

## Teaching Arabic Body-Part Vocabulary through Meaning Concretization in Islamic Primary Education

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### Abstract

This study explores the effectiveness of meaning concretization in teaching Arabic body-part vocabulary in Islamic primary education. Grounded in theories of embodied cognition and meaning-based language learning, the study employs a qualitative classroom-based research design conducted at an Islamic primary school in Indonesia. Data were collected through classroom observations, instructional documents, and teacher reflections to examine how physical demonstration, visual support, and contextual usage influence students' vocabulary comprehension and engagement. The findings indicate that meaning concretization facilitates deeper semantic understanding by enabling learners to associate Arabic lexical items directly with bodily experience rather than relying on memorization or translation. Students demonstrated improved responsiveness, reduced hesitation, and greater confidence during vocabulary learning activities. In addition to cognitive benefits, concretized instruction fostered positive affective responses, including increased engagement and lower levels of anxiety. These findings suggest that meaning concretization aligns closely with the developmental characteristics of young learners, whose learning processes are strongly grounded in sensory and experiential interaction. The study contributes to Arabic language pedagogy by extending embodied learning perspectives into early vocabulary instruction within Islamic educational contexts. Practically, it offers Arabic teachers a developmentally appropriate and low-cost instructional strategy to enhance vocabulary learning while supporting a positive classroom atmosphere. The study concludes that meaning concretization represents a viable and effective approach for early Arabic vocabulary instruction in Islamic primary education.

### Keywords

Arabic Vocabulary, Embodied Learning, Islamic Primary Education, Meaning Concretization, Young Learners.



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## INTRODUCTION

Arabic language instruction in Islamic primary education plays a foundational role in shaping learners' early linguistic awareness and religious literacy (Hanifansyah et al., 2025). At the Madrasah Ibtidaiyah level, Arabic is not merely introduced as a foreign language but as a medium through which students begin to access Islamic texts, ritual expressions, and basic religious discourse (Bahy et al., 2024; Imron et al., 2024; Sanjaya & Hidayat, 2024; Zulpina et al., 2025). Vocabulary acquisition therefore becomes a crucial entry point, particularly for young learners whose cognitive and linguistic development is still closely tied to sensory experience and concrete perception (Baharun et al., 2025; Baharun & Habib, 2026; Habib, Hanifansyah, et al., 2025; Mahmudah, 2025). Among basic lexical domains, body-part vocabulary (أعضاء الجسم) occupies a central position, as it is frequently used in daily communication, classroom interaction, religious practices, and moral instruction. Despite its apparent simplicity, the teaching of body-part vocabulary in Arabic often presents pedagogical challenges in Islamic primary education contexts.

Early childhood represents a critical period in human development (Yanti & Ismiyanti, 2025), including the initial formation of linguistic awareness and the introduction to Arabic language learning. In many Arabic classrooms at the primary level, vocabulary instruction continues to rely heavily on memorization, repetition, and translation-based practices (Habib, Masnun, et al., 2025; Hasan et al., 2025; Lazuardi, 2025; Muhamad Solehudin et al., 2025). While such approaches may support short-term recall, they often fail to foster deep semantic understanding or long-term retention, especially among young learners who are still developing abstract thinking abilities. This issue becomes more pronounced in non-Arabic-speaking contexts, such as Indonesia, where learners encounter Arabic as a foreign language with limited exposure outside the classroom (Baharun et al., 2026a; Masnun et al., 2026; Solehudin et al., 2026). As a result, students may recognize isolated lexical items without fully grasping their meaning, usage, or embodied relevance. This gap between form recognition and meaning comprehension raises important pedagogical concerns regarding the effectiveness of vocabulary instruction methods used in Islamic primary education.

Previous studies in Arabic language education have demonstrated that pedagogical strategies play a crucial role in enhancing learners' vocabulary mastery and engagement. Hanifansyah and Mahmudah (2024), for instance, showed that communicative strategies at the secondary level significantly improved Arabic vocabulary use and learner participation in Islamic educational contexts. With a focus on young learners, Al-Razgan and Alotaibi (2022) reported that

interactive, game-based, and technology-assisted instruction effectively fostered learners' motivation, engagement, and positive attitudes toward Arabic learning. From a psychological perspective, research on language learning has further emphasized the role of affective factors; Kiaer et al. (2021) highlighted that young learners are particularly sensitive to instructional practices that may trigger foreign language anxiety, while Bielak (2025) demonstrated that heightened anxiety tends to impede linguistic performance, whereas positive emotional engagement facilitates language processing and learning outcomes.

