

Challenges in Teaching Arabic to Early Childhood Learners: Pedagogical and Psycholinguistic Perspectives

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to examine the challenges of teaching Arabic to young learners at the elementary school level from pedagogical and psycholinguistic perspectives. The research employs a library research method combined with content analysis of relevant literature on Arabic language teaching, pedagogy, and psycholinguistics. The findings reveal that the challenges can be classified into two main dimensions. From a pedagogical perspective, the major issues include overloaded curricula, monotonous traditional methods, limited teacher competence, and the lack of interactive learning media. From a psycholinguistic perspective, the challenges involve children's cognitive development, low motivation, mother tongue interference, and language anxiety. The discussion emphasizes the need for an integrative approach that combines pedagogical and psycholinguistic strategies, such as curriculum redesign, communicative teaching methods, digital technology integration, and the creation of enjoyable learning environments. The study concludes that the effectiveness of Arabic language learning at the elementary level can be improved by aligning cognitive, affective, and social aspects of learners.

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji tantangan pengajaran bahasa Arab kepada peserta didik usia dini pada tingkat sekolah dasar dari perspektif pedagogis dan psikolinguistik. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode studi kepustakaan yang dipadukan dengan analisis isi terhadap literatur yang relevan mengenai pengajaran bahasa Arab, pedagogi, dan psikolinguistik. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa tantangan tersebut dapat diklasifikasikan ke dalam dua dimensi utama. Dari perspektif pedagogis, permasalahan utama meliputi kurikulum yang terlalu padat, metode tradisional yang monoton, keterbatasan kompetensi guru, serta kurangnya media pembelajaran yang interaktif. Dari perspektif psikolinguistik, tantangan yang dihadapi mencakup perkembangan kognitif anak, rendahnya motivasi belajar, interferensi bahasa ibu, serta kecemasan berbahasa. Pembahasan menekankan perlunya pendekatan integratif yang mengombinasikan strategi pedagogis dan psikolinguistik, seperti perancangan ulang kurikulum, penerapan metode pembelajaran komunikatif, integrasi teknologi digital, serta penciptaan lingkungan belajar yang menyenangkan. Penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa efektivitas pembelajaran bahasa Arab di tingkat sekolah dasar dapat ditingkatkan melalui penyesuaian aspek kognitif, afektif, dan sosial peserta didik.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The teaching of Arabic at the elementary school level holds significant urgency within the context of Indonesian education. This is not only related to the function of Arabic as a religious language, but also as an intellectual and cultural medium that supports the understanding of classical Islamic texts. At the elementary age, children are in a critical period for building the foundation of second or foreign language

learning; therefore, Arabic instruction at this stage has strategic potential in shaping linguistic competence (Hakim, 2017).

Nevertheless, realities in the field indicate various challenges that hinder the achievement of Arabic language learning objectives. Teachers often face limitations in providing engaging learning media that are appropriate to children's characteristics. In addition, limited teacher competence in developing creative learning methods also becomes an obstacle in the instructional process (Rahmawati, 2018). This situation reflects a gap between the ideal curriculum and classroom practice.

From a pedagogical perspective, language instruction for elementary school children requires strategies that align with their cognitive and emotional developmental characteristics. According to Bruner's learning theory (1966), children more easily understand concepts when learning occurs gradually and through concrete experiences. Unfortunately, many Arabic language teaching methods at the elementary level remain textual and abstract, making them less relevant to children's real-world experiences. As a result, students often encounter difficulties in understanding the material, particularly in vocabulary acquisition and grammatical structures.

In addition to pedagogical factors, the challenges of teaching Arabic to young learners can also be understood from a psycholinguistic perspective. According to Piaget (1972), children aged 7–12 are in the concrete operational stage, in which their thinking abilities are still limited to tangible and observable phenomena. Therefore, Arabic language instruction presented in an abstract manner tends to be difficult for children to comprehend, especially in distinguishing phonetic sounds and understanding grammatical structures.

Research in the field of psycholinguistics shows that children learn languages more effectively through activities that involve sensory and emotional engagement, such as games, songs, and storytelling (Lightbown & Spada, 2013). Thus, Arabic language instruction at the elementary level should consider children's multisensory learning styles. Otherwise, learning may lose its relevance and reduce students' motivation to learn Arabic.

