



APPLICATION OF LOOSE PARTS MEDIA IN IMPROVING LETTER RECOGNITION SKILLS IN TODDLERS

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Abstract

This research began with initial observations in Group A of PAUD Edelweis Kalimaro, Cirebon Regency, which showed that children's letter recognition skills were still low. This is due to the lack of variation in learning methods and games that tend to be monotonous, as well as an unsupportive learning environment. The objective of this research is to enhance children's ability to recognize letters through loose parts play. The study employs a classroom action research approach using the Kemmis and Mc. Taggart model, and data is collected through observation and documentation. Data analysis was conducted qualitatively through diligence and data triangulation, as well as quantitatively by calculating the class average and percentage. The research results show that: 1) Before the implementation of loose parts play, the letter recognition ability of children in Group A of PAUD Edelweis Kalimaro was still lacking. 2) The implementation of loose parts play was organized in the lesson plan and applied during the learning process. 3) The children's letter recognition ability significantly improved after the action was taken. At the pre-cycle stage, children's letter recognition ability only reached 36% (Poor). In cycle I, the ability increased to 51% (Fair), and after evaluation, cycle II showed an increase to 83% (Very Good), exceeding the minimum threshold of 80%. Thus, the research was concluded in cycle II as it was deemed successful..

Keywords: *Letter Recognition, Early Childhood, Play, Loose Parts.*

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INTRODUCTION

PAUD is a coaching activity for children aged zero to six years through educational stimulation to help develop physical and psychological growth and development so that children are ready to enter further education (Indriawan & Wijiyono, 2020). Law No. 20 of 2003 concerning the National Education System in Article 1 states that the purpose of PAUD is as an effort to optimize children's development and growth as an initial step for children's educational readiness to enter the next level (Sumarsih, 2020).

Early age is the most important period in children's development and growth, because during this period the development of children's intelligence and motor skills experiences significant development (Indriawan & Wijiyono, 2020). Education for early childhood is the right momentum in a child's lifetime to explore the potential and foundation of children whose goal is to develop various potentials and talents in children with fun learning activities, namely by playing (Apriyani & Suhrahman, 2020).

Early childhood education acts as an intermediary to provide stimulation or stimulus to children during the "golden age", which is a period when children's behavior, character, thinking skills, creativity, and knowledge are easily formed (Margaretha, 2020). The "golden age" is the most appropriate age to provide a strong foundation for children, because during this period brain development occurs very rapidly, reaching 50% of total brain development throughout their life, so it is an ideal time to explore children's intelligence potential in various aspects (Kulsum, 2022). This sensitive period is important to provide appropriate stimulation for children's growth and development through early childhood education services (Mandasari et al., 2021). Language skills that need to be developed in early childhood include four aspects: listening, speaking, reading, and writing (Fatayati & Ningsih, 2020). Permendikbud No. 137 of 2014 concerning STPPA for the language aspect of children aged four to five years includes the ability to understand receptive language, expressive language, and literacy, so that literacy becomes an important part of children's language development (Sari et al., 2020). It is important for early childhood to recognize and understand letters, with delivery through social interaction and reading learning methods that are not burdensome, and presented in a way that is fun for children (Hasan, 2009:66 in Fatayati & Ningsih, 2020). Literacy is a language skill that primarily focuses on recognizing images introduced through letters (Mandasari et al., 2021). This is the reason for the importance of introducing early literacy, especially for early childhood.

Based on the explanation above, the ability to recognize letters for early childhood, especially in the concept of letter recognition, must have been carried out and the introduction of literacy programs in early childhood education institutions can be a learning activity that can help develop children's literacy. and the importance of recognizing early literacy with the ability is the basic ability of children to read and write early.

The ability of children in Group A at Edelweis Kalimaro PAUD, Cirebon Regency, in recognizing letters is still relatively low, with the majority of children not yet understanding the concept of letters. This is evident from the inability of children to recognize letters of the alphabet, recognize letter symbols, and read these symbols. Letter learning carried out by teachers is limited to the use of books or magazines, because the school has limited game media and teachers do not understand how to apply games in learning activities. The frequent use of books and magazines as teaching media is also not appropriate for early childhood education programs, so that letter recognition learning becomes monotonous and less interesting.

Based on the recorded evaluation results, the ability to recognize letters of children in Group A is still very low. Of the total 19 children in the group, only three children (16%) have good letter recognition skills, while the other 16 children (84%) still have great difficulty in recognizing letters. This condition raises problems that need to be analyzed and addressed. If left unchecked, this will hinder the development of children's letter recognition skills according to their age, and children will lose their best opportunity to develop their language skills.