Recent advances in language pedagogy further underscore the value of experience-based and embodied learning. Nikolov and Timpe-Laughlin (2021) argued that vocabulary acquisition among children is more effective when meaning is grounded in concrete physical experience rather than abstract explanation. However, despite these contributions, most existing studies either focus on older learners, prioritize communicative or technology-driven interventions, or examine affective variables in isolation, without closely investigating how concrete meaning construction operates in early Arabic vocabulary instruction for young learners in Islamic primary education contexts.

This study seeks to explore how concretizing meaning through physical demonstration, visual support, and contextual usage can enhance learners' understanding and retention of Arabic body-part vocabulary. The main research question guiding this study is: How does meaning concretization influence students' comprehension and engagement in learning Arabic body-part vocabulary in Islamic primary education? To address this question, the study also considers two specific issues: (1) how students respond cognitively and affectively to concretized vocabulary instruction, and (2) how such instruction aligns with the developmental characteristics of primary-level learners.

This study is limited in scope to Arabic vocabulary instruction related to body parts and is conducted within a single Islamic primary education institution. It does not aim to generalize findings across all Arabic language learning contexts but rather to provide an in-depth pedagogical analysis within a specific educational setting. Despite these limitations, the study offers important insights into the design of vocabulary instruction for young learners, particularly in contexts where Arabic is taught as a foreign language within religious education frameworks.

The significance of this study lies in its potential theoretical and practical contributions. Theoretically, it contributes to the growing body of research on embodied and meaning-based approaches to foreign language vocabulary learning, extending these discussions into the field of

Arabic language education. Practically, it offers pedagogical implications for Arabic teachers in Islamic primary schools by highlighting strategies that align linguistic instruction with learners' cognitive development and experiential learning needs. By positioning meaning concretization as a viable instructional approach, this study aims to support more effective, engaging, and developmentally appropriate Arabic vocabulary instruction in Islamic primary education.

## **METHOD**

This study employs a qualitative classroom-based research design aimed at examining the pedagogical effectiveness of meaning concretization in teaching Arabic body-part vocabulary within Islamic primary education (Creswell & Creswell, 2020). The methodological orientation of this study is informed by theories of embodied cognition and meaning-based language learning, which emphasize the role of physical experience, sensory engagement, and contextualized input in early vocabulary acquisition. These theoretical perspectives provide a conceptual foundation for understanding how young learners construct lexical meaning through concrete interaction rather than abstract memorization.

The research was conducted at MI Darullughah Wadda'wah (Dalwa), an Islamic primary education institution where Arabic is taught as a compulsory subject from the early grades (Baharun et al., 2026b; Baharun & Hanifansyah, 2024). The selection of this site was based on several considerations. First, MI Dalwa represents a typical madrasah context in which Arabic is taught as a foreign language within a religious educational framework. Second, the institution emphasizes early exposure to Arabic vocabulary related to daily activities and religious practices, making body-part vocabulary a relevant and frequently used lexical domain. Third, the accessibility of the classroom setting allowed for sustained observation of instructional practices and learner responses during the implementation of meaning concretization strategies.

This study adopts a qualitative descriptive approach with a pedagogical focus, seeking to capture naturally occurring classroom interactions rather than to measure learning outcomes through statistical testing. The primary data of the study consist of classroom observations (Jones et al., 2022), teacher instructional practices, and students' verbal and non-verbal responses during Arabic vocabulary lessons. These data are complemented by secondary data in the form of lesson plans, teaching materials, and relevant curricular documents used in Arabic instruction at the institution. Together, these data sources enable a comprehensive understanding of how meaning

concretization is operationalized in classroom practice.

The sources of information in this study include the Arabic language teacher and students at the primary level who participated in the observed lessons. The teacher served as a key informant, particularly in explaining instructional decisions, classroom strategies, and pedagogical considerations underlying the use of concrete meaning representation. The students, as learning participants, constituted the primary unit of analysis in terms of their engagement, comprehension, and responsiveness to the instructional approach. The focus of analysis was not on individual learner achievement but on patterns of interaction and meaning construction observable during the learning process.

