

Teachers' Efforts to Improve Early Childhood Reading, Writing, and Arithmetic Skills at Palam State Kindergarten

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ABSTRACT

Early childhood education plays an essential role in supporting children's overall development, particularly in the cognitive domain. One of the fundamental abilities introduced during this stage is literacy and numeracy skills, commonly referred to as reading, writing, and counting (calistung). These skills should be introduced through learning activities that are appropriate for the developmental characteristics of young children, mainly through enjoyable and play-based learning experiences. This study aims to describe the efforts made by teachers to improve early literacy and numeracy skills of children at TK Negeri Palam. The research employed a qualitative approach using a descriptive method. Data were collected through classroom observations, interviews with teachers, and documentation of learning activities. The findings indicate that teachers play an important role in stimulating children's literacy and numeracy development by applying various creative learning strategies, such as singing, storytelling, educational games, and the use of attractive learning media. The media used include letter cards, number cards, illustrated storybooks, and concrete objects found in the children's surrounding environment. The implementation of play-based learning has proven effective in increasing children's interest and participation in learning activities. However, several challenges were also identified, including differences in children's learning abilities and limited learning support from the family environment. To address these challenges, teachers apply flexible teaching approaches, provide individual assistance when necessary, and establish collaboration with parents to support children's learning at home. Therefore, literacy and numeracy learning in early childhood can be carried out gradually, in a fun manner, and in accordance with children's developmental stages

INTRODUCTION

Early Childhood Education (PAUD) is a critically important and strategic stage of education in laying the foundation for children's development (Santrock, 2011; Susanto, 2011). During early childhood, children are in the "golden age" – a period when brain development occurs at a rapid pace and children are highly responsive to various forms of stimulation (Suyadi, 2014). Therefore, early childhood education must be optimally designed so that all aspects of a child's development can progress in a balanced manner, including cognitive development. One aspect of cognitive development that is a focus in early childhood education is literacy skills—specifically reading, writing, and arithmetic (Susanto, 2011). Literacy skills in early childhood are not interpreted as formal academic abilities, as in elementary school, but rather as an initial introduction to the concepts of letters, numbers, and symbols through activities that are enjoyable, meaningful, and appropriate for the child's developmental stage (Ministry of National Education, 2007). Literacy instruction in early childhood education must emphasize the process, not the outcome, and avoid pressure that could hinder the child's psychological development.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Teachers play a crucial role in enhancing early childhood literacy skills. Teachers are expected to possess strong pedagogical, professional, and social competencies, as well as good personal character, to design and implement creative and innovative learning experiences. Teachers must also understand the characteristics and needs of each child, as early childhood literacy skills develop at varying rates. Palam State Kindergarten is an early childhood education institution that strives to develop children's literacy and numeracy skills through various learning strategies. Based on initial observations, the literacy and numeracy skills of children at Palam State Kindergarten vary significantly. Some children are already able to recognize letters and numbers well, while others still face difficulties. This situation requires teachers to make various efforts to ensure that children's literacy and numeracy skills develop optimally. Based on this description, this study was conducted to thoroughly examine teachers' efforts to improve the literacy skills of early childhood students at Palam Public Kindergarten. This study is expected to provide a realistic picture of literacy teaching practices in the field and serve as a reference for early childhood education teachers in improving the quality of learning.

METHODOLOGY

This study employs a qualitative approach using descriptive methods. The qualitative approach was chosen because this study aims to gain an in-depth understanding of the phenomena occurring in the field, particularly regarding teachers' efforts to improve early childhood literacy skills. Descriptive methods were used to systematically and factually describe the conditions and processes of literacy instruction at Palam Public Kindergarten.

The research was conducted at Palam Public Kindergarten. The research subjects were classroom teachers and young children participating in learning activities at the kindergarten. The primary informants in this study were the classroom teachers, while supporting informants included the principal and learning documents.

Data collection methods included observation, interviews, and documentation. Observations were conducted to directly observe literacy and numeracy learning activities in the classroom, including methods, media, and interactions between teachers and children. In-depth interviews were conducted with teachers to obtain information regarding learning strategies, challenges faced, and solutions implemented to improve children's literacy and numeracy skills. Documentation was used to supplement research data, including Daily Lesson Plans (DLPs), photos of learning activities, and children's work samples.

Data analysis was conducted in three stages: data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions. Data reduction involved sorting data relevant to the research focus. Data presentation took the form of descriptive narratives, while conclusions were drawn based on the analyzed research findings. Data validity was ensured through triangulation of techniques and sources.