To overcome the above problems, it is necessary to improve children's ability to recognize letters by using the right method, namely through games. The learning while playing method is very appropriate for the characteristics of early childhood, because playing gives children the opportunity to be creative, express themselves, explore, and develop their creativity, so that children gain new experiences and knowledge (Sumarsih, 2020). As a solution, it is necessary to apply a learning method that is appropriate for early childhood, namely loose parts games. Through In this game, children can learn letters in a flexible way, using various materials that are easily found in the environment, and being creative in forming letters. Thus, the learning process becomes more effective, fun, and easy for children to understand and remember.

Based on this explanation, this study will focus on language development, especially the ability to recognize letters, through the application of the loose parts game. This research will be conducted using a classroom action research model with the title "Application of Loose Parts media in improving the Ability to Recognize Letters in Early Childhood" with the research locus at PAUD Edelweis Kalimaro, Cirebon Regency.

The ability to recognize letters is a skill in the language aspect that needs to be developed and introduced from an early age as preparation for further education (Dewi Purnamasari et al., 2022). According to Carol Seefeldt and Barbara A. Wasik (2008:330 in Yeni & Hartati, 2020), the ability to recognize letters involves activities that aim to find out the differences in signs and characteristics of letter symbols in writing, each of which represents the sound of language. Learning letters is an important component in the development of reading and writing. Meanwhile, Salwanur et al. explained that recognizing letters is a skill that children have to understand and know the characteristics of letter symbols in writing, which are a series of letters of the alphabet that represent the sounds of language (Yeni & Hartati, 2020).

To improve the ability to recognize letters, one of them is by using the Loose Parts game media. The term loose parts comes from English which means loose or detached parts. Loose parts refer to materials that are easy to move, carry, combine, change shape, separate, and reassemble (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2020). According to Shally Haughey (2017, in Yulianti Siantajani), loose parts are materials that are open, can be separated, can be recombined, carried, arranged, and moved, and can be used either separately or combined with other materials. Meanwhile, according to Puspita (2019, in the article Wagriah, 2021), loose parts are tools and materials that can facilitate children's natural curiosity (Eni, 2020). Based on these various explanations, loose parts can be concluded as materials that can be combined, moved, separated, released again, and used both indoors and outdoors in various ways (Ridwan et al., 2022).

METHODOLOGY

This research method uses a qualitative research approach. And the type of research used is classroom action research or also called PTK. The classroom action research used is the

Kemmis and Mc. Taggart PTK model, where this research is in the form of a cycle in which each cycle has four stages, namely the planning stage, the action stage, the observation stage, and the reflection stage.

The data collection method used is observation and documentation. The validity of the data in this study is focused on the ability to recognize children's letters through loose parts games using two-way inspection techniques, namely: Observation persistence and triangulation.

The data analysis technique in this study is to use the Miles, Huberman and Saldana (2014) model in (Fiantika et al., 2022), namely the technical analysis of this model has three stages, namely: Data condensation, Data display, Verification or drawing conclusions. And by calculating the class average and percentage.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. The ability to recognize letters of group A children of PAUD Edelweis Kalimaro, Cirebon Regency before the implementation of loose parts game media

Based on the results of the study, the ability to recognize children's letters can be seen from several existing indicators. First, in recognizing letter symbols, the number of scores obtained was 30 with an average of 1.6 and a percentage of 39%, which is categorized as less than good. Second, to read letter symbols, the number of scores obtained was 28 with an average of 1.4 and a percentage of 37%, also included in the less than good category. Third, in imitating letter shapes, the number of scores obtained was 29 with an average of 1.5 and a percentage of 38%, which is also considered less than good. The total overall score for achieving children's ability to recognize letters was 87, with an average of 1.5 and a percentage of 38%, which showed less than good results. Therefore, it can be concluded that children's ability to recognize letters in this pre-cycle is still relatively low and has not achieved the desired expectations.

The ability to recognize letters in Group A of Edelweis Kalimaro PAUD, Cirebon Regency before the implementation of the loose parts game method has not yet developed optimally as expected. This can be seen from the results of observations showing that the level of children's ability to recognize letters in the pre-cycle only reached 36%, which is categorized as less than good. This condition cannot be left alone, because it will affect the development of children's language aspects and also other aspects of development in the future, considering that each aspect of development is interconnected and influences each other.

The development of the ability to recognize letters is very crucial in the development of children's language aspects, because language is a tool used by children to communicate with their surroundings throughout their lives. Therefore, it is important to provide appropriate and effective stimulation so that children's language abilities can develop optimally.

The results of observations of the ability to recognize letters obtained in the pre-cycle show that before the implementation of this classroom action research, children's ability to recognize letters was clearly not good. Most children still have difficulty in improving their abilities in each indicator. So the researcher applied the loose parts game to improve children's ability to recognize letters.