Data collection was carried out through non-participant classroom observation over several instructional sessions. During these sessions, particular attention was given to how body-part vocabulary was introduced, modeled, reinforced, and practiced through physical demonstration, visual reference, and contextual usage. Field notes were taken to document instructional sequences, learner reactions, and classroom dynamics. In addition, informal teacher reflections were collected to provide contextual insight into the instructional rationale and perceived effectiveness of the approach.

The data analysis followed an interactive qualitative analysis procedure involving data reduction, data display, and interpretation. Observation notes and instructional records were first organized and categorized according to recurring instructional patterns and learner responses related to meaning concretization. These categories were then examined to identify emerging themes, such as levels of learner engagement, clarity of meaning comprehension, and alignment with learners' developmental characteristics. The findings were interpreted by relating classroom evidence to the underlying theoretical framework of embodied and meaning-based learning, allowing the study to articulate pedagogical implications grounded in both theory and practice.

## **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Meaning Concretization and Students' Vocabulary Comprehension**

The findings of this study indicate that meaning concretization played a significant role in facilitating students' comprehension of Arabic body-part vocabulary. During classroom observations, students demonstrated a faster and more accurate recognition of lexical items when vocabulary was introduced through direct physical reference, such as pointing to body parts, guided

movement, and visual reinforcement. Instead of relying on translation, students were able to associate Arabic words directly with bodily awareness, suggesting that meaning was constructed through experience rather than memorization.

This pattern was particularly evident when students were asked to respond to oral prompts without visual cues. Many students were able to identify and demonstrate the correct body part immediately after hearing the Arabic term, indicating internalized semantic understanding. The teacher also noted a reduction in hesitation and confusion compared to previous vocabulary lessons taught through repetition alone. These observations suggest that concretized instruction supports deeper lexical processing by reducing abstraction and cognitive overload, which is consistent with principles of embodied cognition in early language learning.

### **Learner Engagement and Affective Response to Concretized Instruction**

Beyond comprehension, meaning concretization positively influenced students' engagement and emotional response during Arabic lessons. Classroom interaction became more dynamic, with students showing higher levels of participation, attentiveness, and enjoyment. Rather than passively repeating vocabulary items, learners actively followed instructions, imitated movements, and responded spontaneously to teacher prompts. This active involvement created a learning atmosphere that was both structured and playful, aligning with the developmental needs of primary-level learners.

Qualitative interview data further support this finding. The Arabic teacher explained that students appeared more confident and less anxious when vocabulary instruction involved physical activity and concrete reference: *"When the students learn vocabulary through movement and direct demonstration, they seem more confident. They are not afraid of making mistakes because they understand the meaning through their own body, not through translation."*

This affective dimension is pedagogically important, as anxiety and disengagement are often cited as barriers in early foreign language learning. The findings suggest that meaning concretization not only enhances comprehension but also fosters a supportive emotional environment that encourages active language use.

### **Alignment with Learners' Cognitive and Developmental Characteristics**

Another key finding concerns the alignment between concretized vocabulary instruction and the cognitive characteristics of young learners. At the primary level, students tend to process information more effectively when learning activities are grounded in sensory experience and

concrete reference. The observed lessons showed that students were able to retain vocabulary more consistently when learning involved seeing, touching, and moving, rather than listening and repeating alone.

This alignment was also highlighted in the teacher's reflection: *"At this age, students understand faster when learning is concrete. If we only ask them to memorize words, they forget easily. But when they connect the word with action, they remember it longer."*

Such responses indicate that meaning concretization resonates with learners' natural learning tendencies, allowing vocabulary acquisition to occur in a developmentally appropriate manner. The findings reinforce the view that instructional strategies should be adapted to learners' cognitive readiness rather than imposing abstract linguistic demands prematurely.

The findings of this study confirm that meaning concretization constitutes an effective pedagogical strategy for teaching Arabic body-part vocabulary in Islamic primary education. When compared with earlier studies on Arabic vocabulary learning, the present findings extend existing evidence by demonstrating that concretized meaning construction is particularly suitable for young learners whose cognitive development is still grounded in sensory experience. Previous research has shown that pedagogical strategies such as communicative approaches are effective in improving Arabic vocabulary mastery and learner participation at the secondary level (Hanifansyah & Mahmudah, 2024). However, communicative strategies often presuppose a level of abstract thinking and linguistic readiness that may not yet be fully developed among primary-level learners. The present study suggests that, for younger learners, vocabulary comprehension is more effectively achieved when linguistic input is anchored in concrete bodily experience rather than verbal interaction alone.

