

The Role of Teachers in Improving Early Childhood's Critical Thinking Abilities Through Creative Games at Indriya Luwuk Kindergarten

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to describe the role of teachers in implementing creative games and improving critical thinking skills of group A children at Indriya Luwuk Kindergarten. The research method used is descriptive qualitative research with data collection techniques through observation, interviews, and documentation. The research subjects consisted of teachers and group A children at Indriya Luwuk Kindergarten. The results of the study indicate that teachers act as facilitators, activity designers, guides, and observers in the implementation of creative games. The creative games implemented include stringing, stacking blocks, role-playing, making collages, and simple experiments tailored to the learning theme. This teacher's role has been proven to be able to improve children's critical thinking skills, which is characterized by increased courage to ask questions, express opinions, find solutions, and evaluate the work. The conclusion of this study is that the optimal role of teachers in implementing creative games has a positive impact on the development of critical thinking in early childhood

INTRODUCTION

Teachers hold a crucial position in the educational process, as they are the catalyst for a series of interrelated actions designed to foster student development. A teacher's role extends beyond teaching to foster positive behavioral changes appropriate to the student's developmental stage. Therefore, a teacher is required to possess strong determination and sincerity in carrying out their duties. A teacher's commitment will determine the quality of teaching and learning services and will also influence the success of shaping students' character and fostering better individuals. Therefore, an educator's commitment can be defined as an inner bond that drives them to consistently carry out their roles and responsibilities.

In practice, teachers fulfill multiple roles, including educator, instructor, mentor, trainer, assessor, and evaluator. Furthermore, they also serve as facilitators, motivators, role models, counselors, classroom managers, and learning activity planners. Each role a teacher plays contributes significantly to the development of students' knowledge, skills, and attitudes. The ultimate goal is to produce a generation that is intelligent, has character, and is imbued with good morals. Early childhood is often referred to as a crucial period for determining the future direction of a child's life. During this stage, education, family support, and a supportive environment can positively influence a child's overall development.

One important skill to develop from an early age is critical thinking. This ability helps children approach various situations or problems in an organized and logical manner. Critical thinking encompasses the skills of identifying problems, analyzing information in depth, and making careful assessments. This way of thinking requires sequential steps, supported by reliable evidence. By cultivating critical thinking, children will be better prepared to face life's increasingly complex challenges (Kusuma et al., 2023).

For young children, critical thinking can be introduced through activities that align with their concrete abilities. A simple definition of critical thinking in children is the ability to observe, analyze, evaluate, and make decisions based on logic and real-world experiences. This skill encompasses the habit of asking questions, seeking cause-and-effect relationships, and being able to justify opinions or decisions. Children typically enjoy asking "why" or "how" questions, gathering evidence to convince themselves, boldly expressing their opinions, and generating new ideas. Children who are trained in critical thinking will become accustomed to solving problems in a more structured manner. However, every child develops at a different pace, so the experiences they receive greatly influence their skill level (Sit et al., 2016).

LITERATURE REVIEW

The environment plays a major role in stimulating children's critical thinking skills. Interactions within the family, for example through books or educational games, provide the initial foundation for the development of curiosity. At school, teachers play a key role in designing challenging activities, encouraging discussion, and providing a space for children to express their opinions. Meanwhile, the community also contributes through additional

learning facilities such as libraries or children's activity centers (Naisa, 2023). To achieve these goals, teachers need to develop learning plans tailored to children's needs. Sensitive teachers will be able to recognize students' development and guide them toward critical growth (Karmila P. Lamadang, 2025).

From this explanation, it can be understood that critical thinking skills are essential for students. These abilities are essential for facing the challenges of the times, as they encompass creativity and problem-solving abilities. Teachers have a significant responsibility to foster these skills to ensure students' successful development. One way to do this is through creative play. Specifically designed play activities can foster children's imagination, physical activity, and critical thinking skills. Children are given the opportunity to explore freely, making play a fun learning medium. Creative play can encourage children to learn through play, as well as to express their ideas and feelings.