2. Implementation of the application of loose parts games in improving the ability to recognize letters of group A children of PAUD Edelweis, Gebang District, Cirebon Regency

The implementation of the application of loose parts games in improving the ability to recognize letters of group A children of PAUD Edelweis Kalimaro, Cirebon Regency aims to develop and improve these abilities. At the implementation stage, learning planning is prepared in accordance with the guidelines set by the school, which function as a reference and guide for teachers in carrying out learning activities using loose parts games to improve children's ability to recognize letters. In accordance with the action planning in this study, what must be prepared is the Learning Implementation Plan (RPPH) and direct observation.

The learning models applied in this study include classical and group methods. The classical model is used in the opening and closing activities, while the group model is applied to the core activities. In cycle I, the loose parts gravel game is used in the core activities to form letters above the writing. While in cycle II, a more varied variety of games are applied, such as attaching letters to loose parts gravel, arranging them, and imitating the shape of letters using the gravel. Based on the results of observations conducted by researchers together with colleagues, it shows a good improvement through the use of interesting game variations, which are continuously improved throughout cycles I and II. This improvement is made based on reflection from the evaluation of each cycle that has been implemented.

The results of observations of the ability to recognize letters obtained in cycle I show that the application of Loose Parts game media in this classroom action research produces quite good letter recognition abilities.

3. The ability to recognize letters of group A children at Edelweis PAUD as a result of the application of loose parts game media

Recognizing letters is one of the important aspects in children's language development that needs to be stimulated early on as an initial step in their language development. This is in line with the opinion of Alam Siregar (2019) who stated that the ability to recognize letters is very crucial for pre-school children, so it must be introduced as early as possible through fun activities, such as playing. In a playful atmosphere, children do not feel pressured and do not require great physical effort, so they will feel happy, comfortable, and easier to learn the language as a whole. In addition, understanding letter symbols must be a concern since at an early age, because this will be very beneficial for the development of children's language aspects and make it easier for them to learn.

The ability to recognize letters can be improved through various methods, one of which is by using loose parts games. In this study, the loose parts used were gravel, which were chosen because they were small, white, flat, and smooth, so they were safe for children. The way to play with loose parts gravel is to arrange them into the desired shape.

The results of the Classroom Action Research (CAR) which was carried out in two cycles, each consisting of two meetings, with a total of four meetings, showed an increase in children's ability to recognize letters. Before the implementation of classroom action research, children's ability to recognize letters only reached 36%, while after the second cycle, the achievement increased to 81%.

The results of this study indicate that children's ability to recognize letters can be improved through the implementation of loose parts games. In this study, loose parts games were used as a learning method that combines the concept of learning while playing, which provides a fun experience for children. This creates a fun and conducive learning atmosphere,

so that children can more easily absorb the material being taught. This opinion is in line with Lev Vygotsky's theory (1969), which states that playing is the main source of children's development, especially in the aspect of thinking (Sabin et al., 2019). Thus, playing loose parts makes it easier for children to understand the shape and name of letters because children are actively involved in the activity of forming letters with loose parts media. This opinion is also supported by Daly and Beloglovsky, who state that loose parts can stimulate children's imaginative thinking skills and help them see various solutions. In addition, the sensation of adventure and pleasure that children get while playing helps them develop problem-solving skills through interaction with the media (Eni, 2020).

CONCLUSION

Based on the explanation that has been given, the researcher draws the following conclusions from the findings of this classroom action research: In the pre-cycle, the results of initial observations showed that the ability to recognize letters of children in group A was classified as poor. Of the 19 children, only 3 children (36%) had good initial reading skills. This can be seen from the lack of development of children's ability to recognize letters in the aspects of: a) recognizing letter symbols, b) reading letter symbols, and c) imitating letter shapes. The implementation of the action in this study involved the application of the loose parts gravel game method in learning to develop children's ability to recognize letters. The action was arranged in a learning plan and implemented according to the process designed by the researcher. In cycle I, the loose parts gravel game was carried out with the same type of game. In cycle II, the loose parts gravel game was applied with two variations of the game, which aimed to create a fun and interesting learning atmosphere. The results of the application of the loose parts game showed a significant increase in the ability to recognize letters of children in Group A at PAUD Edelweis Kalimaro. In the pre-cycle, children's ability to recognize letters was 36% (not good), then increased in cycle I to 51% (quite good). Since the results of cycle I have not reached the expected target, evaluation and improvement were carried out, and the action was continued to cycle II. In cycle II, there was a significant increase to 84% (very good), which has exceeded the minimum limit targeted in this study, which is $\geq 76\%$. Therefore, the action was stopped in cycle II because it was considered successful and in accordance with expectations.

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