Furthermore, Vygotsky (1978) emphasizes the importance of social interaction in language acquisition. The concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) explains that children can achieve higher levels of competence with the assistance of teachers or peers. In the context of Arabic language learning, this implies that teachers should function as facilitators who guide children in understanding Arabic through collaborative activities, rather than merely acting as transmitters of knowledge. However, in practice, teaching methods still tend to rely heavily on lecturing and memorization.

Another emerging issue is the low motivation to learn Arabic among elementary school students. According to Gardner (1985), motivation is a crucial factor in successful foreign language learning. Low motivation is often influenced by the lack of relevance of learning materials to children's daily lives. Arabic is frequently perceived solely as a language of religious rituals rather than as a means of communication, making it difficult for children to recognize its practical value.

Based on the above discussion, it can be concluded that the challenges of teaching Arabic to elementary school students involve interconnected pedagogical and psycholinguistic aspects. From a pedagogical perspective, the main obstacles lie in teaching methods, learning media, and teacher competence. Meanwhile, from a psycholinguistic perspective, the challenges stem from children's cognitive development, attention span, and motivation. Therefore, this study aims to examine these issues comprehensively by focusing on two main perspectives: pedagogical and psycholinguistic.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

a. Pedagogical Perspective in Arabic Language Teaching

Pedagogy, as the science and art of teaching, emphasizes that instruction should be adapted to learners' characteristics. In the context of elementary school students, Arabic language teaching requires approaches that are concrete, enjoyable, and interactive. According to Brown (2007), successful language learning occurs when students are actively involved through direct experiences. However, in practice, Arabic language instruction at the elementary level is still largely dominated by grammar–translation methods, which are less suitable for the developmental needs of young learners (Rahmawati, 2018).

Limitations in learning facilities and media also constitute part of the pedagogical challenges. Ideally, language learning should be supported by audio-visual media, yet such resources are often unavailable in elementary schools, particularly in areas with limited facilities (Yunus, 2016). This condition makes Arabic language learning less engaging, causing students to lose interest and motivation. In modern pedagogy, the use of creative media is considered a key factor in enhancing learning effectiveness (Arsyad, 2014).

In addition, teacher competence plays a central role in determining the quality of Arabic language instruction. According to Richards and Rodgers (2014), language teachers are required not only to master the subject matter but also to possess methodological skills to teach it effectively. However, studies in Indonesia indicate that many elementary school Arabic teachers have not received adequate pedagogical training (Sutrisno, 2019). As a result, instructional approaches tend to be monotonous, teacher-centered, and lacking in innovation.

b. Psycholinguistic Perspective in Foreign Language Acquisition

Psycholinguistics examines how mental processes function in language acquisition and use. For elementary school children, cognitive development, memory, and attention span are key factors in learning a foreign language. According to Ellis (2008), children possess a natural capacity for language acquisition; however, its effectiveness is highly dependent on the learning methods employed. When instructional methods are overly abstract, children experience difficulty understanding the structure of a foreign language, including Arabic.

One of the psycholinguistic challenges in teaching Arabic is its phonological system, which differs significantly from that of the learners' first language. For example, sounds such as *hā'* (ح) and *'ain* (ع) do not exist in Indonesian, making them difficult for children to pronounce accurately (Versteegh, 2014). These phonological difficulties often result in persistent pronunciation errors that are difficult to correct without intensive practice and proper phonetic guidance.

Furthermore, the attention span of elementary school children is relatively short. Research indicates that children can maintain full concentration on a single activity for only about 10–15 minutes (Pinter, 2011). This condition requires teachers to design Arabic language lessons with varied and engaging activities, such as language games, songs, and physical movement. Through such approaches, instruction can better accommodate the psycholinguistic limitations of young learners.

c. Previous Studies on the Challenges of Arabic Language Teaching

Several previous studies have identified similar issues related to the challenges of teaching Arabic at the elementary level. For instance, Rahmawati (2018) highlighted low student motivation resulting from monotonous teaching methods. Meanwhile, Ahmad (2020) found a gap between the ideal Arabic language curriculum and the limited competencies of teachers in its implementation. Another study by Hasanah (2021) revealed that learning environment factors, such as parental support and school culture, also influence the effectiveness of Arabic language learning among young learners.

