

Exploring the pedagogical role of flashcard media in supporting *hijaiyah* letter recognition among Islamic kindergarten children

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Abstract: Previous studies on flashcards for introducing Hijaiyah letters have largely emphasized media development or learning outcomes, while less attention has been given to how teachers use the cards pedagogically and how children respond during classroom activities. This study explores the pedagogical role of flashcard media in introducing Hijaiyah letters to children aged 5–6 years at ABA Nurul Hidayah Kindergarten, Lumbi-Lumbia Village, South Buko District. A descriptive qualitative approach was employed, involving two classroom teachers and 20 children aged 5–6 years. Data were collected through observation, interviews, and documentation, then analyzed using the Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña model of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. The findings show that teachers used the cards through structured and varied activities, including naming letters, guessing games, matching letters with similar shapes, and arranging letters in sequence. Teacher questioning, guidance, and praise supported interaction and participation. Children responded with attention, enthusiasm, active involvement, and sustained focus. The cards also provided visual support for recognizing and distinguishing letters with similar forms. These findings contribute a classroom-based account of flashcards beyond a general claim of effectiveness: their pedagogical value lies in the combination of visual prompts, guided interaction, and playful practice. The study suggests that early Hijaiyah instruction should integrate concrete visual media with purposeful teacher facilitation and repeated opportunities for children to engage.

Keywords: Flashcard media, Hijaiyah letter recognition, early childhood education, pedagogical strategies, classroom interaction.

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Introduction

Early childhood education (ECE) provides an important foundation for children's physical, cognitive, social, emotional, language, and religious development. Children aged 0–6 years experience a period of rapid development that requires learning experiences appropriate to their developmental characteristics. Therefore, learning in early childhood needs to be meaningful, enjoyable, and responsive to children's active participation. The use of concrete and interactive learning media is particularly relevant because young children benefit from learning experiences that connect information with observable objects, images, and activities (Ulfah, 2023).

Within Islamic early childhood education, the recognition of *hijaiyah* letters represents an important component of children's early Qur'anic literacy. Familiarity with *Hijaiyah* letters provides an initial foundation for children before developing further Qur'anic reading abilities. However, learning *hijaiyah* letters involves more than memorizing letter names or shapes. Children also need opportunities to observe, identify, differentiate, and recall letters, including letters with visually similar forms. Consequently, the teaching of *hijaiyah* letters requires learning practices that correspond to children's developmental characteristics and provide opportunities

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for active engagement (Widjayatri, 2024). For children aged 5–6 years, learning experiences that involve visual and concrete representations can help make abstract information more accessible. Learning media can function as a bridge between teacher explanations and children's experiences by presenting information in a form that children can observe and manipulate (Nasih, 2023). In *hijaiyah* learning, flashcards are particularly relevant because they present letters visually and can be incorporated into interactive activities such as naming, guessing, matching, grouping, and repeated identification. Rather than functioning only as a display of letter forms, flashcards can become part of teacher-guided activities that encourage children to observe, respond, communicate, and participate in learning.

The pedagogical function of flashcard media can be further understood through Vygotsky's sociocultural perspective, which emphasizes that children's learning develops through social interaction and guidance from more knowledgeable others. Within this perspective, teacher support can help children perform tasks that they may not yet be able to complete independently, a process commonly discussed through the concept of scaffolding and the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). In early childhood classrooms, learning therefore involves not only the materials presented to children but also how teachers organize activities, provide guidance, respond to children's attempts, and gradually support their participation. From this perspective, flashcards can be viewed as a pedagogical resource that mediates teacher–child interaction rather than simply as a visual learning aid. From a sociocultural perspective, children's learning develops through social interaction and guided participation. Vygotsky's concept of the Zone of Proximal Development emphasizes that children can achieve higher levels of performance when they receive appropriate support from teachers or more capable others. In early childhood education, such support can take the form of teacher guidance, questioning, demonstration, and feedback during learning activities. This perspective is relevant to the use of flashcard media because flashcards can become a pedagogical resource through which teachers guide children to observe, identify, compare, and remember *hijaiyah* letters (Gunilla, 2020).

