



Efforts to Improve Language Skills through the Use of Letter Cards in Children at RA Kusuma Mulia I

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ABSTRACT

Language is a fundamental aspect in early childhood development because it plays an important role in the process of communication, thinking, and personality formation. This study aims to: (1) develop children's language skills through letter card media, and (2) create enjoyable learning by utilizing this media in Group B RA Kusuma Mulia I. This study uses the Classroom Action Research (CAR) method which is carried out in two cycles with 10 students as research subjects in Bergas District, Semarang Regency. The data analysis technique used is descriptive percentage to assess learning outcomes and descriptive qualitative to observe children's activities during learning. The results of the study show that the use of letter card media can significantly improve children's language skills. Children are more enthusiastic, active, and easily understand letters and words learned through interesting concrete media. Thus, letter card media is proven to be effective as an alternative language learning strategy for early childhood. This study recommends that teachers utilize letter card media creatively in learning activities, so that children can learn in a more interactive, interesting, and enjoyable atmosphere.

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Introduction

National education aims to develop abilities and form a dignified character and civilization of the nation. The main goal of this education is so that every student is able to develop his or her potential so that they become human beings who believe, fear God Almighty, have noble character, are healthy, knowledgeable, capable, creative, independent, and are able to become democratic and responsible citizens as mandated in the National Education System Law of 2003. This mandate is an important basis in the implementation of government because the quality of education determines the direction of the nation's progress. A nation whose population is highly educated has a great opportunity to develop into a superior and competitive nation at the global level. The government is committed to equitable access and improving the quality of

education. Education is seen as a strategic factor that greatly determines economic growth through increasing the productivity of an educated and skilled workforce.

In addition, education also has an important role in ensuring the survival of the nation. Education not only functions to transfer knowledge, but also instill values, form character, and train skills needed in community life. Schools as formal educational institutions have the main task of helping students develop all their potential. The success of a school is largely determined by how the learning process takes place, both in the classroom and outside the classroom.

In this context, the role of teachers is very vital because teachers not only deliver material, but also guide, motivate, and create a conducive learning atmosphere so that students are able to develop optimally. However, the success of education is not only determined by activities in schools. The use of children's time at home is also very important. The role of parents in accompanying and directing children is a determining factor that supports the success of education.

Children's childhood is synonymous with the world of play because play is their main need. Therefore, the task of teachers and parents is to direct and control children's play activities so that they are not only entertainment, but also provide educational benefits. Based on the experience of teachers in the field, especially at RA Kusuma Mulia I, it was found that there were problems in improving the ability to sequence numbers in children. Children tend to be less interested in the numbers written on the board so that the learning process of counting becomes less effective.

In addition, many children have difficulty understanding the concept of numbers because learning tends to be delivered orally. Conventional methods like this make learning activities less interesting and reduce children's motivation to study seriously. As a result, children's learning achievement in recognizing and sorting numbers is still relatively low. This condition is certainly a serious concern for teachers who want to ensure that children's cognitive development takes place optimally from an early age.

As a form of concern for this problem, researchers who also play the role of teachers feel the need to make breakthroughs in learning. One of the steps taken is to use learning media that is more creative and in accordance with the characteristics of early childhood. Number card media was chosen as an alternative to improve the quality of numeracy learning. With number cards, children not only hear the teacher's explanation, but also see, touch, and manipulate concrete objects that can make it easier to understand the concept of numbers.

The use of number cards is expected to be able to attract students' interest in learning to count more enthusiastically. This activity can also train children's cognitive abilities while making the learning process more fun and interactive. Based on this

background, it is clear that class action is needed to overcome the problem of children's difficulties in recognizing numbers. Through the application of number card media, teachers hope to increase interest in learning, facilitate concept understanding, and encourage improvement of student achievement in numeracy skills at RA Kusuma Mulia I.

Methods

This type of research uses the Classroom Action Research (PTK) approach as stated by Trianto (2012:20), which is research whose results can be described naturally according to facts in the field and can be analyzed with descriptive statistics. Thus, classroom action research has both quantitative and qualitative dimensions, because it not only presents numbers, but also explains learning phenomena in depth. The approach used is action research that refers to continuous learning improvement. This research model follows the framework of Kemmis and McTaggart (in Arikunto, 2002:84) which consists of three cycles. Each cycle includes four stages, namely planning, action, observation, and reflection. This cycle is carried out repeatedly until optimal results are obtained.