These studies indicate that the challenges of Arabic language teaching are multidimensional, encompassing pedagogical, psycholinguistic, and environmental factors. Therefore, an analysis that focuses on only one aspect is insufficient to provide a comprehensive understanding of the difficulties encountered. Accordingly, this study emphasizes the importance of examining these issues from two main perspectives—pedagogical and psycholinguistic—in order to achieve a more holistic understanding.

3. METHOD

This study employs a qualitative approach using a library research method. This approach was chosen because it is appropriate for analyzing the challenges of teaching Arabic to elementary school children from pedagogical and psycholinguistic perspectives based on existing scholarly sources. According to Creswell (2014), a qualitative approach allows researchers to gain an in-depth understanding of phenomena through the interpretation of texts, theories, and previous research findings.

The primary data sources in this study consist of books on pedagogical and psycholinguistic theories, journal articles discussing Arabic language instruction at the elementary school level, and findings from prior empirical studies. The selection of sources was conducted purposively, meaning that only literature relevant to the research focus was included. This strategy aligns with Bowen's (2009) view that, in document analysis, the selection of documents should be based on their relevance to the research objectives.

Data collection was carried out by reviewing literature from academic databases such as Google Scholar, ProQuest, and accredited national journal portals. In addition, both classical and contemporary pedagogical books were used as references. This is important because literature not only provides a theoretical foundation but also offers empirical findings that strengthen the analysis (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

The collected data were then analyzed using content analysis techniques. According to Krippendorff (2013), content analysis enables researchers to interpret textual data systematically, objectively, and in a structured manner. The analysis was conducted through three stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. This model refers to the qualitative data analysis framework developed by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014).

Research validity was ensured through the application of source triangulation, namely by comparing data from various references to ensure consistency of findings. This method aligns with Patton’s (2015) view that triangulation is essential for enhancing the credibility of qualitative research. In addition, peer debriefing with experts in Arabic language education was conducted to obtain feedback in interpreting the data.

The research procedure was designed to provide a comprehensive overview of the challenges in teaching Arabic to elementary school students. By examining the literature from pedagogical and psycholinguistic perspectives, this study aims to identify existing constraints and to open opportunities for developing more effective and child-appropriate instructional strategies.

In summary, this research methodology integrates library research, content analysis, and data validation strategies through triangulation and peer discussion. This approach is considered appropriate for addressing the research questions related to the challenges of teaching Arabic to elementary school learners.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

a. Pedagogical Challenges

Arabic language instruction at the elementary school level demonstrates a number of complex pedagogical challenges. One of the main obstacles is the teaching methodology, which tends to remain traditional and focuses heavily on vocabulary memorization and grammatical structures. This approach is considered less suitable for young learners, who should instead be engaged through contextual and communicative learning experiences (Brown, 2007).

In addition, the limited availability of learning media presents another significant challenge. Many elementary schools lack adequate facilities to support Arabic language instruction, such as audio-visual tools or game-based learning materials. This condition makes the learning process appear monotonous and less engaging for students (Arsyad, 2014).

Time constraints also constitute a major issue. Within the elementary school curriculum, Arabic is often allocated limited instructional time compared to other subjects. As a result, teachers face difficulties in achieving learning objectives effectively (Yunus, 2016).

Beyond technical aspects, the role of the teacher is also a crucial factor. Research indicates that some Arabic language teachers at the elementary level have not yet mastered pedagogical strategies that align with children’s developmental characteristics. Many teachers still rely heavily on lecture-based methods, which lead to passive learning among students (Rahmawati, 2018).

Teachers also often receive insufficient continuous professional development in the field of Arabic language pedagogy. In fact, the ability to adapt teaching methods is essential to ensure that learning materials are well understood by students (Richards & Rodgers, 2014). This gap in teacher competence further exacerbates the quality of instruction at the elementary level.

Furthermore, the lack of integration between Arabic language materials and children’s daily life contexts constitutes another pedagogical challenge. Abstract content that is disconnected from students’ real-life experiences makes it difficult for them to perceive the relevance of learning Arabic in their everyday lives (Ahmad, 2020).

