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Drill Method Using Clay Media in Teaching *Hijaiyah* Letters to Deaf Children

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Abstract: Deaf children face unique challenges in learning *Hijaiyah* letters, particularly in distinguishing letter sounds due to hearing limitations. These challenges necessitate tailored instructional approaches that accommodate their sensory needs. This study aims to explore the implementation of the drill method combined with clay media in teaching Hijaiyah letters to deaf children at a Community Learning Center (*Pusat Kegiatan Belajar Mengajar*). Using a qualitative approach with a phenomenological design, data were collected through classroom observation and in-depth interviews with one teacher and two deaf students. Data were analyzed through the stages of data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing. The results indicate that the integration of the drill method, clay media, and sign language enhances learning outcomes by promoting student engagement, improving concentration, and supporting better comprehension of Hijaiyah letters. The study concludes that this interactive, multisensory approach is effective in optimizing Hijaiyah instruction for deaf children and should be considered in inclusive Islamic education settings.

Keywords: *clay media, deaf children, drill method, hijaiyah letters*

I. Introduction

Teaching *hijaiyah* letters to children with special needs, particularly those who are deaf, frequently presents numerous obstacles. Consequently, a highly specialized approach becomes essential (Jundi et al., 2023). One of the main challenges in teaching *hijaiyah* letters to deaf children lies in distinguishing the sounds of the letters, as they have limitations in hearing (Rahmawati, 2019). According to Hidayat (2020), a key difficulty faced by deaf children is the correct pronunciation of *hijaiyah* letters, since their articulation involves sound vibrations or air pressure, which they often struggle to control due to their inability to monitor their voice or airflow. Therefore, to deliver *hijaiyah* letter instructions effectively and meaningfully, teachers need to understand various teaching methods in order to choose the most suitable approach (Andani et al., 2023). Teachers must also make appropriate adjustments in their teaching methods during the learning process, especially when working with children with special needs (Lafiana et al., 2020). A well-chosen instructional method can significantly contribute to improving students' vocabulary acquisition in learning Arabic (Hestiyani, 2020). One such method is the drill method, which teachers often use to instill certain habits, aiming to build consistent and positive learning behaviors in students with diverse abilities.

Beyond choosing suitable teaching methods for deaf children the teacher's role is crucial because deaf students require more attention than typically developing children. Deaf children typically require extended time to grasp *hijaiyah* letter concepts. Consequently applying the drill method with individualized support and guidance gradually diminishing assistance as proficiency increases proves effective. However, another important aspect to consider is that not all children with special needs receive instruction in *hijaiyah* letters, as this depends on each child's abilities and limitations (Fauziah, 2020). Children with limitations do not necessarily struggle with learning. However, when learning alongside other students in school, there are certain aspects that teachers need to pay attention to so that the child can learn effectively (Rhomadhona, 2017). Children with special needs encompass a wide range of conditions, such as autism, physical disabilities, hearing impairments, emotional and behavioral disorders, intellectual disabilities, visual impairments, and ADHD. These children have different needs from their typically developing peers, which may include cognitive, physical, social, or emotional challenges (Rejeki & Hermawan, 2010). Therefore, teacher education needs to be strengthened to meet the learning needs of deaf students and provide specialized support (Kelly et al., 2020).

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Community Learning Centers (*Pusat Kegiatan Belajar Mengajar*) offer an alternative learning environment for deaf children besides special schools and inclusive schools. PKBM is a non-formal educational institution that offers various learning programs for the community, including equivalency education programs. However, one of the most prominent challenges faced by teachers in the PKBM learning process is the lack of teaching methods suited to the characteristics of the learners, particularly in teaching *hijaiyah* letters to deaf children. One of the research settings for deaf children is a learning center. According to Gorney et al. (2016), a learning center is an institution that provides a space for deaf children to learn actively through structured, independent, and choice-based activities that support their language development as well as their social and emotional growth.

Preliminary observations and interviews conducted by the researcher reveal that teachers employed the drill method when teaching *hijaiyah* letters to deaf students. However, in addition to applying the drill method, the teacher also utilized instructional media that suited the specific needs of learning *hijaiyah* letters. One such medium used was clay. According to Suroso et al. (2008), clay has plastic properties that make it easy to shape, making it particularly accessible for beginners, such as children with special needs. The use of clay is introduced to the children gradually to stimulate their visual and motor responses. Aside from capturing the children's attention during lessons, clay also helps train them to form *hijaiyah* letters physically, thus enabling them to recognize the shapes of the letters more effectively.

