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Implementation of Environment-Based Learning Methods to Improve Early Childhood Creativity

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ABSTRAK:
This research describes the results of environment-based learning to increase the creativity of early childhood in the era of freedom to play. Creativity is a manifestation of a fully functioning individual, with creativity enabling humans to improve the quality of their lives. Creativity can be increased through the use of the environment and natural materials. The research subjects consisted of early childhood children group B aged 5-6 years at Al Falah PAUD Gunung Sitoli City. Data collection was carried out using observation, interviews and documentation techniques. Analysis of data obtained in the field takes the form of observation results sheets, interview notes, and documents relevant to the research focus. The method used is qualitative. The number of research subjects was 20 early childhood children and 3 educators as informants. Based on the research results, it can improve the creative abilities of young children, such as in the activities: (1) Children observe the rimbang tree, then the teacher helps spark children's knowledge about what they observe. Children are invited to pick fruits and flowers around them, children are given the freedom to choose and make choices which of course have an impact on their creative abilities, which flowers to pick and how to pick them;
(2) children experiment with brewing butterfly pea flowers to make herbal drinks; and (3) Children count and form letters and numbers using natural materials that they collect according to each child's creativity. Overall, observations of children as well as the results of interviews with class teachers and school principals include creativity, imagination and the ability of children to produce work in early childhood.

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1. Introduction

Early childhood is a golden period in human development, in this phase the development is very important, where learning has a major impact on their physical, cognitive, social, and emotional growth, including their creativity. A form of learning that can contribute to the optimal development of children is by playing.

In Early Childhood Education (ECE) institutions, learning and play often occur together as children explore their surroundings to recognize nature. Early childhood is not only a glorious period, but also a very fundamental stage in life. This stage is important because everything a child experiences during this time has a major influence on his or her future development into adulthood. Early childhood can develop a positive and ideal mindset if given useful and valuable things from the start. Therefore, the type of influence a child receives at this stage will determine the quality of his or her life in the future. Caregivers, teachers, and the surrounding community must work together to shape and develop children's mindsets so that they grow into good and creative individuals (Mayer et al., 2022).

In order for them to grow into good and creative individuals, this early age period requires child development to be optimally developed. However, if children during the golden age of development do not maximize their growth and development or do not get the right stimulus, children are rarely invited to play, touched, then their brain development will not be able to develop optimally, which will later determine the intelligence of a child. Intelligence is one of the most important things for a child to have.

Early childhood education institutions are a place to shape children's development in addition to the home environment. But many institutions, especially educators, do not fully understand the concept of creative and fun learning. Teaching and learning activities are less directed or only simple exploration without quality educational goals. Educators teach monotonously, only fixated on existing media such as writing, coloring or using textbook media. Whereas media and learning resources are very diverse and many in the surrounding environment. The lack of creativity of educators makes learning not foster the creativity of early childhood.

Intelligence and creativity have a very close relationship; therefore, children should not only be educated to become intelligent children but must also be educated to become creative children and have stable emotions. Creativity needs to be nurtured from an early age due to several factors, namely as follows; by creating people can realize themselves, and self-realization is a basic need at the highest level in life. Creativity is a manifestation of a fully functioning individual. Having good creativity from an early age will help children in various aspects of later developmental life.

One important aspect of early childhood development is cognitive development. This cognitive development includes the ability to learn and solve simple problems in everyday life, think logically, and understand symbolic concepts. Science, which is part of cognition, places great emphasis on the thinking process. In order for early childhood cognitive development to be optimal, they need appropriate and supportive stimulation (Veronica & Yunanti, 2022).

Early childhood is in a very important phase of development, where learning has a huge impact on their physical, cognitive, social and emotional growth. In this context, creativity is one aspect that must be developed early on. Creativity helps children think critically, solve problems and express their ideas uniquely. One effective method to enhance children's creativity is environment-based learning.