RESULTS

Initial Assessment of Children's Literacy and Numeracy Skills

Based on the results of initial observations, the literacy and numeracy skills of young children at Palam Public Kindergarten vary widely. Some children have already been able to recognize vowels and consonants, write simple letters, and count numbers from 1 to 10. However, there are also children who still have difficulty recognizing letters and numbers. These differences in ability are influenced by the children's backgrounds, family environments, and prior stimulation.

Teachers' Efforts to Improve Reading Skills

Teachers' efforts to improve children's reading skills are carried out through various fun activities. Teachers use play-based learning methods, such as letter card games, reading picture books, and singing the alphabet song. Teachers also help children become familiar with letters through their own names, so that children feel more connected to and interested in reading activities.

The use of engaging visual aids has proven effective in increasing children's interest in learning letters. Teachers do not force children to read fluently but instead provide stimulation gradually, in accordance with the children's abilities.

Teachers' Efforts to Improve Writing Skills

To improve writing skills, teachers begin with fine motor activities, such as drawing, coloring, and tracing lines. After that, children are introduced to simple letter-writing activities. Teachers provide examples and direct guidance to help children feel confident.

Teachers also use an individualized approach, especially with children who are struggling. Teachers offer encouragement and praise so that children do not feel pressured while learning to write.

Teachers' Efforts to Improve Numeracy Skills

Children's numeracy skills are developed through concrete and contextual activities. Teachers encourage children to count objects in their surroundings, such as the number of friends, toys, and items in the classroom. Counting games using number blocks and counting songs are also frequently used to spark children's interest.

Math instruction is conducted gradually and repeatedly so that children can understand number concepts well. Teachers avoid abstract instruction and place greater emphasis on children's hands-on experiences.

Supporting and Hindering Factors

Supporting factors in improving literacy skills include teacher competence, the availability of learning materials, and support from the school. Creative and patient teachers are able to create an enjoyable learning environment for children. Meanwhile, inhibiting factors include differences in children's abilities, a lack of parental support at home, and limited learning time. Therefore, cooperation between teachers and parents is essential to support the development of children's literacy skills.

The results of this study align with experts' views that literacy instruction for young children should be conducted in an enjoyable, gradual manner, and in accordance with children's developmental characteristics.

DISCUSSION

Based on an interview conducted with one of the teachers at Palam Public Kindergarten, it was learned that the process of teaching reading, writing, and arithmetic to young children is carried out using a fun approach tailored to the children's developmental stages. The teacher explained that while it is indeed important to introduce these foundational skills early on, the instruction is not rigid or academic in nature, as is the case at the elementary school level. Learning is focused more on the process of introduction through activities that are engaging for the children.

The teacher also mentioned that at Palam Public Kindergarten, the introduction to reading, writing, and arithmetic begins when children are around four to five years old. At that age, children are gradually introduced to letters, numbers, and symbols through various play-based activities. Learning activities are conducted in a fun way so that children remain comfortable throughout the learning process.

In the classroom, teachers use a variety of methods, such as singing, storytelling, and various educational games related to letters and numbers. Through these activities, children gradually learn letters, simple words, and numerical concepts. This play-based learning approach is considered more effective because it aligns with the characteristics of young children, who tend to be active and enjoy exploring.

In addition to teaching methods, the use of media is also a crucial component of the learning process. The teacher explains that various media are used to help children understand the material more easily, such as letter cards, number cards, picture storybooks, and objects found in the surrounding environment. Concrete and engaging media can enhance children's interest in learning and make learning activities more interactive.

Nevertheless, the teacher noted that there are still several challenges encountered in the learning process. One of the most common challenges is the variation in ability levels among the children. Some children can quickly grasp the material presented, while others need more time to learn letters and numbers.

To address this situation, the teacher strives to provide a learning approach tailored to each child's abilities. Children who are struggling are given more intensive guidance and support so they can participate effectively in learning activities. Additionally, the teacher maintains communication with parents to ensure that the learning stimulation provided at school can be continued at home, thereby optimizing the child's skill development.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the research findings, it can be concluded that teachers at Palam Public Kindergarten have effectively improved young children's literacy skills through the use of play-based methods, engaging learning materials, individualized approaches, and the integration of these skills into daily activities. These efforts have gradually enhanced the children's interest and literacy skills without imposing academic pressure.

FURTHER STUDY

Based on the research findings, the researcher offers the following recommendations:

1. Teachers are encouraged to continue enhancing creativity and innovation in literacy instruction.
2. The school should provide adequate learning facilities and resources to support literacy activities.
3. Parents are encouraged to collaborate with teachers in stimulating children's literacy skills at home.
4. Future research could examine specific learning methods in greater depth and through quantitative analysis.

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