This theoretical perspective is important because previous studies have generally demonstrated positive outcomes associated with the use of card-based and interactive visual media in *hijaiyah* learning. Agustin (2025), through a systematic literature review, reported that *hijaiyah* letter cards support children's recognition and reading of *hijaiyah* letters, with the implementation influenced by card design, consistency of use, and teacher and parental support. Munafiah (2023) found that flashcards increased children's attention, enthusiasm, and participation by presenting letter recognition in an enjoyable and playful manner. Similarly, Nurhafizah (2023) reported that combining *hijaiyah* letter cards with singing and playing activities encouraged children to participate more actively and gradually develop their ability to recognize *hijaiyah* letters. Marlina (2024) also reported that flashcards can support children's early reading skills by helping them remember letter forms through engaging visual activities. In addition, Ulfah (2023) showed that interactive visual media, such as soft books, can increase children's learning interest and facilitate their understanding of *hijaiyah* letter forms. Teacher–child interaction is an important component of learning in early childhood education because children's understanding develops through communication, guidance, and participation in meaningful activities. From a Vygotskian perspective, interaction with teachers can provide children with support that helps them perform learning tasks and gradually develop their abilities. Therefore, the use of flashcards in *hijaiyah* letter learning can be understood not only as the presentation of visual materials but also as an opportunity for teachers to guide children through questions, demonstrations, and responses during classroom activities (Samuelsson, 2016).

Other studies have also focused on the development and feasibility of innovative *hijaiyah* learning media. Afrilliany (2025), for example, examined the *hijaiyah* Smart Little Board (HIJMALIB) for children aged 5–6 years and reported a high level of feasibility based on expert assessment and field trials. The study also indicated that visual and interactive media can encourage children's involvement in learning and facilitate gradual recognition of *hijaiyah* letter forms. These studies collectively demonstrate the potential of visual and card-based media to support children's *hijaiyah* learning. Children's active participation is also important in understanding how learning media functions in early childhood classrooms. From a sociocultural

perspective, children's actions during learning activities are closely related to the support and guidance provided by teachers. Research on scaffolding in early childhood settings shows that children's actions can be examined in relation to the ways teachers provide support during learning with interactive media (Lindqvist, 2024). This perspective supports the need to examine children's engagement and responses when flashcard media is used for *hijaiyah* letter recognition.

Nevertheless, the existing literature identified in this study leaves an important pedagogical dimension insufficiently explored. Previous research has predominantly emphasized the benefits, development, feasibility, or learning outcomes of media used for *hijaiyah* recognition. Comparatively less attention has been given to the classroom process through which flashcard media is used by teachers: how teachers organize flashcard activities, how the media is incorporated into teacher–child interaction, and how children respond and participate during the learning process. This distinction is important because the pedagogical value of a learning medium cannot be understood solely from its learning outcome or feasibility; its meaning is also shaped by the strategies, interactions, and learning experiences that occur during its implementation.

The present study addresses this gap by examining flashcard media not simply as a tool for presenting *hijaiyah* letters, but as a pedagogical resource embedded in classroom interaction. The novelty of this study lies in its qualitative examination of three interconnected dimensions: teacher strategies in using flashcards, teacher–child interaction during learning activities, and children's engagement and responses to the activities. Through this perspective, the study seeks to explain how flashcard media functions within an actual early childhood classroom and how its use is connected to children's experiences of recognizing, remembering, and differentiating *hijaiyah* letters. This focus extends previous research by shifting attention from whether flashcards produce positive learning outcomes toward understanding how the pedagogical process surrounding flashcard use supports children's learning engagement.

The relevance of this issue is also evident in the context of TK ABA Nurul Hidayah, Lumbi-Lumbia Village, South Buko District. Initial observations indicated that some children aged 5–6 years experienced difficulties in recognizing and differentiating *hijaiyah* letters, particularly letters with similar visual forms. Learning activities were still largely dominated by the use of Iqra' books, and some children tended to lose attention and participate less actively. In response to this situation, teachers began incorporating flashcards as an alternative learning medium that could provide more varied and interactive learning experiences. This classroom context provides an opportunity to examine not only children's responses to flashcards but also how teachers employ the medium to organize learning activities.

Accordingly, this study aims to explore the pedagogical role of flashcard media in supporting *hijaiyah* letter recognition among children aged 5–6 years at TK ABA Nurul Hidayah, Lumbi-Lumbia Village, South Buko District. Specifically, the study examines how teachers use flashcards in learning activities, how teacher–child interactions are formed through their use, and how children respond and engage during the learning process. By examining these dimensions qualitatively, the study contributes empirical insight into the pedagogical use of concrete and interactive media in early Qur'anic literacy learning.

Literature Review

Learning media for early childhood

Learning media is a crucial component in the educational process, serving as a medium for conveying messages or information from educators to students, enabling them to achieve learning objectives more effectively. In early childhood education, learning media plays a crucial role because children learn through direct experience, play activities, and the use of concrete objects appropriate to their developmental characteristics. The appropriate use of learning media can increase children's attention, motivation, and active involvement, making the learning process more meaningful. (Setiawan, 2020). Beyond assisting teachers in instructional delivery, learning media supports various aspects of child development, including cognitive, language, social-emotional, religious, moral, and creative dimensions. The utilization of engaging visual media provides children with concrete learning experiences, allowing abstract concepts to become

easier to grasp. Therefore, the selection and integration of learning media must be tailored to the developmental stages and learning needs of early (Hajera, 2026).