Additional information is needed regarding how this method and media are practically applied to deaf students. Over the past five years, at least three researchers have conducted studies relevant to this issue. Hasanah (2020) investigated the methods teachers use to teach *hijaiyah* letters to children with special needs. The teacher employed the Iqro' method, incorporating individual strategies, oral approaches, and sign language. Fatan (2021) examined the implementation of the training method as a strategy to improve Qur'anic reading skills among students with intellectual disabilities at SLB B-C Flora Indonesia. The study concluded the drill method was effective in enhancing the Qur'anic reading abilities of students with intellectual disabilities. Fadila (2021) researched an educational game designed to recognize *hijaiyah* letters for deaf and intellectually disabled children. Her findings indicate the game was created to be as accessible as possible, facilitating easier use by the children.

Based on these studies, in addition to the drill method, previous researchers have noted that teachers often employ various other methods to support the learning success of children with special needs. These include lecture methods, educational games, the Iqro' method, and other instructional strategies. The current researcher identified a research gap in previous studies: the use of the drill method assisted by clay media in the teaching of *hijaiyah* letters has not been specifically explored.

Beyond the drill method and clay media, the researcher identified a gap in the setting of previous studies. Unlike earlier studies conducted in special schools (SLB) or inclusive schools, this study was carried out at a Community Learning Center (PKBM). The combination of the drill method and clay media is expected to capture the attention of deaf children at PKBM. This study, therefore, aims to describe the use of the drill method, supported by clay media, in teaching *hijaiyah* letters to deaf children. Clay media is expected to increase students' motivation and facilitate their learning of *hijaiyah* letters. Sign language further supports this by helping deaf children interpret spoken language.

This study addresses the identified research gap. Exploring the use of a clay-based drill method in a PKBM setting, this research has the potential to contribute to the development of innovative and inclusive teaching strategies. The findings are expected to serve as recommendations for PKBM educators on improving deaf students' understanding of *hijaiyah* letters. This enables deaf students to receive more optimal instruction tailored to their needs. The researcher also employed VOSviewer software to visualize collaboration networks among authors, keywords, and topic correlations across several publications related to the drill method using clay media in teaching *hijaiyah* letters to deaf children in PKBM. The following is the result generated by VOSviewer.

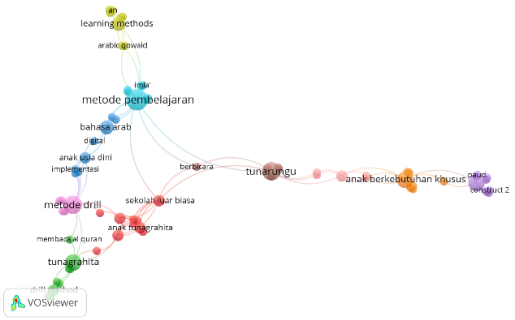

Figure 1. VOSviewers

II. Method

This study employed a qualitative approach using the phenomenological method. According to Creswell (2013), phenomenology emphasizes individual experience rather than the number of participants. This method is used to understand the subjective experiences of others. In addition, Creswell (2018) explains that a qualitative approach involves the collection, examination, interpretation, and reporting of data in ways that differ from the more traditional quantitative approach. In qualitative research, data are gathered from purposefully selected samples, collected through open-ended processes, and analyzed in textual or visual form.

This qualitative approach was used to explore and analyze the drill method applied by the teacher in teaching *hijaiyah* letters to deaf students. The researcher adopted the phenomenological method to examine in depth the phenomenon of how the drill method was implemented by the teacher (Edgar & Sedgwick, 1999). This study is a micro-level exploratory study, focusing on an in-depth description rather than generalization

A. Participants

This study focused on exploring the drill method using clay media in the teaching of *hijaiyah* letters to deaf children. The participants in this research included one teacher who was responsible for teaching *hijaiyah* letters to deaf students. Additionally, the study included two deaf children as participants. The research was conducted at a PKBM, which served as the setting for the teaching and learning activities.