When implemented appropriately, creative play can stimulate creativity while supporting the development of other aspects of early childhood. With teacher support and a conducive environment, children's potential is more easily discovered. Play also creates an interactive learning environment, for example through block-building activities or simple experiments that stimulate curiosity. Through these activities, children learn to ask questions, identify problems, and develop solutions. This aligns with constructivist theory, which emphasizes that knowledge is built through direct experience with the surrounding environment.

Based on observations at Indriya Kindergarten in Luwuk, Banggai Regency, teachers face challenges in managing differences in student character. Some children are active and critical, while others are quieter and shyer. This situation impacts opportunities for class participation, as passive children tend to fall behind. Furthermore, there are differences in the speed at which they understand lessons, with some absorbing material quickly while others need more time. Seeing this phenomenon, researchers were interested in pursuing a research title "The Role of Teachers in Enhancing Critical Thinking Skills in Early Childhood through Creative Play."

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative method. A qualitative approach is understood as a research method that produces data in the form of descriptive descriptions, both written and spoken, from individuals, as well as observed behavior (Sanjani, 2020: 21). The chosen method was descriptive, namely research that aims to present an overview and explanation of the data obtained by the researcher. This data relates to the role of teachers in developing critical thinking skills in early childhood through the implementation of creative games. The researcher's participation in this study plays a crucial role. The researcher was present directly in the field as a human instrument tasked with determining the direction of the research, selecting informants deemed appropriate as sources of information, conducting the data collection process, assessing the quality of the data obtained, analyzing, interpreting, and drawing conclusions from the findings. Thus, the researcher's position in this study was placed as the primary

instrument, namely as a participant and data collector, while other instruments were used only as supporting tools.

RESULTS

The Role of Teachers in Implementing Creative Play at Indriya Luwuk Kindergarten

Based on observations and interviews, teachers at Indriya Luwuk Kindergarten play an active role as facilitators, activity designers, guides, observers, and creators of a conducive learning environment for implementing creative play. As facilitators, teachers provide tools, materials, and simple instructions that allow children to explore freely. This role is very dominant because teachers strive to ensure children are actively involved and feel comfortable while playing.

"The role of teachers in implementing creative play for group A at Indriya Luwuk Kindergarten is as facilitator, activity designer, and observer. Teachers create a conducive atmosphere, provide simple but open instructions, and guide children without limiting their creativity." (w/principal/3/6/25/wk/10.10)

As activity designers, teachers select and adapt types of creative play according to the learning theme, interests, and developmental level of the children. Games frequently used include building blocks, role-playing, and simple experiments. Teachers also consider the educational value and potential of play in fostering critical thinking skills.

Teachers are not only present to teach, but also tasked with accompanying children during play, providing necessary guidance, and assessing their progress. The teacher's presence creates a safe, comfortable, and supportive learning environment, allowing children to feel confident in trying new ideas without fear of making mistakes. This attitude contributes to enjoyable learning and supports the achievement of learning objectives through creative play activities.

"We regularly implement games such as building with blocks, playing with telephones from used materials, or playing with plasticine to shape flowers, fruit, or other forms. We prepare the tools and materials, provide a few examples, and then let the children get creative." (w/Gk/4/6/25/wk/10.15)

Research results show that teachers at Indriya Luwuk Kindergarten play an active role in implementing creative play through planning activities integrated with the learning theme, providing media and play equipment, providing guidance during activities, and providing direction and motivation that encourages children to explore and develop their ideas. Teachers act as facilitators, guides, and observers, ensuring that each game has educational value and is appropriate for the child's developmental level. Implementing this role has been proven to create a more lively, interactive, and comfortable learning environment for children. This encourages students to be more creative, motivated, and actively participate in each learning activity.