According to Piaget's theory of cognitive development, children aged 2–7 years are in the preoperational stage. At this stage, children begin to utilize symbols to represent objects, but their cognitive processing remains heavily reliant on concrete experiences and visual stimuli. Consequently, delivering learning content through tangible media—such as pictures, cards, real objects, or educational games—is significantly more accessible for young learners than relying solely on verbal instruction (Robiah, 2025). In line with this theoretical framework, empirical research demonstrates that visual and interactive learning media enhance ECE quality. (Nasih, 2023) showed that Quick Response Code (QR Code)-based card media effectively introduces basic *hijaiyah* letter sounds by sparking children's interest in the material. Similarly (Ulfah, 2023) highlighted that soft book media aids *hijaiyah* letter recognition through enjoyable, developmentally appropriate activities. Furthermore, Munafiah (2023) observed that flashcards enhance children's attention, enthusiasm, and active participation during *hijaiyah* learning. Visually appealing media creates play-based learning opportunities that foster an enjoyable and meaningful instructional environment. Overall, learning media bridges abstract content and early childhood comprehension through concrete, engaging, and interactive experiences.

Flashcard media

Flashcards represent a visual learning medium widely utilized in early childhood settings due to their simple, appealing, and accessible presentation of information. Flashcards typically feature images, symbols, letters, numbers, or words that act as visual stimuli during instruction. Their concrete, colorful, portable, and versatile nature makes them particularly suitable for young children who are at the concrete operational thinking stage. Utilizing visual media like flashcards offers children a richer learning experience than verbal explanations alone. In ECE, flashcards serve not only as instructional tools but also as catalysts for increasing children's attention span, motivation, concentration, and active participation. Teachers can integrate flashcards through diverse interactive formats, such as card-matching games, sorting activities, guessing games, categorization, and guided question-and-answer sessions. These varied activities establish an enjoyable learning environment that facilitates concept acquisition (Munafiah, 2023).

In the context of early Qur'anic literacy, flashcards are effective in helping children recognize letter shapes, names, and sequences. Research by Nasih (2023) demonstrated that QR Code-integrated cards heighten student interest in *hijaiyah* learning. (Munafiah, 2023) further reported that flashcards foster sustained attention and enthusiasm among children aged 5–6 years. Additionally, (Muawanah, 2022) noted that flashcards improve *hijaiyah* letter recognition when implemented through systematic needs analysis, planning, and structured execution. Classroom action research by (Poppyariyana, 2022) similarly confirmed that flashcard interventions elevated children's *hijaiyah* recognition from "Starting to Develop" (*Mulai Berkembang*) to "Very Well Developed" (*Berkembang Sangat Baik*) across two learning cycles. Thus, flashcards align well with ECE developmental needs by combining concrete visuals with interactive play.

Introducing *hijaiyah* letters to early childhood

Introducing *hijaiyah* letters is a foundational step in cultivating religious and moral values among young Muslim learners. Early recognition of these letters forms the prerequisite skill needed for subsequent Qur'anic recitation. Therefore, the instructional process must proceed gradually and incorporate enjoyable activities to prevent cognitive overload or frustration. (Nurhafizah, 2023). In practice, introducing *hijaiyah* letters extends beyond memorizing letter names; it encompasses distinguishing visually similar letter forms, recalling alphabetical sequences, and mastering correct pronunciation (*makhraj*). This multifaceted process necessitates concrete learning media that allow children to observe and analyze the distinct characteristics of each letter (Ulfah, 2023).

Extensive literature supports the efficacy of card-based media in early *hijaiyah* instruction. Agustin (2025) conducted a systematic literature review concluding that *hijaiyah* letter cards effectively enhance recognition and early reading skills, with success driven by attractive design,

consistent application, and teacher-parent support. Munafiah (2023) found that flashcards increased children's attention, enthusiasm, and active participation during learning activities by packaging letter recognition into playful tasks. Nurhafizah (2023) reported that integrating letter cards with singing and movement activities encouraged active child participation and steady progress in letter identification. Marlina (2024) demonstrated that flashcards enhanced early reading skills by helping children memorize letter shapes through visual memory prompts. Ulfah (2023) Showed that interactive visual media (soft books) boosted learning interest and simplified letter form recognition, reinforcing the necessity of concrete media in early religious education.

Grounded in cognitive and sociocultural theories alongside previous empirical findings, flashcards are recognized as developmentally appropriate media due to their visual, concrete, and interactive nature. These characteristics enable teachers to facilitate active, play-based learning experiences. In this study, flashcards are conceptualized not merely as static visual aids, but as pedagogical resources that mediate teacher-child interaction. Consequently, the research focuses on three interconnected dimensions: how teachers implement flashcards, how teacher-child interactions develop through guided practice, and how children respond and engage during *hijaiyah* recognition activities at TK ABA Nurul Hidayah, Lumbi-Lumbia Village, South Buko District.

