences. For example, when the teacher gives a long message such as *" اذْهَبْ إِلَى الْفَصْلِ، وَافْتَحِ النَّافِذَةَ، ثُمَّ اجْلِسْ فِي الْمَقْعَدِ الثَّانِي"*, the student managed to convey it almost without errors.

In addition to increasing accuracy, this activity also forms the habit of *focused listening* or listening with full attention. Because the message is delivered only once without repetition, students learn to control distractions, pay attention to intonation, and identify key words in speech. Based on the interview, one of the students said, *"Now I can catch the teacher's words faster because I am used to listening to my friend's message with focus."*

This process strengthens *students' working auditory memory* — the ability to process and store verbal information while processing it into meaning. This is especially important in learning Arabic, which has a complex sentence structure and a distinctive morphological system. In line with Wahyuni, Ritonga, & Afrianti (2023), communicative game techniques have been proven to be effective in increasing the catching power and speed of auditory reactions in foreign languages.

In addition to cognitive factors, emotional factors also affect the success of istimā' learning. A relaxed and competitive classroom atmosphere in a healthy way reduces the fear of making mistakes and increases the spirit of learning. Based on the theory *of the Affective Filter Hypothesis* (Krashen, 1982), high motivation and low anxiety lower affective barriers so

that language input can be received more effectively. Observations show that students who were initially quiet began to seem brave enough to ask the teacher to repeat or clarify, a sign that they had the confidence to interact in the target language.

Impact on Speaking Skills (Kalām) and Self-Confidence

In addition to improving listening skills, the Message *Relay game* also significantly improves speaking skills (kalām) in a qualitative context. Prior to the application of this method, most students (about 70%) tended to be hesitant to speak for fear of making structural or pronunciation errors. But after four meetings, more than 75% of the students began to speak spontaneously in Arabic without the teacher's coercion.

The process of repetition in games helps students practice courage and verbal spontaneity. One student said, *"I used to be afraid to speak up because I was afraid of making a mistake, but now I dare to say it even though I am still stunned."* This statement shows how the game model is able to reduce *language anxiety* and create a supportive learning environment.

This activity also improves pronunciation accuracy and sentence structure. Since the success of the game depends on the accuracy of the message delivery, students are encouraged to pay attention to phonology, diction, as well as the correct use of structure. In some sessions, there is corrective interaction between friends; For example, a student reminds his colleague to replace the wrong noun, such as *"not a book, but a pole, because it is plural."* This shows the emergence of collaborative learning where students correct each other's mistakes without shame or fear.

From an affective aspect, this game helps build confidence and group solidarity. Fair role rotation creates a sense of shared responsibility, while teamwork reinforces mutual trust between members. The teacher noted that the atmosphere of healthy competition makes students more courageous to try to use new vocabulary that they have not mastered before. According to *Krashen's (1982) Affective Filter theory, this condition lowers emotional barriers and accelerates the acquisition of language naturally.*

From a social perspective, *Message Relays* also foster awareness of the importance of effective communication within teams. Students learn that the success of the group depends on the clarity of the message and the accuracy of the language. Thus, this activity not only trains speaking skills, but also builds *self-efficacy* (academic confidence) which is important in learning a foreign language (Hasibuan et al., 2024).

Synthesis of Results and Implications

Overall, the results of the study show that the application of *the Message Relay* game in pesantren has a holistic influence on Arabic language learning, including cognitive, affective, and social aspects. Cognitively, students show improved listening skills, understanding the meaning of speech, and expressing messages accurately and quickly. Affectively, students appear more enthusiastic, motivated, and confident in public speaking. Socially, they learn to collaborate, respect the opinions of friends, and take responsibility for the group's success.

When compared to conventional learning methods such as *drilling* or *translation methods*, *Message Relay* has the advantage of combining receptive and productive skills simultaneously. Students not only listen, but also directly use language to convey meaning. This is in line with the CLT principle which emphasizes the use of language as a means of meaningful communication.

These findings also enrich the theory of second language acquisition by showing that game-based learning not only strengthens linguistic ability, but also lowers *affective filters* that are often the main barriers to success for foreign language learners. By combining elements of competition, collaboration, and fun, the Message *Relay game* is able to create natural and fun learning conditions.

From a pedagogical perspective, the results of this study recommend that Arabic teachers in Islamic boarding schools and educational institutions consider the integration *of Message*

Relay as a routine learning strategy. This game can be modified for various topics such as *fi'l amr*, *isim isyarah*, or everyday conversations, so that it can adapt to the student's ability level. In addition, this model can be an alternative to building an active, dynamic, and communicative bi'ah lughawiyyah in a modern pesantren environment.

CONCLUSION

This study aims to describe the effectiveness and implementation process of the *Message Relay game* in improving the istimā' (listening) and kalām (speaking) abilities of grade VII students at the Wali Songo Ngabar Islamic Boarding School, Ponorogo. Based on the results of observations, interviews, and documentation during four meetings, it was found that the application of this game provided a significant improvement in the students' Arabic language skills, both from linguistic and affective aspects.

The *Message Relay* game has been proven to be able to strengthen istimā' skills by practicing auditory focus, short-term memory, and speed in understanding verbal messages. Meanwhile, kalām skills are improved through the practice of conveying messages in a spontaneous, accurate, and communicative manner. The mechanism of improvement occurs through three main factors: (1) peer interaction that allows for a natural process of correction and social support; (2) intrinsic motivation that grows due to a competitive and fun atmosphere; and (3) direct feedback from teachers and peers that strengthens students' linguistic awareness.

In general, the *Message Relay* game makes a meaningful contribution to improving the Arabic communication skills of students in the pesantren environment. This activity not only strengthens linguistic skills, but also fosters confidence, communication discipline, and collaborative ethos which are an important part of pesantren character education. The results of this study also confirm the relevance of the *Communicative Language Teaching* (CLT) approach and *the theory of the Affective Filter Hypothesis* (Krashen) in the context of Arabic language learning based on real interaction and a positive emotional atmosphere.

However, this study has several limitations, including the relatively limited number of participants (25 students) and the research context that only focuses on one Islamic boarding school institution. Therefore, the results of this study cannot be generalized to all contexts of Arabic language learning in Indonesia. Further research is needed by involving a wider population or using quantitative and experimental approaches to measure the effectiveness of these games more objectively.

In terms of pedagogical implications, this study provides a direction for Arabic teachers to integrate *the Message Relay game* into their classroom routines, especially in listening and speaking activities. This method can be modified according to the theme of the lesson, such as *fi'l amr*, daily conversation, or mufradāt learning, so as to create an active and communicative learning atmosphere. Teachers can also use this technique as part of bi*'ah lughawiyyah* (language environment) in pesantren to reinforce Arabic language habits in a real context.

Thus, it can be concluded that the *Message Relay game* is an effective, fun, and applicable learning strategy in improving the ability of istimā' and kalām students in modern Islamic boarding schools. In addition to acting as a means of developing language competence, this method also functions as a medium for the formation of social character and student confidence through meaningful communicative interaction.

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