B. Data Collection

Data were collected through observation and interviews. Observation was used as a method for systematically and structurally recording behaviors, events, or phenomena (Abdussamad, 2021). In this study, a systematic observation approach was employed, where the researcher observed the teacher during the teaching process of *hijaiyah* letters using the drill method in the classroom. Through this observation, the researcher gained insight into how the drill method is implemented in teaching deaf students. In addition, semi-structured interviews were conducted as part of the data collection process. According to Sugiyono (2017), semi-structured interviews are prepared in advance but remain flexible to accommodate the interviewee's responses. The interviews aimed to gather information regarding the drill method using clay media in teaching *hijaiyah* letters to deaf children. The interview questions were also aligned with the theoretical framework used by the researcher, namely Vygotsky's theory. The interview was conducted with the teacher responsible for teaching *hijaiyah* letters.

C. Interview Indicators

Table 1 outlines the interview indicators. It details four key areas of inquiry. The first indicator focuses on the use of the Drill Method in learning, grounded in Vygotsky's Theory from 1978. The second indicator examines the use of Clay Media in learning, referencing Dale's Cone of Experience Theory from 1969. Challenges in learning constitute the third indicator, based on Piaget's Theory from 1952. The final indicator explores the use of the Drill Method and Clay Media alongside Sign Language, drawing from Thorndike's Theory of Connectionism, 1913. The table is presented above.

Table 1. Interview Indicators

Indicators	Theory
The use of the Drill Method in Learning	Vygotsky's Theory, 1978
The use of the Clay Media in Learning	Dale's Cone of Experience Theory, 1969
Challenges in Learning	Piaget's Theory, 1952
The use of Drill Method and Clay Media Alongside Sign Language	Based on Thorndike's Theory of Connectionism, 1913

C. Data Analysis

The data analysis process in this study involves data reduction, data display, and conclusion (Miles & Huberman, 1992). During the data reduction stage, in-depth interview data obtained from the teacher regarding the implementation of the drill method using clay media in teaching *hijaiyah* letters to deaf children were selected and categorized based on information relevant to the research context. Unnecessary words were omitted to extract the core meaning of each statement while still aligning with the informant's message. The following table presents the data reduction process, illustrating the selection, categorization, and extraction of key meanings from the teacher's statements related to the use of the drill method and clay media in the teaching of *hijaiyah* letters to deaf students.

Table 2. Interview Data Reduction

Interview Excerpt	Reduced Result	Category	Core Meaning
"I implement the drill method in teaching *hijaiyah* letters because it aligns with the needs of the children, enabling them to retain the letters for use in prayer recitations."	"The teacher applies the drill method in teaching *hijaiyah* letters to help children memorize the letters when reciting prayer texts."	Drill method.	The teacher uses the drill method in *hijaiyah* letter instruction as a strategy to help children remember the letters used in prayer recitations.
"The use of clay media greatly assists children in recognizing the concrete visual form of *hijaiyah* letters."	The teacher stated that clay media is suitable for helping children recognize the concrete shapes of *hijaiyah* letters.	Clay Media	Clay media is very helpful for children in recognizing the concrete forms of *hijaiyah* letters.

The subsequent section of this research meticulously presents the collected data, primarily through a structured table. This table serves as a comprehensive overview, systematically organizing the specific questions that were carefully crafted and posed to the study's participants during the interview process. Each question within this display is designed to elicit rich, qualitative insights, directly addressing the research objectives and ensuring thorough exploration of the phenomena under investigation. The detailed presentation of these questions allows for transparency in the data collection methodology, providing readers with a clear understanding of the information sought from each participant. This table is provided below.

Table 3. Interview Questions

No	Question
1	How do you adapt the drill method for deaf children?
2	What techniques do you use to engage the children's attention during drill activities?
3	How often do you conduct evaluations during the drill practice?
4	What types of media do you use to reinforce the understanding of h*ijaiyah* Letters?
5	Does the use of clay media help in the learning of *hijaiyah* letters?
6	How do you teach *hijaiyah* letters using sign language?
7	How do you overcome the challenges that arise when implementing this method?

In conclusion, the drill method, assisted by clay media, positively impacted deaf children's understanding and memory retention of *hijaiyah* letters. This method's implementation necessitates intensive educator guidance for optimal results. A key challenge observed in the field involves maintaining the children's focus during lessons. The classroom's proximity to students with intellectual disabilities causes this difficulty.

III. Results and Discussion

A. Result

The classroom instruction began with the teacher greeting the students and taking attendance using sign language. Subsequently, the teacher introduced the *hijaiyah* letters (Arabic letters) by writing them on the whiteboard along with their Latin transliterations as shown in figure 2.