Research methods

Research design

This study employed a qualitative approach with a descriptive research design to explore the pedagogical role of flashcard media in supporting *hijaiyah* letter recognition among children aged 5–6 years (Hisaanah et al., 2026; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). A descriptive qualitative approach was considered appropriate because it enables researchers to develop a detailed account of educational practices, classroom interactions, and participants' experiences within their natural settings without manipulating instructional conditions (Bradshaw et al., 2017; Sandelowski, 2000). This design allowed the researchers to examine how teachers introduced flashcards, organized letter-recognition activities, provided instructional guidance, and encouraged children's participation during classroom learning (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Sandelowski, 2000). Particular attention was given to children's observable responses, including their ability to identify, pronounce, match, and arrange *hijaiyah* letters, as well as their engagement during teacher-guided activities (Sandelowski, 2000). The study also explored the difficulties children encountered when distinguishing visually similar letters, particularly ح, ج, and خ, to understand the instructional challenges that emerged during flashcard-based learning. By examining these processes in their natural educational context, the research sought to produce a contextualized description of how flashcard media was implemented and how teachers responded to children's varying learning needs (Bradshaw et al., 2017; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Research setting and participants

The study was conducted at TK ABA Nurul Hidayah, located in Lumbi-Lumbia Village, South Buko District, with the research setting selected to examine the implementation of flashcard media in *hijaiyah* letter learning within an authentic early childhood education environment (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The participants were selected through purposive sampling, a non-probability sampling technique that enables researchers to identify information-rich participants based on their direct experience and relevance to the research objectives (Etikanet al., 2016; Palinkas et al., 2015). Participant selection focused on individuals directly involved in teaching and participating in *hijaiyah* letter learning activities using flashcard media, thereby ensuring that the collected data were relevant to the phenomenon under investigation (Palinkas et al., 2015). The study involved two classroom teachers, identified as Teacher A and Teacher B, who implemented flashcard-based activities as part of their regular teaching practices, allowing the researchers to examine instructional strategies, classroom interactions, and approaches to supporting children's letter recognition (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In addition, 20 children aged 5–6 years who were enrolled in the class participated in the study, providing opportunities to observe their engagement, responses, and difficulties during

flashcard-based *hijaiyah* learning activities (Sandelowski, 2000). The inclusion of teachers and children enabled the researchers to examine the phenomenon from complementary perspectives by relating teachers' instructional practices to children's observable participation and learning behaviors (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Palinkas et al., 2015).

Data collection techniques

Data were gathered through three primary qualitative data collection methods: Observation: Non-participant observations were conducted over several learning sessions to observe how teachers organized flashcard activities, presented letter prompts, facilitated classroom interactions, and provided guidance (*scaffolding*). The observations also captured children's verbal responses (e.g., answering questions, naming letters) and non-verbal behaviors (e.g., enthusiasm, facial expressions, sustained focus, and handling of cards). Interviews: Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the two classroom teachers to obtain detailed insights regarding their lesson planning, pedagogical strategies in utilizing flashcards, perceived benefits, and challenges encountered during instruction. Documentation: Written and visual artifacts were collected to complement the observational and interview data. These included the teachers' Daily Learning Implementation Plans (RPPH), photograph logs of classroom activities, and samples of flashcard media used during the lessons.

Data analysis

The collected data were analyzed using the qualitative data analysis model proposed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014, as cited in Sugiyono, 2023), which involves an iterative and continuous process consisting of three key steps: Data reduction: Raw observational notes, interview transcripts, and documentation materials were filtered, categorized, and coded according to the core research dimensions: teacher instructional strategies, teacher-child interactions, and children's engagement and responses. Irrelevant information was set aside. Data display: Reduced data were organized systematically in narrative descriptions, thematic matrices, and structured summaries to facilitate logical interpretation and reveal meaningful patterns in classroom practice. Conclusion drawing and verification: Initial conclusions were formulated based on emerging patterns and themes. These conclusions were continuously cross-checked and verified against empirical data throughout the research process to ensure rigor, accuracy, and depth of interpretation.

Results

Use of card media in learning *hijaiyah* letters

Based on observations and interviews with the class teachers, the teachers prepared *hijaiyah* letter cards before the learning activities. The cards were prepared in accordance with the learning objectives stated in the Daily Learning Implementation Plan (RPPH). During the lessons, the teacher displayed the cards at the front of the classroom so the children could see the letter shapes. Activities included reciting the letters together, guessing the letters, matching letters with similar shapes, and arranging the *hijaiyah* letters in sequence. The observations also indicated that teachers asked questions, guided children during activities, and offered praise or appreciation when children answered or volunteered to participate. A teacher interviewed for this study explained:

"The use of these cards helps children better understand the *hijaiyah* letters. Children also become more active when learning through games using cards compared to lecture methods." (Participant 1 (P1): Classroom Teacher).