Research at Indriya Kindergarten in Luwuk shows that teacher involvement through the use of creative play is crucial in creating enjoyable and meaningful learning experiences for early childhood. In this context, teachers serve as facilitators, preparing various media, materials, and simple instructions,

so that children have ample opportunities to explore according to their imaginations. They also play the role of activity designers, adapting games to the learning theme, interests, and developmental level of the children. The creative games used, such as building blocks, role-playing, collage making, and simple experiments, were chosen for their educational value and ability to stimulate children's critical thinking skills. Furthermore, teachers act as guides and accompany children during play, providing motivation and stimulating new ideas through open-ended questions. Observers also play a role, recording children's engagement, social interactions, and creative work. These notes are then used as a basis for designing subsequent games to better suit the children's developmental needs. A safe, comfortable, and conducive learning environment encourages children to try new ideas without fear of making mistakes, resulting in a more interactive and productive learning atmosphere.

"We design games that align with the learning theme and are of interest to children. The games chosen are usually educational and involve creativity, such as collage making, role-playing, stringing beads, building blocks, and simple experiments. We consider the cognitive, motor, social, and emotional development of children." (w/Gk/10/6/25/wk/10.10)

The implementation of creative games by teachers at Indriya Luwuk Kindergarten has been proven to improve the critical thinking skills of group A children. Children become more confident in asking questions, expressing opinions, finding solutions, and evaluating their own work. With careful planning, appropriate questioning techniques, and consistent guidance, teachers have successfully made creative games an effective means of developing cognitive and social skills in early childhood.

The Role of Teachers in Improving Critical Thinking Skills of Group A of Indriya Luwuk Kindergarten

This research, conducted at Indriya Luwuk Kindergarten (TKN Indriya Luwuk), involved 17 students in Group A. The aim was to determine the role of teachers in developing children's critical thinking skills. Observations revealed that teachers played an active role through structured lesson planning, the use of challenging play methods, and the provision of open-ended questions to stimulate students' thinking. Activities included creative games, small group discussions, and simple experiments, designed to hone children's analytical and problem-solving skills.

"Teachers guide children to ask questions, express their opinions, and try various solutions when faced with challenges in games or activities. We don't immediately provide answers, but guide them to discover for themselves." (w/principal/3/6/25/wk/10.10)

Throughout the learning process, teachers consistently provided appropriate stimuli. They encouraged children to express their opinions, compare ideas, and draw their own conclusions. Children who received intensive guidance showed significant progress in asking questions and connecting information. The teacher's role was also evident in facilitating interactions between students, allowing children to learn from their peers. To foster children's critical thinking skills, a play-while-learning approach can be

used, as at an early age, children absorb learning better through fun and meaningful activities. This approach is combined with an integrative scientific and thematic approach.

"We provide games that require children to think, such as putting together puzzles without looking at examples or designing a road out of blocks for toy cars. Children learn to experiment until they find the right method." (w/Gk/4/6/25/wk/10.15)

Creating a safe and comfortable learning environment so that children feel free to express their opinions. We don't immediately condemn their answers, but instead encourage them to rethink and give them the opportunity to try again. This is crucial so they aren't afraid of making mistakes and try again.

"We often ask, 'What will happen if this happens?' or 'How can this stand up?' Questions like these encourage children to think and explore various possibilities." (w/Gk/10/6/25/wk/10.10)

Overall, the role of teachers at Indriya Luwuk Kindergarten in developing critical thinking skills in Group A children can be said to be effective. The approach used is able to motivate students to think more deeply and creatively. With careful planning, the right strategies, and positive interactions, teachers have succeeded in creating a learning environment that is conducive to the growth of critical thinking skills in early childhood.

DISCUSSION

The Role of Teachers in Implementing Creative Games for Group A at Indriya Luwuk Kindergarten

The research results show that teachers at Indriya Luwuk Kindergarten play a crucial role in implementing creative play in group A. These roles include facilitator, activity designer, guide, and observer. As facilitator, teachers provide various tools and materials such as blocks, plasticine, collage materials, and other play media. According to Mulyati (2019), early childhood education teachers must be able to facilitate meaningful learning experiences through enjoyable play.

Furthermore, teachers also play the role of activity designers, adapting creative play to the learning theme, children's interests, and their developmental stage. Rozana et al. (2025) state that selecting creative play relevant to children's themes and interests will increase engagement and enrich their learning experiences. In practice, teachers at Indriya Luwuk Kindergarten design games such as collage making, role-playing, stacking blocks, and conducting simple experiments, all aligned with the weekly curriculum.