Table (a). Pedagogical Challenges in Teaching Arabic at the Elementary School Level

Aspect	Focus of Analysis	Main Description	Supporting Scholars/Theories
Curriculum	Relevance and content load	The learning materials are too demanding and not appropriate for children’s developmental level	Hidayat (2019), Krashen (1982)
Method	Teaching strategies	Dominance of traditional methods with minimal innovation	Richards & Rodgers (2014)
Teacher	Pedagogical competence	Teachers lack adequate training in Arabic language pedagogy for young learners	Brown (2007)
Media	Instructional tools	Limited use of visual and interactive media; learning tends to be text-based	Arsyad (2017)

b. Psycholinguistic Challenges

From a psycholinguistic perspective, the main challenge lies in the limited attention span of elementary school children. Research shows that children are only able to maintain focus for approximately 10–15 minutes before losing concentration (Pinter, 2011). This condition presents a significant challenge for teachers in maintaining engaging and effective Arabic language instruction.

In addition, differences between the phonological systems of Arabic and the learners' first language, such as Indonesian, often lead to pronunciation difficulties. Certain Arabic sounds, such as 'ain (ع) and qāf (ق), do not exist in Indonesian, making them difficult for children to articulate correctly (Versteegh, 2014). These pronunciation errors tend to persist if not addressed early in the learning process.

Another psycholinguistic challenge is the limited capacity of children's long-term memory in retaining new vocabulary. Children often forget previously learned vocabulary if it is not used in meaningful contexts. This aligns with psycholinguistic theories emphasizing the importance of repetition and contextualized use in foreign language acquisition (Ellis, 2008).

Motivation also plays a crucial role from a psycholinguistic perspective. Elementary school children often struggle to perceive the immediate benefits of learning Arabic, which results in low motivation. This condition negatively affects their willingness to actively engage in learning vocabulary and language structures (Gardner, 1985).

Furthermore, young learners tend to respond more positively to learning experiences that involve emotions, movement, and play. However, Arabic language instruction in many schools still lacks multisensory approaches. As a result, learning does not align with the natural ways children acquire a second or foreign language (Lightbown & Spada, 2013).

Vygotsky's (1978) concept of the *Zone of Proximal Development* (ZPD) is also relevant in understanding these psycholinguistic challenges. Many teachers have not fully utilized social interaction among students as a means of enhancing Arabic language skills. In fact, children can acquire language more effectively through collaboration with peers during group-based activities.

Table (b). Psycholinguistic Challenges in Arabic Language Learning

Aspect	Focus of Analysis	Main Description	Supporting Scholars/Theories
Age & Development	Critical period	Elementary-aged children are receptive to language learning but become easily bored	Lenneberg (1967), Vygotsky (1978)
Motivation	Internal and external factors	Children learn due to obligation rather than genuine need or interest	Gardner (1985)
Language Interference	First language vs. foreign language	Children often mix Indonesian and Arabic in usage	Ellis (2008)
Affective Factors	Anxiety and fear	High anxiety levels inhibit participation in learning activities	Horwitz (2001)

c. Interaction Between Pedagogical and Psycholinguistic Aspects

The analysis also indicates that pedagogical and psycholinguistic challenges are closely interconnected. For instance, monotonous and abstract teaching methods can exacerbate children's cognitive limitations in understanding language concepts. Conversely, when teachers employ creative methods such as language games or Total Physical Response (TPR), psycholinguistic barriers can be reduced (Brown, 2007).

Similarly, limited instructional time intensifies children's long-term memory constraints. With insufficient time, students lack adequate opportunities to repeatedly practice vocabulary or language patterns they have learned. As a result, their retention of Arabic language material becomes weak (Ellis, 2008).

Furthermore, low learner motivation is closely linked to pedagogical limitations. Teachers who are unable to relate Arabic learning to children's daily lives often struggle to foster students' motivation. In fact, motivation plays a crucial role in successful foreign language acquisition (Gardner, 1985).