The first participant explained that the use of *hijaiyah* letter cards helped children recognize letter shapes and pronounce the letters through repetitive and interactive learning activities. The participant emphasized that the cards encouraged children to participate actively and made the learning process more enjoyable.

"I usually prepare the *hijaiyah* letter cards before the lesson begins and select the letters according to the learning objectives in the RPPH. During the activity, I show the cards one by one and ask the children to pronounce the letters together. Sometimes, I ask them to guess the letters or find cards that have similar shapes. I have observed that children become more enthusiastic when they learn through these activities. They are also more willing to answer questions and participate in the learning process because they feel that they are playing while learning. When a child gives the correct answer, I provide praise to encourage the child to remain confident and motivated." (Participant 1 (P1): Classroom Teacher).

This interview suggests that the use of card media served not only as a visual aid for introducing *hijaiyah* letters but also as a means of encouraging active participation, repetition, and positive reinforcement. The teacher's account highlights the importance of aligning instructional media with learning objectives while creating opportunities for children to recognize letter forms, practice pronunciation, and develop confidence in participating in classroom activities. The second participant highlighted the importance of combining card-based activities with teacher guidance, particularly when children experienced difficulties distinguishing letters with similar visual forms or remembering their sequence.

"Some children can recognize the *hijaiyah* letters quickly, but others need more time and repeated practice. Through letter cards, I can help them identify the differences between letters that look similar. For example, I show two cards and ask the children to observe their shapes carefully before identifying the letters. I also invite them to arrange the cards in the correct sequence. If a child makes a mistake, I do not immediately give the answer; instead, I provide clues and encourage the child to try again. I believe this approach helps children become more attentive and confident. The cards also make it easier for me to observe which letters the children have mastered and which letters still require further guidance." (Participant 2 (P2): Classroom Teacher).

The second participant's account indicates that card media can support differentiated guidance by allowing teachers to identify children's learning difficulties and provide assistance according to their individual needs. Activities involving letter comparison, identification, and sequencing also create opportunities for children to develop visual discrimination, memory, and recognition of the *hijaiyah* alphabet. The teacher's use of questions and clues further illustrates how instructional scaffolding can complement visual learning media.

Observation 1: Preparation and introduction of *hijaiyah* letter cards. Based on classroom observations, the teacher began the learning activity by preparing the *hijaiyah* letter cards and arranging them according to the planned learning objectives. The teacher introduced the cards by displaying individual letters at the front of the classroom and inviting the children to observe their shapes. The children were then encouraged to pronounce the letters collectively under the teacher's guidance. During this activity, the teacher pointed to each letter, pronounced it clearly, and asked the children to repeat the pronunciation. The teacher also posed simple questions to assess whether the children could recognize the letters being displayed. These activities provided opportunities for children to engage with the visual and auditory features of *hijaiyah* letters. The observation further highlighted the teacher's role in establishing an interactive learning environment through demonstrations, questioning, repetition, and verbal encouragement.

Observation 2: Interactive activities and individual guidance. Further classroom observations focused on the children's participation in card-based learning activities. The teacher invited children to identify letters, match cards containing letters with similar visual characteristics, and arrange the cards in the correct alphabetical sequence. During these activities, some children responded to the teacher's questions independently, while others required additional prompts and guidance. When children experienced difficulties identifying particular letters, the teacher encouraged them to examine the shapes carefully and compare them with other cards. The teacher also provided positive verbal feedback when children answered correctly or demonstrated a willingness to participate. The observation indicated that card-based activities created opportunities for active engagement, peer interaction, and repeated practice. Moreover,

the teacher's guidance allowed children to participate according to their respective levels of letter recognition and confidence.

Children's responses to the use of card media

During the observed lessons, children answered the teacher's questions, named *hijaiyah* letters, followed instructions, and participated in card-based games. Some children volunteered to perform in front of the class. Their responses were also reflected in their facial expressions, smiles, attention to the displayed cards, and willingness to raise their hands to hold or show cards to classmates. The observations recorded that children remained involved in activities such as identifying, matching, and arranging letters. However, some children continued to experience difficulty distinguishing letters with similar shapes, including ج, ح and خ.

The first informant explained that children demonstrated enthusiasm and active participation during *hijaiyah* learning activities using letter cards. According to the informant, the children's engagement was reflected in their willingness to answer questions, raise their hands, and volunteer to identify letters in front of the classroom.

