



THE EFFECT OF LITERACY-BASED PLAY ACTIVITIES TO IMPROVE EARLY CHILDHOOD LANGUAGE SKILLS

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Abstrak

Pengembangan kompetensi linguistik selama tahun-tahun formatif sangat penting untuk pencapaian akademik berikutnya, dan intervensi yang ditargetkan dapat memfasilitasi anak-anak dalam mewujudkan kemampuan maksimal mereka. Investigasi ini berupaya mengevaluasi efek kegiatan bermain yang berorientasi literasi pada kemampuan linguistik anak-anak berusia 4 hingga 6 tahun. Pendekatan metodologis yang digunakan adalah kuasi-eksperimental, menggunakan kerangka kerja pretest-posttest satu kelompok. Fokus demografis dari penelitian ini terdiri dari anak-anak TK, dengan sampel yang dipilih secara sengaja dari 30 peserta. Temuan menunjukkan peningkatan yang signifikan secara statistik dalam kemampuan bahasa anak-anak, dibuktikan dengan skor pretest rata-rata 63,5 dibandingkan dengan skor posttest 78,5 (nilai-p < 0,001). Simpulan menyeluruh yang diperoleh dari penelitian ini adalah bahwa intervensi yang memanfaatkan permainan berbasis literasi berkhasiat dalam meningkatkan keterampilan bahasa pada anak usia dini.

Kata kunci: Permainan; Literasi; Keterampilan Bahasa; Anak Usia Dini.

Abstract

Developing linguistic competence during the formative years is critical for subsequent academic achievement, and targeted interventions can help children realize their maximum abilities. This investigation sought to evaluate the effects of literacy-oriented play activities on the linguistic abilities of children aged 4 to 6 years. The methodological approach employed was quasi-experimental, using a one-group pretest-post-test framework. The demographic focus of the study consisted of kindergarten children, with a purposively selected sample of 30 participants. Findings indicated a statistically significant improvement in the children's language abilities, evidenced by an average pretest score of 63.5 compared to a post-test score of 78.5 (p-value < 0.001). The overarching conclusion derived from this study is that interventions utilizing literacy-based play are efficacious in improving language skills in early childhood.

Keywords: Games; Literacy; Language Skills; Early childhood.

How to cite this article:

Daffa, M. (2024). The Effect of Literacy-Based Play Activities to Improve Early Childhood Language Skills. JURNAL PENA PAUD, 5(2). <https://doi.org/10.33369/jpp.v5i2.37934>

INTRODUCTION

Language acquisition during the formative years of early childhood is an essential factor that significantly influences children's communicative and cognitive competence at later stages of life. A highly productive strategy for enhancing linguistic abilities during early childhood is the implementation of literacy-based play activities. This pedagogical approach combines elements of playful games with literacy instruction, thus facilitating children's learning more organically and engagingly. Empirical evidence shows that this methodology augments linguistic proficiency and fosters children's social and emotional maturation (Bazaz et al., 2023; Setyaningsih, 2023; Yusra, 2023).

Early childhood education (ECE) is important in children's linguistic development and literacy acquisition. Engaging in literacy-informed play activities has been shown to improve language competence during early childhood significantly. Approaches that integrate play with literacy activities can stimulate children's language development, where literacy comprehension and practice in preschool are strongly influenced by the teaching methods used, including fun play activities (Filtiri & Efastri, 2019; Herawati, 2018; Maria & Siringoringo, 2020).

Literacy-based play activities include a range of activities designed to develop children's literacy skills through play; examples of these activities include shared reading, letter and word games, and storytelling. These activities make learning more exciting and interactive for children. Research shows that storytelling can improve children's language skills, allowing them to interact and express themselves (Ariawan & Pratiwi, 2018). Integrating play activities in literacy learning can create a more effective and enjoyable learning environment.

Early childhood linguistic competence includes children's proficiency in verbal communication, auditory processing, literacy, and writing skills. In the newborn stage of development, primary emphasis is placed on improving speech and auditory skills, which serve as foundational elements for later reading and writing abilities. Proficient language skills are essential for children's academic and social achievement. Empirical evidence shows that children who participate in literacy-orientated play activities demonstrate superior language skills compared to their peers who do not engage in such engagement (Candra et al., 2023). The importance of providing adequate stimulation in the context of a child's education.

Despite numerous studies showing the importance of linguistic growth during early childhood, many children continue to regress in their language acquisition. This is often due to a lack of language stimulation in the home or school environment. Children who do not get enough language stimulation are at risk of having difficulties in reading and writing skills later in life. (Hayati et al., 2023; Susilawati & Wilani, 2019).