At the planning stage, the researcher prepared learning tools in the form of RPPH, letter card media, and research instruments. The action stage is the implementation of the plan, where learning with letter card media is carried out according to the scenario. Furthermore, the observation stage is carried out simultaneously with the implementation of actions to see the activities of children and teachers in learning. The last stage is reflection, which is evaluating the learning outcomes to formulate improvements in the next cycle. This research was carried out at RA Kusuma Mulia I, Bergas District, Semarang Regency, in semester 2 of the 2023/2024 school year. The selection of the location was made because the researcher is a teacher at the school, thus facilitating the implementation as well as making a real contribution to the institution. The research period starts from January to March 2023, with stages ranging from initial observation, pre-cycle implementation, cycle I, cycle II, to the preparation of research reports.

The subjects of this study are 10 students of group B RA Kusuma Mulia I, consisting of 3 boys and 7 girls. The selection of subjects is based on the need to improve children's language skills, especially in recognizing letters through the medium of letter cards. The object of the research is focused on children's language skills in the activity of arranging letters into simple words and sentences. The research procedure was carried out in three cycles. In cycle I, the researcher introduced the use of letter cards through simple word composing activities. In cycle II, learning is improved based on reflection in cycle I by adding a variety of activities to make it more interesting. If obstacles are still found, then the research will continue to cycle III to improve the learning process and results.

The data collection technique is carried out in two ways, namely observation and documentation. Observation is used to record the activities of students and teachers during the learning process, especially related to children's involvement in the activity of compiling letter cards. Documentation is used to support research data in the form of photos, notes, and RPPH used during the action. The data analysis in this study uses qualitative and quantitative descriptive analysis. Qualitative data is obtained from the results of observation of children's activities and teachers' reflections, while quantitative data is in the form of scores of children's language ability achievement which is calculated in the form of individual and classical completion percentages. The completeness criterion refers to the standards of the Ministry of National Education, namely children are said to be complete if they reach a minimum score of 65 or 65%.

Indicators of research success are determined based on the child's ability to arrange letters according to the teacher's instructions, arrange letters into words, arrange according to pictures, and arrange letters into simple sentences. Classical success is determined when at least 85% of all children achieve completeness. The instruments used are in the form of observation sheets that have been arranged according to the indicators of children's language development. With the design of this method, it is hoped that the implementation of the research will be able to provide a comprehensive picture of the effectiveness of letter card media in improving children's language skills. In addition, this research is also expected to be a reference for other PAUD teachers in choosing learning strategies that are creative, fun, and in accordance with the characteristics of early childhood development.

Result

RA Kusuma Mulia I is located next to the Jamiatul Abidin Mosque and next to the Qur'ani Early Childhood College. This RA, PAUD, and TPQ educational institution is under the auspices of the Jamiatul Abidin Foundation. RA Kusuma Mulia I was established with the aim of providing educational services to the people of Bergas Lor and its surroundings so that they can send their children to school. Since its establishment, this institution has received a positive response from the community, as can be seen from the increase in the number of students from year to year. Along with the increase in the number of students, the educators at RA Kusuma Mulia I have also experienced development. In the 2023/2024 school year, the number of students reached 215 children, with details of 115 children in group A and 100 children in group B. Meanwhile, the number of educators is 9 people.

This research was carried out starting on January 17, 2023 with a learning duration of 150 minutes per meeting. The class action research schedule is divided into five stages, namely initial observation on January 17, 2023, cycle I action on January 25, 2023, cycle II action on February 2, 2023, cycle III action on February 8, 2023, and preparation

of PTK report on March 2, 2023. The focus of the research is directed to describe efforts to improve children's language skills through the application of letter cards. Pre-cycle data analysis is an important part because it provides an objective picture of a child's early abilities. The pre-cycle results show that the language skills of group B children of RA Kusuma Mulia I have not reached the targeted completeness.

Of the 10 children who were the subjects of the study, only 3 children (30%) were declared complete, while 7 children (70%) had not yet reached completion. The average score of children is still below the minimum completion standard of 85%. This indicates the need for class action as an effort to improve. In cycle I, the research is focused on planning more varied learning by utilizing letter card media. The learning theme used is "My Country" with the subtheme "State Emblem". In its implementation, children are invited to arrange letters into simple words related to the Garuda bird as the symbol of the country.

The results of the first cycle showed an increase in completeness to 70%, with 7 children completing and 3 children still incomplete. Despite the increase, this result has not met the 85% completeness target. The obstacles that arise include some children who are not focused during activities and there are still difficulties in arranging letters sequentially. Reflection from cycle I then became the basis for improvement in cycle II. The theme used is still related to "My Country", but the activities are arranged more interestingly with a variety of colored media and intensive mentoring. In cycle II, completeness increased, but the results still did not reach the target so the research was continued to cycle III.