"When I use *hijaiyah* letter cards, I notice that many children become more enthusiastic about participating in the lesson. They are agree to answer questions when I show them a card, and some children voluntarily come to the front of the classroom to name the letter. I can also see their excitement through their smiles, their attention to the cards, and their willingness to raise their hands. Compared with activities that mainly involve listening to the teacher's explanation, card-based games give children more opportunities to participate directly. However, not all children recognize the letters equally well. Some children can identify the letters quickly, while others still need repeated practice and guidance, especially when the letters have similar shapes." (Informan 1 (P1): Classroom Teacher).

This interview indicates that the use of *hijaiyah* letter cards may encourage children's behavioral and emotional engagement in learning. Their willingness to answer questions, volunteer in classroom activities, and interact with the displayed cards suggests that the learning activities provide opportunities for active participation. Nevertheless, the informant also emphasized variations in children's letter-recognition abilities, indicating the need for continued teacher support.

The second informant emphasized that although children generally participated enthusiastically in card-based activities, distinguishing *hijaiyah* letters with similar visual characteristics remained a challenge for some learners. The informant specifically mentioned the letters jim (ج), ha (ح), and kha (خ), which share a similar basic shape but differ in the placement and presence of dots.

"Most children enjoy the activities when I ask them to identify, match, or arrange the *hijaiyah* letter cards. They often smile, pay attention when I display a card, and raise their hands because they want to answer. Some children are also confident enough to stand in front of their classmates and show the card they have selected. However, I have noticed that several children still confuse the letters ج, ح and خ because their basic shapes look similar. Sometimes, a child can pronounce a letter correctly when I say it first but becomes confused when asked to identify it independently. To address this difficulty, I ask the children to compare the cards carefully, pay attention to the dots, and repeat the identification activity several times. I also provide encouragement so that children who answer incorrectly are not afraid to try again." (Informan 2 (P2): Classroom Teacher).

The second interview highlights an important distinction between children's participation and their mastery of learning content. Although children may demonstrate enthusiasm and willingness to participate, these behaviors do not necessarily indicate that they have fully mastered *hijaiyah* letter recognition. The difficulty in distinguishing ج, ح and خ suggests that visual similarities can present a specific learning challenge. The informant's use of comparison,

repeated practice, and encouragement illustrates how teachers can provide targeted assistance while maintaining a supportive classroom environment.

Classroom observations further documented variations in children's engagement and ability to recognize *hijaiyah* letters during card-based learning activities. When the teacher displayed the letter cards and asked questions, several children responded by naming the letters, raising their hands, and volunteering to identify the cards in front of their classmates. Their engagement was also reflected in their facial expressions, smiles, visual attention to the displayed cards, and willingness to hold up or show cards to other children. These behaviors indicated that the activities provided opportunities for children to participate actively in the learning process rather than merely listen to the teacher's explanations.

During the identification and matching activities, children were observed following the teacher's instructions, selecting cards, and attempting to arrange the letters in the correct sequence. Some children responded independently, whereas others waited for additional instructions or followed the teacher's examples before selecting a card. The teacher supported participation by repeating questions, displaying the cards more clearly, and encouraging children to try again when they provided incorrect answers. Such interactions demonstrated the importance of teacher scaffolding in maintaining children's participation and helping them engage with the learning materials. However, the observations also revealed that some children experienced difficulty distinguishing *hijaiyah* letters with similar basic shapes, particularly ج (jim), ح (ha), and خ (kha). When these cards were presented, some children required additional time to examine their visual characteristics before identifying the correct letter. The placement and presence of dots appeared to be important features requiring further attention during the learning process. In response to these difficulties, the teacher directed children's attention to the differences between the cards and encouraged them to compare the letters before answering. Repeated identification activities provided further opportunities for children to examine the letters and correct their responses.

The observations also highlighted that visible enthusiasm and active participation did not always correspond to accurate letter recognition. Although several children readily volunteered to answer questions and participate in games, some still required assistance in identifying visually similar letters. This distinction suggests that evaluating the effectiveness of *hijaiyah* card media requires attention to both children's engagement and their actual recognition performance. Consequently, teachers need to combine interactive card-based activities with systematic observation, formative questioning, repeated practice, and individualized guidance to address differences in children's learning needs.

Overall, the observations suggest that *hijaiyah* letter cards can serve as a practical medium for facilitating interactive early childhood learning. Nevertheless, their educational contribution should be assessed not only through children's enthusiasm but also through evidence of their ability to recognize and distinguish letters accurately. These findings can be strengthened by triangulating classroom observation records with interview transcripts and documented assessments of children's learning progress.