The importance of providing stimulation and stimuli to develop children's potential, especially in the field of art learning, cannot be ignored. Learning art can enhance the imagination, creativity and potential of every child. Every child is born with a unique talent for creativity, so the development of this aspect is crucial in the early stages of their growth. The imagination that develops in a child's mind is closely related to creativity, which is the foundation for their future growth." (Aisyiah & Pamungkas, 2023)

Learning media and resources for children aged 2-6 years are actually very diverse. Not only limited to factory products or expensive items, but teachers can also utilize materials around children to create learning tools. In addition, if the space for learning activities is limited, the surrounding environment can be a very appropriate and fun solution for children. Thus, outdoor play not only provides happiness, but can also increase the effectiveness of the learning process (Miftah Kusuma Dewi, 2021)

The use of learning resources from the surrounding environment is an optimal step in utilizing all the natural potential around the learners. In addition, it also supports the achievement of basic competencies stipulated in the 2013 PAUD curriculum. The learning process, which is often referred to as playing while learning, can take place effectively and efficiently, without requiring a large budget to buy factory-made or high-tech learning media. Through this approach, children can be taught to appreciate the environment by recognizing, caring for and utilizing it in their daily lives. In addition, this learning resource is also easily accessible, as it is available around the child's environment (Ali et al., 2023).

Children's environment is a rich alternative learning resource that can be utilized in the learning process

to achieve quality results. The environment holds a variety of important things that can be explored by students. By using the environment as a learning tool, we can create a better and more enjoyable learning experience for them. The learning process can be done anywhere, both in the classroom and outside the classroom, in the surrounding environment that offers valuable information (Ali et al., 2023). When the environment is used as a learning resource, students will be more actively involved, because they can interact directly with what is around them. The use of the environment can also help develop various skills, such as observing, taking notes, formulating questions, making conjectures, and writing or drawing. In this way, learning becomes more dynamic and meaningful.

One prominent educational figure, Jan Lighter, had a different view and dared to challenge existing theories. He emphasized the importance of subjective values and practical learning, where learners are directly involved in the field, instead of being trapped in theories that could potentially make them passive. Lighter's thinking is in line with the concept of Eco pedagogics, which also focuses on the environment. With the application of ecopedagogics in education today, it is hoped that love for nature can be awakened, so that the balance between humans and the environment can be maintained. Therefore, building a harmonious relationship between the two is very important (Kusumawardani & Kuswanto, 2020).

Early childhood is at a golden age with very high curiosity. Therefore, it is important to provide appropriate learning to improve their science skills. To overcome this challenge, effective learning activities are needed, such as the introduction of science through an exploration approach. This approach is designed to make children more familiar with their surrounding environment through direct experience (Dewi, Kadek Resmita, Dr. I Ketut Gading, M.Psi, Mutiara Magna, S.Pd., 2019). Through exploration activities, children are invited to conduct various experiments with objects around them, which will help develop their science skills. By utilizing their five senses, children can recognize various natural phenomena and, through interaction with the objects they observe, they will gain a new understanding of science concepts.

The natural environment with all its natural contents, without the engineering often found in manufactured media, can stimulate children to play in a meaningful way. This contributes to the development of their potential. The various elements of nature that are easily recognized by children require a deeper understanding of what they see and observe. (Ali et al., 2023).