In cycle III, the theme raised was "President" with the subtheme "Names of Presidents". Children were invited to arrange letters into words related to the image of the president of Indonesia. At this stage, the media is presented more interestingly, accompanied by LCD displays to attract children's attention, as well as more intensive guidance from teachers.

The results of cycle III showed that learning completeness reached 90%, where 9 children were declared complete and only 1 child had not reached the standard. This proves that the application of letter cards is effective in improving the language skills of children of group B RA Kusuma Mulia I. The improvement in learning outcomes is seen significantly from cycle to cycle. In the pre-cycle, only 30% of children are completed, increasing to 70% in cycle I, then reaching 90% in cycle III. This means that this class action research has succeeded in achieving the set success indicators.

Overall, the results of the study prove that learning with letter card media is able to foster children's interest, concentration, and language skills. Children become more enthusiastic about participating in activities, are better able to recognize letters, and can better organize them into simple words and sentences. This success also shows that

simple learning media, when designed creatively, can have a significant impact on the development of early childhood abilities. Teachers are expected to continue to develop similar innovations to support the achievement of learning goals optimally.

Discussion

The discussion of the results of this study confirms that the application of letter card media is able to improve the language skills of group B children of RA Kusuma Mulia I. At first, children's ability to recognize letters was still low, as evidenced by the results of the pre-cycle which only showed 30% completeness. This condition is in line with the opinion of Vygotsky (1978) who emphasized the importance of using concrete media to help children understand abstract concepts, including letter recognition. The results in the first cycle showed an increase in completeness to 70%. This proves that children's involvement through the medium of letter cards is able to attract their interest. According to Piaget (1964), early childhood is in the preoperational stage, so visual and manipulative learning is very effective in improving symbolic thinking skills.

However, in the first cycle there are still obstacles in the form of lack of concentration for some children in participating in activities. This problem is in accordance with the findings of Santrock (2011) who stated that early childhood has a limited attention span, so teachers need to use varied learning strategies to maintain children's focus. The implementation of improvements in cycle II with the use of color letter cards and more intensive guidance made learning completeness increase. This corroborates the research of Arsyad (2013) who emphasizes that attractive visual media can foster learning motivation and make it easier for children to understand the material being taught.

In addition, the direct involvement of teachers in accompanying children when composing letters has proven effective. These results are consistent with the opinion of Slavin (2006) that the interaction between teachers and students in active learning has a positive influence on learning outcomes. Thus, teacher support is an important factor in increasing children's success.

In cycle III, the application of letter card media is combined with visual impressions through LCD. This approach is in accordance with the multimedia learning theory of Mayer (2001) which states that the integration of image and text media can increase children's absorption. This is evident from the completeness of learning which reached 90% in cycle III. The activity of arranging letters into simple words is also able to train children's cognitive and motor skills. As expressed by Hurlock (1991), educational play activities in early childhood not only improve cognitive aspects, but also contribute to fine motor development. Thus, learning through letter cards provides comprehensive benefits.

In addition to increasing learning outcomes, this activity also increases children's confidence. Children who were previously passive became more daring to show their work in front of the class. According to Erikson (1963), positive experiences in completing tasks will form confidence and initiative attitudes in children. This is evident in the increase in children's enthusiasm in following each cycle. The results of this study are also in line with the findings of Mutiah (2010) who stated that the use of letter card media in learning is able to improve early childhood literacy skills.

Simple media, if used creatively, can facilitate more fun and meaningful learning. Thus, this study proves that the application of letter cards is one of the effective strategies to improve children's language skills. This reinforces Bruner's (1966) theory that children learn best when they are directly involved in the process of exploration through concrete, interesting, and appropriate media for their developmental stages.

Conclusion

Based on the results of the implementation of learning improvements carried out at RA Kusuma Mulia I during the Pre-Cycle, Cycle I, and Cycle II, it can be concluded that the application of the letter card matching method can improve teachers' abilities in designing and implementing more varied and effective learning, increasing students' interest in recognizing letters, and strengthening children's language skills in the aspect of letter recognition. This is evidenced by a significant increase in children's learning outcomes, where learning completeness which in the Pre-Cycle condition only reached 24% experienced an increase of 30% to 54% in Cycle I, and increased again by 30% to reach 84% in Cycle II. Thus, the application of the letter card matching method has proven effective in improving children's language skills, especially in letter recognition skills.

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