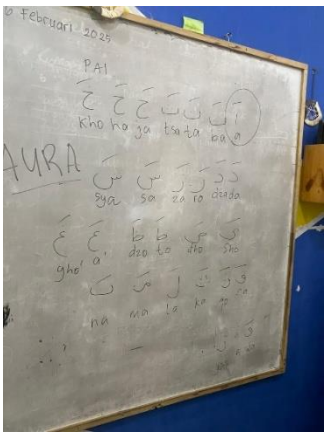

Figure 2. *Hijaiyah* Letters Whiteboard

Each letter was then individually pointed at and pronounced by the teacher, accompanied by articulation cues and sign demonstrations. The students responded by observing closely and repeating each letter, engaging in repetitive oral practice aimed at letter memorization. The session was conducted without the use of additional instructional aids beyond the whiteboard and marker, thus relying solely on two-dimensional visuals and the teacher's physical cues. The students showed contrasting responses: one student demonstrated quick comprehension and active participation, while the other exhibited slower responsiveness, requiring repeated guidance.

In the subsequent phase, clay media was introduced to reinforce letter recognition and tactile memory. After being re-exposed to the *hijaiyah* letters visually, the students received step-by-step demonstrations from the teacher using sign language to explain how to form the letters with clay as depicted in figure 3.

Figure 3. Result of the Clay Media

The teacher introduced clay media as a tactile learning tool to enhance engagement. This activity was conducted after students had been exposed to the *hijaiyah* letters through visual demonstration. Using sign language, the teacher explained and modeled the steps for shaping each letter with clay. The students then recreated the letters under supervision. The first student displayed good fine motor coordination and was able to complete the task successfully. In contrast, the second student showed signs of sensory difficulty and was easily distracted by external noise, leading to incomplete task execution.

Evaluation of the students performance was conducted based on three core aspects: fluency, pronunciation, and accuracy in articulating the *hijaiyah* letters. The first child demonstrated moderate proficiency across all assessment categories. In terms of fluency, a score of 2 was recorded, indicating the child often hesitated and exhibited noticeable pauses, particularly when encountering *hijaiyah* letters with phonetically similar sounds. For the pronunciation aspect, while the child could produce several letters correctly, difficulties remained with letters that share articulation points, leading to occasional mispronunciations. Similarly, in the accuracy dimension, the child achieved a score of 2, reflecting inconsistencies in precise articulation despite overall comprehension of the letter forms. These outcomes suggest that while the child is developing foundational skills, further reinforcement is required to improve consistency and articulation clarity. The detailed scores for the first child's performance are presented in table 4.

Table 4. First evaluation of Students Performance

Assessment Aspect	Score Range		
	1	2	3
Fluency		✓	
Prononciation		✓	
Accuracy		✓	

The second child exhibited slightly lower performance, particularly in the area of pronunciation. In terms of fluency, the child received a score of 2, suggesting a level of fluency comparable to that of the first child, with sporadic pauses and inconsistent rhythm when reciting letters. In the pronunciation aspect, however, the child scored 1, indicating significant challenges. The child was frequently unfocused during the task and produced responses that appeared random rather than deliberate, reflecting limited phonemic awareness. As for accuracy, the score remained at 2, suggesting partial recognition of letter forms but with recurring articulation errors. The second child's detailed performance across assessment criteria is summarized in Table 5

Table 5. Second evaluation of Students Performance

Assessment Aspect	Score Range		
	1	2	3
Fluency		✓	
Prononciation	✓		
Accuracy		✓	

B. Discussion

The results of this study indicate that the drill method has been effectively employed to support the learning process of *hijaiyah* letters among deaf students through structured and repetitive practice. The teacher implemented this method to help students internalize each letter's form and pronunciation. This instructional approach aligns with the view of Tambak (2016), who emphasized the role of repetition in enhancing skills. Moreover, Thorndike (1913) argued that the frequency of practice strengthens memory associations, thereby facilitating better skill retention. For deaf learners, this is particularly beneficial because it builds consistent habits in both receptive and expressive language. Slameto (2010) further explained that the drill method enhances cognitive and motor abilities by enabling automatic recall and application of learned material. This repetition-driven approach enables deaf students to retain new concepts more effectively and develop a routine in recognizing and expressing *hijaiyah* letters.