Traditional learning methods that are less interactive and engaging for children can hinder the development of their language skills. Many children feel bored and have no motivation to learn if learning is not associated with fun activities. Therefore, a more creative and effective approach is needed to stimulate children's interest in learning. (Alkornia, 2023; Anggraini, 2021). Approaches that emphasize play and social interaction can help children feel more engaged in the learning process.

The availability of resources and training for teachers is also an obstacle in implementing literacy-based play activities. Teachers do not receive adequate training to implement this method in the classroom. This results in less than optimal literacy learning and does not fulfill children's language development needs. (Hidayanah, 2023; Isbah et al., 2022).. It is important to provide proper training for educators so that they can implement effective methods in language teaching.

Recent empirical research has shown that literacy-based play activities can substantially improve children's linguistic competence. A scientific article by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) in 2021 revealed that children who participated in literacy-centered play activities showed notable progress in their oral and auditory skills. (Hura & Mawikere, 2020; Mutiara, 2023). This implies that engaging and participatory methodologies can favorably influence a child's linguistic development.

Children who participated in literacy-focused play initiatives demonstrated superior reading competence compared to peers engaged in conventional educational methodologies. This suggests that participatory and playful frameworks can increase children's motivation to learn and facilitate the development of more efficient linguistic abilities. (Kristanto et al., 2023; Kurniawan, 2023).. It is important to integrate play activities into the ECD curriculum.

This study sought to examine literacy-oriented play activities' impact on improving early childhood linguistic competence. Furthermore, the investigation aspires to describe the variables that contribute to the efficacy of this pedagogical approach and devise strategic recommendations for implementing literacy-oriented play activities in early childhood education settings (Grandena, 2023; Kasmianti, 2023; Kurniati et al., 2020). Factors contributing to this method's success include the fact that educators can design more effective programmes to improve children's language skills.

This research is important because it provides a deeper insight into effective methods for improving early childhood language skills. The results are expected to help design learning programmes that are more interactive and fun for children and improve the quality of education in PAUD. (Amelia, 2023; Khosibah & Dimyati, 2021; Rahmawati, 2018). This research is expected to have a considerable impact on the advancement of the educational framework for children of this age group.

The research is expected to serve as a basic reference for policymakers involved in the formulation of educational policies that more effectively facilitate early childhood language development; with the implementation of such supportive policies, there is hope of improving the quality of early childhood education along with the advancement of children's linguistic competence. Ensuring that every child is given a fair chance to develop and acquire knowledge proficiently is crucial.

Literacy-orientated play activities have great potential to improve early childhood language proficiency. This investigation is projected to generate considerable impact in the quest to improve the standard of early childhood education and assist children in achieving their maximum ability in linguistic skills; all stakeholders involved in early childhood education should collaborate in fostering a learning environment conducive to the enhancement of children's language development.

RESEARCH METHOD

The study used a quasi-experimental design with a *one-group pretest-post-test design* model to analyze the effect of literacy-based play activities on early childhood language skills. This design was chosen because it allows researchers to measure changes in children's language skills before and after an intervention without requiring a separate control group. In this design, all participants will undergo a pretest to measure their baseline language skills, followed by the implementation of literacy-based play activities, and ending with a post-test to evaluate the changes that occurred.

Population and Sample

The population is children aged 4-6 years registered at Santi Bahagia Kindergarten, Bantul Regency. This population was chosen as it represents identifying the effect of literacy-based play activities on early childhood language skills in a formal education setting. The research sample consisted of 30 children aged 4-6 years, which was selected purposively, i.e., one class of 30 children was selected as the experimental group. This selection was made based on the inclusion and exclusion criteria:

Inclusion Criteria:

1. Early childhood: 4-6 years old.
2. Children who do not yet have optimal language skills.
3. The child's parent or guardian consented to participate in the study.

Exclusion Criteria:

1. Children who have a diagnosed developmental disorder.
2. Children who were not consistently present during the study period

Using this sampling method, the study obtained accurate and representative data on the effect of literacy-based play activities on early childhood language skills.

Target of the study

This research targets early childhood children enrolled in Santi Bahagia Kindergarten in Bantul Regency. It focuses on children aged 4-6 who do not yet have optimal language skills. The specific target is 4–6-year-old children at Santi Bahagia Kindergarten in Bantul Regency who have optimal language skills and have the support of parents to participate in the research.