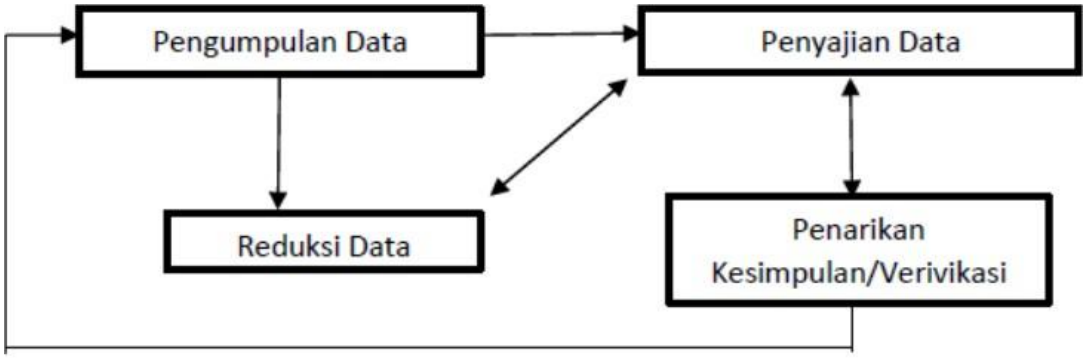
Environmental education aims to foster children's concern for the environment. This includes introducing basic concepts as well as teaching concrete actions that can be taken to preserve the environment, particularly in relation to water, waste management and plant care (Adawiyah & Dewinggih, 2021).

1. Methodology

This research uses case study qualitative research. The data obtained through data collection techniques will be presented in descriptive form, namely describing what it is or providing a clearer picture of the use of natural materials to improve children's creativity. The research location is at PAUD Al Falah Gunung Sitoli City.

In this study, informants consisted of parties involved and in the environment where the research was conducted, such as teachers, students, and principals. Researchers conducted direct observations and interviews with informants, following the prepared guidelines, which included research instruments such as observation sheets, interview formats, and documentation. Meleong (2012) explains that informants are individuals who provide important information about the situation and conditions at the research location. The selection of participants and informants was carried out using purposive sampling technique. Data collection was conducted through observation, interview, and documentation study methods, which were then systematically analyzed. (Tarich Yuandana, 2024)

Data analysis was conducted through three stages: data reduction, data presentation, and data verification (Miles & Huberman, 1992).



Gambar 1. Analisis Data Model Miles dan Huberman

At the data reduction stage, researchers collected information through observation techniques for all group B students aged 5-6 years at PAUD Al Falah Gunung Sitoli City, consisting of 20 children. In addition, researchers also conducted interviews with three informants. Some of the data collected was eliminated because it was not relevant to the focus of the research. Furthermore, at the data presentation stage, researchers presented information in tabular form and grouped data related to creativity indicators and the use of natural materials. After grouping, the researcher verified to ensure that the grouping was accurate and in accordance with the research objectives. To maintain the objectivity of the data obtained in the field, checking the validity of the data was done through careful and continuous observation in accordance with the focus of the study. Data triangulation was also applied by comparing one data source with other data sources, as well as conducting member checks by showing the transcripts to informants. Data is considered valid when it has been approved by the informant, and will then be compiled in the form of a descriptive report.

2. Result/Findings

Based on the results of observations or observations, the results of the activity analysis are divided into several steps and stages, in this case briefly explained as follows:

In this activity indicator, children are invited to observe the environment around their school, children observe the plants around them. Like the rimbang tree plants that were previously planted with the children. Children observe the rimbang tree, then the teacher helps spark children's knowledge about what they are observing. Children are invited to pick fruits and flowers around them, children are given the freedom to choose and make choices of course have an impact on creativity, which flowers to pick and how to pick them. They are happy because they feel they have the space to be free to do activities outside and interact with the natural environment, besides that they also practice and hone fine motor skills, independence and creativity." The observation results show that 70% of students received the BSB (Developing Very Well) predicate, meaning that students have been able to choose and pick telang flowers independently and creatively. (Figure 2)

Children observe the nature around them



In this activity indicator, there is a stage of experimentation. After picking bayang flowers, children are invited to brew bayang flowers to make herbal drinks. This activity is dominant in fine motor skills, imagination and creativity. Everything is done according to the creativity of each child. The observation results showed that 36% of students received the BSB (Developing Very Well) predicate and 36% of students received the BSH (Developing as Expected) predicate, indicating that early childhood experiments make their creativity skills more honed. Educators do not help much, but direct, encourage and motivate children to remain enthusiastic about doing the experiments that are being made. (Figure 3)



Children experimenting with making drinks from bay flowers

3. Discussion

In this activity, children re-observe the surrounding environment and collect natural materials around them, such as pine cones, rocks, seeds. Children count and form letters and numbers using the natural materials they collect according to the creativity of each child. The observation results show that 40% of students received the BSB (Developing Very Well) predicate and 30% of students received the BSH (Developing as Expected) predicate. (Figure 4)



Figure 4: Children learn literacy and numeracy from natural materials around them.