Vygotsky's (1978) theory of the Zone of Proximal Development reinforces the relevance of the drill method in this context, as it underscores the importance of guided learning with appropriate support, or scaffolding, to reach optimal development. In this study, scaffolding was implemented through the integration of visual aids, sign language, and interactive materials, helping students comprehend *hijaiyah* letters incrementally. Cahyono (2019) also emphasized that building foundational concepts prior to instruction enhances comprehension, particularly when using media that support visual and auditory modalities. The repetitive exposure and reinforcement used in this classroom provided students with multiple opportunities to master each letter. The teacher ensured that memorization was complemented by practical application through structured repetition and reinforcement at the end of each session. This comprehensive strategy reflects an individualized approach tailored to the unique learning needs of deaf students, fostering better academic and social outcomes.

The instructional techniques used in the implementation of the drill method were adapted to ensure optimal engagement and skill acquisition. According to Gagne (1977), instructional techniques are deliberate strategies encompassing procedures, methods, and organizational frameworks designed to support the achievement of educational goals. In the context of *hijaiyah* letter instruction, the drill method was employed to encourage the automatic and responsive use of learned material. This technique is traditionally effective in teaching basic academic skills such as reading, arithmetic, and memorization, and it is particularly suitable for students with specific learning needs. The teacher consistently applied this method to establish fluency and speed, which are essential in the early stages of language learning. These structured techniques not only facilitated mastery but also provided students with predictable routines that enhanced their confidence and participation in the classroom.

Evaluation in the learning process played a critical role in assessing student progress and the effectiveness of the teaching strategy. As noted by Sudjana (2009), evaluation is a systematic effort to determine the extent to which students achieve learning objectives. In this study, evaluations were conducted in alignment with the format of regular schools, including midterm and final assessments. However, special attention was given to evaluating fluency, pronunciation, and accuracy in recognizing *hijaiyah* letters. The evaluation process functioned not only as a measurement tool but also as a feedback mechanism to inform instructional improvements. It allowed the teacher to identify areas of difficulty and to refine teaching strategies accordingly. The emphasis on phonetic clarity and recall also helped students internalize the structure and sound of each letter, reinforcing the goals of the drill-based instruction.

The use of clay media emerged as a highly effective tool in supporting the tactile and visual learning needs of deaf students. Children with special needs, especially those with hearing impairments, require concrete and manipulative learning tools to aid in the recognition of abstract symbols such as letters. According to Sudjana and Rivai (2002), tactile media like clay facilitate direct interaction with letter shapes, supporting the development of spatial and visual cognition. The teacher reported that the use of clay was particularly effective in attracting students' attention and sustaining engagement during lessons (personal communication, February 6, 2025). This finding is consistent with Dale's Cone of Experience (1969), which emphasizes the importance of experiential learning over passive methods such as reading or listening. The incorporation of clay as a medium allows students to form *hijaiyah* letters with their hands, fostering a multisensory experience that bridges visual, kinesthetic, and vibrotactile information.

The multisensory approach employed in this study aligns with recent research that highlights its role in enhancing phonological processing and reading comprehension in deaf learners. Teresa et al. (2023) found that the integration of multiple sensory modalities in phonological instruction significantly improves language acquisition outcomes. Similarly, Putra and Suarsana (2024) emphasized the importance of designing instructional materials that are simple, clear, and accessible for students with hearing impairments. In the learning process, students were guided to observe *hijaiyah* letter forms on the whiteboard and replicate them using clay, which enabled the reinforcement of visual memory and fine motor skills simultaneously. This hands-on activity made abstract letter forms more tangible, thereby supporting the development of foundational literacy in a way that was both interactive and individualized. The use of clay media not only increased student motivation but also reinforced the drill method by providing a complementary learning modality.

The learning process of *hijaiyah* letters for deaf students presents several challenges, particularly due to the intrinsic reliance of Arabic phonology on auditory perception. Language in education plays a fundamental role not only as a medium of instruction but also as a vehicle for developing cognitive abilities, communication skills, and character formation. As noted by Muin (2021), language functions as a social and cultural tool that facilitates meaningful interaction in educational settings. In the context of deaf learners, however, this role becomes complex due to hearing limitations that hinder access to oral language input. One of the most prominent challenges in teaching *hijaiyah* letters to deaf students lies in their difficulty recognizing and producing the correct articulation of sounds, especially as many *makharij al-huruf* require auditory feedback for accurate production (Yasmin, 2024).