The positive learner engagement observed in this study also aligns with findings from interactive and technology-assisted Arabic learning research. Al-Razgan and Alotaibi (2022) reported that game-based and mobile-assisted instruction significantly increased learners' motivation, interaction, and positive attitudes toward Arabic learning. While their study focused on orthographic skills mediated through digital games, the current findings indicate that similar affective benefits can be achieved through non-digital, embodied instructional practices. This suggests that learner engagement is not inherently dependent on technology but rather on the meaningfulness and experiential quality of instructional design. Meaning concretization, therefore, emerges as a pedagogical alternative that achieves motivational outcomes comparable to

technology-enhanced learning while remaining accessible in low-resource classroom settings.

From a psychological perspective, the findings of this study resonate strongly with research on affective variables in language learning. Kiaer, Morgan-Brown, and Choi (2021) emphasized that young learners are particularly vulnerable to foreign language anxiety when instruction relies heavily on abstract explanation, performance pressure, or excessive correction. Similarly, Bielak (2025) demonstrated that heightened anxiety tends to impair linguistic processing, whereas positive emotional engagement facilitates language performance. The reduced hesitation, increased confidence, and spontaneous participation observed in the present study suggest that meaning concretization contributes to a low-anxiety learning environment. By allowing learners to construct meaning through physical demonstration and visual reference, instructional pressure is minimized, thereby fostering enjoyment and emotional safety—conditions that are conducive to effective language learning at an early age.

The present findings further support theoretical arguments in experience-based and embodied language learning. Nikolov and Timpe-Laughlin (2021) argued that young learners acquire foreign language vocabulary more effectively when learning activities are aligned with their developmental characteristics and grounded in concrete experience. The ability of learners in this study to retain and retrieve body-part vocabulary without reliance on translation reflects this principle. By engaging multiple sensory channels—visual, kinesthetic, and auditory—meaning concretization facilitates deeper semantic processing and reduces cognitive overload, a challenge frequently noted in traditional vocabulary instruction for young learners.

Taken together, these findings address an important gap in the existing literature. While prior studies have examined communicative strategies, technological interventions, and affective factors separately, few have explored how concrete meaning construction operates as an integrated pedagogical mechanism in early Arabic vocabulary instruction. This study demonstrates that meaning concretization functions simultaneously as a cognitive scaffold and an affective regulator, supporting both comprehension and emotional engagement. In the context of Islamic primary education, where Arabic learning is closely intertwined with moral instruction and daily religious practices, such an approach offers a developmentally appropriate and pedagogically sustainable model for early vocabulary instruction.



## CONCLUSION

This study has demonstrated that meaning concretization constitutes a pedagogically effective approach for teaching Arabic body-part vocabulary in Islamic primary education. By grounding vocabulary instruction in physical demonstration, visual reference, and contextual usage, the study highlights how young learners are able to construct lexical meaning more naturally and confidently. The findings contribute to the existing literature by extending embodied and meaning-based learning perspectives into the domain of Arabic vocabulary instruction for children, an area that has received limited empirical attention. Unlike prior studies that primarily emphasize communicative strategies, technological interventions, or affective variables in isolation, this study underscores the integrative role of meaning concretization in supporting both cognitive comprehension and emotional engagement among young learners.

Despite its contributions, this study is limited by its focus on a single Islamic primary education context and a specific semantic domain, namely body-part vocabulary. Future research may explore the application of meaning concretization across different vocabulary categories, grade levels, and institutional settings, as well as examine its long-term impact on vocabulary retention and language development. Practically, the findings suggest that Arabic teachers in Islamic primary schools can adopt meaning concretization as a low-cost and developmentally appropriate instructional strategy to enhance vocabulary learning while reducing learner anxiety. Further studies may also consider integrating concretized instruction with other pedagogical approaches, such as storytelling or task-based learning, to expand its effectiveness and applicability in diverse Arabic language learning contexts.

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