The interaction between these two aspects indicates that solutions to the challenges of Arabic language teaching at the elementary level cannot focus solely on curriculum improvement or teacher training. Instead, an integrated approach is required—one that simultaneously considers children's psychological development and innovative pedagogical strategies. In this way, pedagogical obstacles can be addressed while ensuring that instruction aligns with children's psycholinguistic capacities (Rahmawati, 2018).

Table (c). Solution Strategies from Pedagogical and Psycholinguistic Perspectives

Aspect	Focus of Analysis	Main Description	Supporting Scholars/Theories
Curriculum Design	Age-appropriate adaptation	Curriculum aligned with children's cognitive development	Bruner (1960)

Innovative Methods	Communicative approach	Implementation of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT)	Richards & Rodgers (2014)
Media and Technology	Digital integration	Use of educational games and interactive Arabic-based applications	Warschauer (2000)
Learning Environment	Affective support	Creating a joyful and low-anxiety classroom atmosphere	Krashen (1982)

d. Discussion of Findings

The findings of this study indicate that the challenges in teaching Arabic at the elementary school level encompass both pedagogical and psycholinguistic aspects. From a pedagogical perspective, the main challenges lie in the curriculum, teaching methods, teacher competence, and instructional media. Meanwhile, from a psycholinguistic perspective, the challenges are related to children’s developmental stages, learning motivation, first-language interference, and affective factors such as anxiety. These two dimensions are closely interconnected; therefore, problem-solving efforts must address both aspects in an integrated manner (Krashen, 1982).

The Arabic language curriculum at the elementary level is often considered overly dense and insufficiently aligned with children’s developmental stages. According to Piaget’s theory (1964), children at this age are in the concrete operational stage, meaning they learn more effectively through practical and visual activities. When the curriculum is overly theoretical, students struggle to understand the material, leading to decreased learning motivation (Bruner, 1960).

Teaching methods also play a crucial role in the success of Arabic language learning. Many schools still rely on traditional methods such as rote memorization and translation, which tend to bore students. In contrast, research by Richards and Rodgers (2014) indicates that communicative approaches are more effective because they actively engage learners in meaningful language use. This aligns with the principle of *learning by doing* in modern pedagogy.

Teacher competence is another key factor in addressing challenges in Arabic language instruction. Many teachers possess strong linguistic knowledge but lack sufficient pedagogical skills for teaching young learners. According to Brown (2007), a language teacher is not merely a grammar instructor but also a facilitator of students’ cognitive, affective, and social development. Therefore, continuous professional development is essential to improve instructional effectiveness.

The limited availability of learning media also constitutes a major obstacle. Instruction often relies heavily on textbooks, whereas young learners are more attracted to visual, auditory, and interactive media. According to Arsyad (2017), appropriate instructional media can enhance motivation, clarify learning content, and strengthen students’ memory retention. Thus, innovations such as digital applications and interactive Arabic learning tools can serve as effective alternatives.

From a psycholinguistic perspective, age-related development plays a significant role. Lenneberg’s (1967) *Critical Period Hypothesis* suggests that young children have a greater capacity for language acquisition, which gradually declines with age. This implies that Arabic language learning at the elementary level holds great potential, provided that appropriate instructional methods are applied.

Motivation is another crucial factor. Gardner (1985) distinguishes between integrative motivation (the desire to integrate with the target language community) and instrumental motivation (practical goals such as academic achievement). Among elementary school students, motivation is often instrumental; therefore, teachers need to foster integrative motivation through enjoyable activities such as games, songs, and simple role-playing.

First-language interference is another unavoidable challenge. Children often mix their mother tongue with Arabic, which can hinder fluency. Ellis (2008) refers to this phenomenon as language transfer. However, such interference can also be used constructively by comparing similarities and differences between languages to facilitate learning.

Affective factors, particularly anxiety, also significantly influence language learning. Horwitz (2001) emphasizes that foreign language anxiety can inhibit active participation in the classroom. Students who fear making mistakes tend to remain silent, reducing opportunities for practice. Therefore, teachers must create a supportive, low-anxiety classroom environment that encourages risk-taking and participation.

The relationship between pedagogical and psycholinguistic challenges is clearly interconnected in practice. For example, an overly dense curriculum (a pedagogical issue) can increase student anxiety (a psycholinguistic issue). Likewise, traditional teaching methods can reduce motivation, even though motivation is a key psycholinguistic factor in second language acquisition (Krashen, 1982).