As activity designers, teachers adapt play to the learning theme, children's interests, and their developmental stage. According to (Limbong et al. 2024) in the Early Childhood Creative Play Journal, games relevant to children's interests will increase their emotional and cognitive engagement.

The observer's role involves monitoring children's interactions, their involvement, and the products they produce during play. At Indriya Luwuk Kindergarten, these observations serve as evaluation materials to adjust game plans for subsequent activities. Teachers also record children's positive behavior during play to strengthen their self-confidence. These observations serve as

evaluation materials for planning subsequent activities, ensuring that the creative play implemented is more aligned with children's developmental needs. *The Role of Teachers in Improving Group A's Critical Thinking Skills at Indriya Luwuk Kindergarten*

The research results show that teachers at Indriya Luwuk Kindergarten play a crucial role in developing critical thinking skills in Group A children through creative and interactive activity-based learning. Teachers strive to create learning situations that encourage children to observe, ask questions, solve problems, and make simple decisions. This aligns with findings (Rofi'ah 2025), which state that early childhood education teachers act as facilitators and motivators, guiding children to explore ideas and develop critical thinking skills through structured play activities. Teachers also design learning activities that integrate problem-solving elements. For example, in a block-building game, children are asked to build a sturdy structure with a limited number of blocks, requiring them to try various strategies. According to (Yusup et al. 2025), educational games designed with specific challenges can stimulate children to think critically, evaluate their actions, and correct mistakes.

In their guiding role, teachers utilize questioning techniques to spark children's curiosity. This strategy aligns with (Kusuma et al. 2023), which emphasizes that open-ended questions from teachers can encourage children to think more deeply, compare information, and discover relationships between concepts.

Children's language skills should be developed continuously from an early age so they become accustomed to more focused thinking and have a broad vocabulary. This way, children can express their ideas without encountering significant obstacles. Speaking skills are part of language development and are a crucial aspect for early childhood development (Wulyani et al., 2022). Teachers also observe children's thought processes during activities, not just assessing the final results. (Kusuma et al., 2023) state that process observation is crucial for assessing the development of children's critical thinking skills, as it can reveal how they make decisions and overcome obstacles. At Indriya Kindergarten in Luwuk, observation results are used as reflection material to design subsequent activities so that challenges are always appropriate to the children's abilities.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on research conducted at Indriya Kindergarten, Luwuk, on teacher involvement in the use of creative play to improve critical thinking skills in Group A children, the following conclusions were drawn:

- Teachers have a significant influence in implementing creative play activities, including their roles as facilitators, activity designers, mentors, and observers. Teachers prepare appropriate learning resources, design games tailored to the theme and children's development, guide the game by asking thought-provoking questions, and record the level of participation and the results of children's work.
- The implementation of creative play has been shown to foster children's critical thinking skills, as evidenced by their increased confidence in asking

questions, expressing opinions, finding solutions, and assessing their own work.

- Teachers can regularly integrate creative play activities into daily learning, so that children not only gain play experiences but also practice problem-solving, decision-making, and develop social skills.
- Consistent teacher support and a well-organized play environment are key factors in fostering creativity and enhancing critical thinking skills in early childhood in Group A at Indriya Kindergarten, Luwuk.

FURTHER STUDY

- Teachers are expected to continue creating a variety of creative games that are challenging and aligned with the learning theme. Furthermore, the use of open-ended questions can be an effective way to train children to think critically.
- Schools can provide support by providing a wider variety of play facilities and regular training for teachers to familiarize themselves with using creative game-based learning methods and developing critical thinking skills.
- Parents are expected to continue efforts to foster children's creativity and critical thinking skills at home through simple activities, such as building games, storytelling, or fun small experiments.
- Future researchers are advised to conduct follow-up studies with a larger sample size, or examine the influence of other factors, such as family conditions and surrounding culture, on the development of critical thinking in early childhood.

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