Additional difficulties emerge in understanding *tajwid* rules, which demand not only visual familiarity with the script but also awareness of phonological nuances, a task made significantly harder for deaf learners (Anugrah, 2023). The limited availability of instructional resources tailored to their learning preferences further restricts their ability to build an adequate Arabic vocabulary. Environmental factors also contribute to these challenges. For instance, the proximity of classrooms designated for students with intellectual disabilities can disrupt the concentration of deaf learners, particularly when behavioral episodes occur nearby. Drawing on Piaget's theory of cognitive development (1952), meaningful learning occurs through the integration of new knowledge with real-life experiences. However, the inability to differentiate similar phonemes visually may inhibit deaf students from forming accurate associations between letter forms and their corresponding sounds, impeding the internalization of abstract concepts.

To address these pedagogical difficulties, the integration of the drill method and clay media alongside sign language has proven to be a valuable strategy in this study. This combination leverages the strengths of visual, tactile, and repetitive learning approaches, which are particularly beneficial for students with hearing impairments (Wahyudi et al., 2024). The drill method plays a critical role in reinforcing learning through repeated exposure and practice. This principle resonates with Thorndike's (1913) theory, which posits that repetition solidifies the relationship between stimulus and response, enhancing memory and skill acquisition. In the context of *hijaiyah* letter instruction, the drill method was used to systematically develop recognition skills, enabling students to become familiar with both the visual representation and the symbolic meaning of each letter through sustained repetition and guided interaction.

The use of clay media in this approach further enriches the learning experience by providing a concrete, hands-on method of forming letter shapes. This sensory engagement supports kinesthetic learning, allowing students to grasp letter structures physically while simultaneously visualizing their sign language representations. The teacher reported that sign language plays a vital role in accelerating comprehension, as it enables students to associate letter forms with corresponding hand gestures (personal communication, February 6, 2025). Moreover, clay was not only used to mold *hijaiyah* letters but also to demonstrate the handshapes of sign language associated with each letter, enhancing students' multimodal engagement. This form of integration transforms the learning environment into an inclusive and interactive space that accommodates the unique needs of deaf students.

The incorporation of sign language as a core instructional tool enhances accessibility and comprehension by bridging gaps in verbal communication. Gumulya et al. (2019) emphasized the centrality of sign language in facilitating effective teacher-student interaction among deaf learners. In line with this, Bintoro et al. (2023) highlighted the necessity for educators to apply targeted strategies that utilize visual communication to optimize learning outcomes. The findings of this study support these conclusions by demonstrating that sign language not only mediates understanding but also enriches the instructional process when paired with tactile and repetitive techniques. Theoretically, this research aligns with Vygotsky's concept of the Zone of Proximal Development, wherein learning is maximized through guided social interaction and appropriate scaffolding. In practice, the drill method offers structured repetition to reinforce letter recognition, while clay media introduces an element of creativity and physical engagement. Empirically, this study contributes to the growing body of literature advocating for multisensory instructional models tailored to deaf education. Consequently, the integration of drill-based repetition, clay modeling, and sign language constitutes a promising pedagogical framework for enhancing the literacy skills of deaf students in learning *hijaiyah* letters.

IV. Conclusion and Suggestion

Based on the findings of this study, clay media can be effectively integrated into the drill method for teaching Arabic letters (*hijaiah* letters) to deaf students. The drill method significantly enhances memory retention and letter recognition when combined with tactile clay modeling and visual communication through sign language. This multimodal approach offers a comprehensive instructional strategy that supports both cognitive and psychomotor development. In particular, clay media reinforces visual perception and fine motor coordination, making it especially beneficial for deaf learners. Moreover, the combination of these methods fosters increased engagement and motivation among students, contributing to a more inclusive and responsive learning environment.

Future research should explore the extension of this method beyond individual letters to include sentence-level language learning. Studies are also encouraged to investigate the optimal frequency and duration of clay-based drill sessions to ensure maximum learning efficacy. Additionally, researchers may consider applying this approach in diverse educational settings, particularly in non-formal or inclusive learning environments, to assess its adaptability and broader impact. Further studies could also examine how parental or caregiver involvement in clay-based learning activities at home influences student motivation and reinforcement of learning outcomes.

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