Several solutions can be proposed, including curriculum redesign to better align with children’s cognitive development. Bruner (1960) emphasizes the importance of a spiral curriculum, in which content

is presented progressively from simple to more complex forms. This approach allows students to learn without feeling overwhelmed.

The implementation of innovative teaching methods such as Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) is also essential. CLT emphasizes meaningful communication through activities such as role-playing, simulations, and interactive tasks. According to Richards and Rodgers (2014), this approach enhances both language proficiency and learner motivation.

The use of interactive media also represents a strategic solution. Warschauer (2000) highlights that integrating technology into language learning can significantly increase student engagement. Digital applications, animated videos, and interactive games can make Arabic learning more enjoyable and effective.

Furthermore, teachers should apply affective-filter-lowering strategies as proposed by Krashen (1982). These include creating a supportive classroom atmosphere, providing positive reinforcement, and reducing fear of making mistakes. Such strategies help minimize emotional barriers to language learning.

In conclusion, addressing the challenges of Arabic language teaching at the elementary level requires an integrated approach that combines pedagogical and psycholinguistic perspectives. Improving curriculum design, enhancing teacher competence, implementing innovative teaching methods, and understanding students' psychological characteristics are all essential. Through this comprehensive approach, Arabic language learning can become more effective, engaging, and developmentally appropriate for young learners.

5. CONCLUSION

The discussion of challenges in teaching Arabic to elementary school students indicates that this issue cannot be separated from two main dimensions: pedagogical and psycholinguistic. From a pedagogical perspective, the main challenges include an overloaded curriculum, predominantly traditional teaching methods, limited teacher competence, and a lack of interactive learning media. From a psycholinguistic perspective, the challenges involve children's developmental stages, low learning motivation, first-language interference, and affective factors such as language anxiety (Horwitz, 2001; Krashen, 1982).

This study emphasizes that Arabic language instruction at the elementary level must take children's cognitive development into account. Piaget's (1964) and Bruner's (1960) theories highlight the importance of designing curricula that align with developmental characteristics, enabling learning materials to be not only intellectually accessible but also meaningful within children's concrete experiences.

From a methodological standpoint, communicative approaches such as Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) have proven effective in reducing boredom and increasing student participation. Richards and Rodgers (2014) argue that language learning should not be limited to grammatical memorization but should focus on developing communicative competence. Implementing such approaches at the elementary level can foster practical language skills while enhancing learners' motivation.

Teacher involvement is also a critical factor. Teachers must possess adequate pedagogical competence, not only as language instructors but also as facilitators of students' psychological development. As noted by Brown (2007), the role of the teacher encompasses cognitive, affective, and social dimensions. Therefore, professional development programs for Arabic language teachers are essential to address these multifaceted challenges.

The use of instructional media that aligns with children's characteristics is another crucial aspect. Visual, audio, and digital media can significantly enhance motivation and comprehension. Arsyad (2017) emphasizes that appropriate instructional media serve as a bridge between abstract content and children's concrete experiences. The integration of modern technology, such as Arabic language learning applications, represents an effective solution.

From a psycholinguistic perspective, it is important to recognize that children are in a critical period for language acquisition (Lenneberg, 1967). When instruction is delivered effectively, children can acquire a foreign language more easily. However, without appropriate strategies, this potential may be hindered by anxiety, fear of making mistakes, or low motivation. Therefore, the application of affective filter-lowering strategies, as proposed by Krashen (1982), is essential.

In conclusion, addressing the challenges of Arabic language teaching at the elementary level requires an integrated approach. Pedagogical and psycholinguistic dimensions must be considered simultaneously in curriculum design, teaching methods, media selection, and teacher roles. Such an integrative approach enables more effective, engaging, and developmentally appropriate Arabic language instruction.

Future research should focus on empirical classroom-based studies to evaluate the effectiveness of proposed strategies, such as the use of digital media, the implementation of communicative approaches, and teacher training programs grounded in child-centered pedagogy. Through such efforts, Arabic

language teaching at the elementary level can become more relevant, engaging, and effective in building students' foundational language skills.

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