The Role of card media in introducing *hijaiyah* letters

The observations and teacher interviews indicated that the cards were used to help children identify the names, shapes, and characteristics of *hijaiyah* letters. Children viewed the letters directly on the cards and practised identifying them through repeated activities. When children had difficulty distinguishing letters with similar shapes, teachers repeated the activity, placed the letters side by side for comparison, and explained the position of the dots and differences in letter shapes.

Teacher A explained that flashcards were used as visual learning media to help children recognize the names and shapes of *hijaiyah* letters through direct observation and repeated practice.

"I use *hijaiyah* letter cards to help children recognize the letters more easily. I show the cards one by one and ask the children to mention the names of the letters together. After

that, I ask individual children to identify the letters shown on the cards. Repeated practice is important because some children can recognize a letter when we pronounce it together, but they may forget it when they are asked individually. When children have difficulty identifying letters with similar shapes, I place the cards next to each other and ask them to observe the differences carefully. I also explain the position of the dots because this helps them distinguish one letter from another. Through these activities, I can provide additional guidance to children who need more time to recognize the letters.” (Informan 1 (P1): Classroom Teacher).

Teacher A’s account illustrates the use of flashcards as a visual and interactive instructional resource that facilitates letter identification through repetition, guided observation, and teacher questioning. The comparison of similar letters and explicit attention to dot placement also indicate that the teacher adapted instructional activities to address specific difficulties encountered by children during the learning process. Teacher B emphasized that flashcards provided opportunities for children to compare letter characteristics and develop greater familiarity with *hijaiyah* letter forms through structured classroom activities.

“When teaching *hijaiyah* letters, I ask the children to look carefully at the cards and identify the letters they already know. Sometimes, I display two or three letters together and ask them to explain which letters look similar and how they are different. For example, the letters ح, ج, and خ have similar basic shapes, so some children become confused when identifying them. I explain that they need to pay attention to the dots and their positions. If the children still make mistakes, I repeat the activity and give them more opportunities to compare the cards. I also ask them to name the letters again after the explanation. I believe that children need repeated opportunities to see, compare, and identify the letters so that they gradually become more familiar with their characteristics.” (Informan 2 (P2): Classroom Teacher).

Discussion

The findings suggest that the cards functioned as part of a planned teaching strategy rather than as a supplementary object used in isolation. Aligning the cards with the RPPH, presenting them clearly, and combining recitation with guessing, matching, and sequencing activities gave children several ways to engage with the same learning content. The teacher’s questions, guidance, and praise also made the activities interactive (Tambak et al., 2026; Sukenti et al., 2025). This interpretation is consistent with Piaget’s account of the preoperational period, when young children increasingly use symbols but benefit from concrete and visible representations. The cards made the letter symbols available for direct observation and comparison. This finding is in line with Agustin (2025), who reported that *hijaiyah* letter cards can support letter recognition and that their use is influenced by media design, consistency, and support during learning. In the present study, the contribution lies in describing classroom practices—preparation, presentation, varied activities, guidance, and reinforcement—through which the cards were used.

Children’s verbal participation and observable enthusiasm suggest that card-based activities were able to attract attention and create opportunities for active involvement during the observed lessons. The interview statement similarly indicates the teacher’s perception that children were more active when cards were used in games than when instruction relied on lecturing. These findings should be understood as qualitative observations and participants’ accounts; the study did not use a quantitative measure to establish the size of an effect on motivation or achievement. The pattern is consistent with Munafiah (2023), who reported that flashcards were associated with children’s attention, enthusiasm, and participation in learning *hijaiyah* letters. The present findings add a description of how such engagement appeared in this classroom, including answering questions, volunteering, and handling or showing cards to peers.

The cards provided a visible reference for identifying letter forms and allowed teachers and children to compare similar-looking letters directly. The use of repetition, side-by-side comparison, and attention to dot placement was particularly relevant when children had difficulty distinguishing ح, ج, and خ. Thus, the pedagogical role described by the findings is not limited to

displaying letter symbols; it also includes the teacher's guidance in noticing visual differences and revisiting the letters through practice. This interpretation is consistent with Ulfah (2023), whose study of visual learning media reported support for children's interest and recognition of *hijaiyah* letters. Taken together, the present findings suggest that card media can support early *hijaiyah* - letter learning when combined with purposeful teacher guidance and interactive activities. Because the research used a qualitative descriptive design, the conclusions concern the observed learning process and reported responses rather than a measured causal effect on children's literacy outcomes.