Environment-based learning gives children the opportunity to explore and understand the world around them. By directly engaging in activities that involve natural elements, children can develop creativity, motor skills and scientific understanding early on. According to research, the use of nature-based media can support early childhood creativity. Implementation methods for environment-based learning are

1. Neighborhood Exploration: Inviting children to explore their surroundings, such as parks, gardens, or small forests, can boost their curiosity and creativity. This activity allows children to learn from first-hand experience and observe various natural phenomena.

2. Use of Natural Materials as Learning Media: Utilizing natural materials such as leaves, rocks, sand and water in art activities or science experiments can stimulate children's creativity and imagination. Studies show that mosaic activities with natural materials can increase the creativity of children aged 4-5 years.

3. Gardening Activities**:** Involving children in simple gardening activities, such as planting and caring for plants, can teach them about the life cycle of plants and the importance of caring for the environment. It can also improve fine motor skills and a sense of responsibility.

4. Project Based Learning**:** Developing environmentally-focused projects, such as creating a mini garden or recycling project, can encourage children to think creatively and work together in groups. This approach also helps children understand the concept of sustainability and the importance of protecting the environment.

The benefits of Environment Based Learning are:

- Increased Creativity**:** Interaction with the natural environment encourages children to think creatively in solving problems and creating something new. The use of natural materials in learning activities has been shown to improve early childhood creativity.

- Social Skills Development: Group activities in environmental exploration can improve children's social skills, such as cooperating, communicating and sharing with peers.

- Environmental Understanding: Children learn to appreciate and understand the importance of the environment, which can form a caring attitude towards nature from an early age. Environmental exploration in children's learning at PAUD institutions is an effort to bring children closer to their environment.

Fostering children's creativity depends on support from parents, teachers, and the surrounding environment. Here are some steps that can be taken to help create and develop creativity in early

childhood: understanding their thoughts and feelings, creating a safe environment where children feel free to express their creativity, and encouraging them to express their thoughts with confidence (Morinda Sari, 2015).

Those with a creative mindset tend to find solutions to problems with unique perspectives and approaches. The challenges posed by global competition can be overcome through creativity. Therefore, it is important to stimulate creative thinking skills from an early age, not just when one is an adult. This stimulation will be more effective if done through various supportive activities at an early age (Andriani & Rakimahwati, 2023). Stimulation of creative thinking skills should not only be done when someone is an adult. Stimulation will be more optimal if it starts at an early age through various supportive activities (Ummah, 2019).

Creativity is an important space that needs to be created for young children. By developing creativity, we can shape the various potentials within children and organize their psychological interactions. Children's development at this age is very important, and should be directed to include physical, intellectual, social, language and creativity aspects. This will build the right framework for their overall personality development (Mayar et al., 2022).

Early childhood creativity usually emerges when they play without restrictions and are able to express themselves freely. Over time, their creativity will grow with every movement they make, as children are active and energetic individuals. Creativity also involves organizing the various examples and information that children gain from experiences in school and outside the learning environment.

4. Conclusion

Developing early childhood creativity through the use of natural materials around us can open up opportunities for innovative ideas that may not have been realized in other activities. Thus, children can discover new ideas that they have never thought of before. They will be more free to be creative while getting closer to the environment, which in turn can foster a sense of love and concern for nature conservation. Based on the results of this study, it is recommended that early childhood education institutions be more active in utilizing natural materials in the learning process, in order to stimulate children's development, especially in the aspect of creativity.

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