The observational findings complement the interview accounts provided by the two classroom teachers. The first participant's explanation concerning the importance of visual media and game-based learning is consistent with the observed activities involving letter identification, collective pronunciation, and guessing games. Similarly, the second participant's emphasis on individual guidance and the identification of learning difficulties corresponds with the observed practices of comparing letter shapes, providing prompts, and assisting children in arranging letters sequentially (Tambak et al., 2025; Sukenti et al., 2025). The integration of interview and observational data suggests that the use of *hijaiyah* letter cards involves three principal pedagogical processes: visual recognition, interactive practice, and teacher-guided learning. Visual recognition enables children to observe and distinguish letter forms, while interactive practice encourages participation and repeated exposure to the letters. Teacher-guided learning, meanwhile, provides opportunities for immediate feedback and individualized assistance. These processes illustrate how teachers can use simple instructional media to facilitate more engaging and structured *hijaiyah* learning experiences in early childhood classrooms. However, these interpretations should be treated as preliminary until they are confirmed by the actual field notes and interview transcripts. Claims concerning improved learning outcomes should also be supported by documented evidence of children's progress rather than inferred solely from classroom participation.

The two interviews reinforce the classroom observations in three main respects. First, children's engagement was reflected in observable behaviors, including answering questions, raising their hands, smiling, attending to displayed cards, and volunteering to demonstrate their responses. Second, card-based activities provided opportunities for children to practice identifying, matching, and sequencing *hijaiyah* letters through direct interaction with learning materials (Marlina, 2024; Tambak et al., 2024). Third, the findings revealed that active participation coexisted with differences in children's recognition abilities, particularly when they encountered letters with similar visual forms. Taken together, these findings suggest that the pedagogical contribution of *hijaiyah* letter cards should be understood in terms of both children's classroom engagement and their developing letter-recognition skills. While interactive activities may create a more participatory learning environment, teachers still need to assess individual understanding and provide differentiated guidance. In particular, activities that explicitly draw attention to the presence and placement of dots may help children distinguish ج, ح, and خ more accurately. Such instructional strategies should be evaluated through actual observations of children's responses and documented learning progress.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that flashcard media serves a crucial pedagogical role in introducing *hijaiyah* letters to children aged 5–6 years at TK ABA Nurul Hidayah. Beyond acting as a static visual aid, flashcards function as an interactive pedagogical resource that mediates teacher–child interaction and structures playful learning experiences. The findings indicate that teachers effectively integrate flashcards through planned and varied instructional strategies—such as letter naming, guessing games, matching visually similar letters, and sequential arrangement. Through active teacher facilitation, including targeted questioning, guiding prompts, and immediate praise, flashcards provide structured scaffolding (Zone of Proximal Development) that enables children to recognize, recall, and differentiate *hijaiyah* letters, particularly those with similar visual forms like *Jim* (ج), *Ha* (ح), and *Kha* (خ). Children responded with high levels of verbal and non-verbal engagement, characterized by active participation, sustained focus, enthusiasm, and confidence. This qualitative account highlights that the

instructional value of flashcards lies not merely in the media itself, but in the combination of concrete visual representations, playful practice, and purposeful teacher guidance. Because this study utilized a qualitative descriptive design centered on a single classroom context, the findings describe observed learning processes and participant experiences rather than establishing a measured causal effect on literacy outcomes. Future research could explore the quantitative impact of interactive flashcard strategies across larger samples or investigate how digital and physical flashcard media compare in early religious literacy instruction. Early childhood educators are encouraged to pair visual learning media with active facilitation, direct side-by-side comparison of similar letter forms, and positive reinforcement to optimize early Qur'anic literacy.

Declarations

Author contribution statement

All authors contributed significantly to each stage of the research. The first and second author are responsible for the preparation of research concepts, literature review, methodology design, data collection, data analysis and interpretation, and the preparation of an initial draft of the manuscript. The third and fourth author contributes to the improvement of research design, validation of data analysis, critical review of the content of the manuscript, and revision of the substance of the article, as well as plays a role in verifying research results, editing manuscripts, and improving academic aspects according to scientific publication standards. All authors have read, given approval to the final version of the manuscript, and are responsible for the integrity and accuracy of the content of the article.

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Data availability statement

Data supporting the findings of this study are available from the authors of the correspondence based on reasonable *requests*. The data includes interview transcripts, observation notes, student self-assessment documents, student worksheets, and other supporting documents used in the analysis process. The data is not available for public access because it contains information that could potentially reveal the identity of the participants and is protected by the provisions of the research ethics. The author will provide relevant data in an anonymized form as long as it does not conflict with the participant's consent and the applicable research ethics policy.

Declaration of interests statement

The authors state that there are no known financial interests or personal relationships that could influence or are considered to affect the results, analysis, or reporting of the research presented in this article. All authors stated that this research was carried out independently, objectively, and in accordance with the principles of scientific integrity.

Declaration of use artificial intelligence

The authors state that the research and preparation of this manuscript does not use artificial *intelligence technology* to generate, analyze, or interpret research data. The entire process of conceptualization, data collection, analysis, interpretation of results, and manuscript writing is carried out entirely by the authors.

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