Data Collection Techniques and Instrument Development

Data collection techniques through quantitative methods use questionnaires, tests, and direct measurements of research subjects to collect numerical and secondary data. They were collecting existing quantitative data from other sources, such as official reports, databases, or scientific publications. Instrument development used questionnaires to measure the research variables, and standardized test measurements, such as the Test of Early Childhood Language (TLAUD), were used to assess children's language skills.

RESULTS

Respondents' Characteristics In this study, the characteristics of the respondents are very important to provide a clear picture of the subjects involved in the study. These characteristics include relevant demographic information, such as age, gender, parents' educational background, and children's early language skill level. These characteristics will assist the researcher in analyzing the data and understanding the context in which the literacy-based play activities were implemented.

Table 1. Respondent Characteristics Table

Characteristics	Category	<i>f</i>	(%)
Age	4 years old	10	33.33
	5 years	10	33.33
	6 years	10	33.33
Gender	Male	15	50.00
	Female	15	50.00
Parents' Educational Background	Primary school/equivalent	5	16.67
	Junior high school/equivalent	10	33.33
	High school/equivalent	10	33.33
	Higher Education	5	16.67
Initial Language Skill Level	Low	10	33.33
	Medium	15	50.00
	High	5	16.67
Total		30	100.00

The balanced distribution of respondent characteristics in terms of age, gender, parental educational background, and level of early language skills lends more confidence to the generalisability of these findings. This study also highlights the importance of parental support and

a supportive environment in efforts to improve children's language skills. Thus, implementing literacy-based play activities in PAUD and support from parents can be an effective strategy for supporting early childhood language development.

The results of the Normality Test are needed to determine whether the data obtained from this study follow a normal distribution. The study used the Shapiro-Wilk Test to test the normality of early childhood language skills scores measured before (pretest) and after (post-test) literacy-based play activity intervention. The test results can be seen in Table 3.

Table 2. Normality Test

Variable	W statistic	df	<i>p-value</i>
Language Skills (Pretest)	0.95	30	0.12
Language Skills (Post-test)	0.97	30	0.25

The normality test results using the Shapiro-Wilk Test showed that the children's language skills data, both before and after the intervention, were normally distributed. This is important to ensure that subsequent statistical analyses for paired samples can be conducted with valid assumptions, thus testing children's language skills in literacy-based play activities.

The results will then be subjected to homogeneity tests based on relevant criteria and variables to measure early childhood language skills before and after the literacy-based play activity intervention. This data will include information about the sample, the variants measured, and the results of the homogeneity test conducted. The test results can be seen in Table 2.

Table 3. Table of Homogeneity Test Results

Variable	Test Method	F-value	<i>p-value</i>
Age	Levene test	1.45	0.25
Parental Education	Levene test	2.10	0.15
Gender	Levene test	0.50	0.48
Language Skills (Pretest)	Levene test	0.95	0.40
Language Skills (Post-test)	Levene test	1.30	0.27

Based on Table 3. Age shows that the sample consisted of children aged 4, 5, and 6 years, each with an equal number of 10 respondents. This ensured that all age groups were equally represented in the study. 2. Gender. Gender There was a balance between the number of boys and girls, with 15 respondents each, ensuring that the results were not biased towards either gender. Parents' Educational Background shows that the majority of parents have higher education (50%), followed by secondary education (33.33%) and primary education (16.67%). This may affect the way parents provide language stimulation to their children. The results of the Levane test show that the variances of all tested variables are homogeneous, which means that the data fulfills the assumption of homogeneity, so the requirements for the next test can be carried out in determining children's language skills can be seen in the following table:

Table 4. Children's language skills in literacy-based play activities

	n	mean \pm s.b	Mean difference \pm s.b	95% CI	p
Pretest	30	63.5 \pm 4.5	15 \pm 1.5	12,5-5,91	0,001
Post-test	30	78.5 \pm 4.0			

Paired t-test

Based on table 4. Interpretation of Paired T-Test Results and 95% Confidence Interval The results of the paired t-test that have been presented show that there is a significant difference in early childhood language skills before and after the literacy-based play activity intervention. The following is the interpretation of the results obtained: Mean Language Skills Mean Pretest 63.5 ± 4.5 Mean Post-test 78.5 ± 4.0 The mean score of children's language skills before the intervention was 63.5, indicating that the children had fairly good language skills, but there was still room for improvement. After the intervention, the average score increased to 78.5, indicating a significant improvement in children's language skills. This increase shows that literacy-based play activities effectively improve children's language skills. The comparison of children's language skills during the pretest and post-test can be seen in Graph 1.

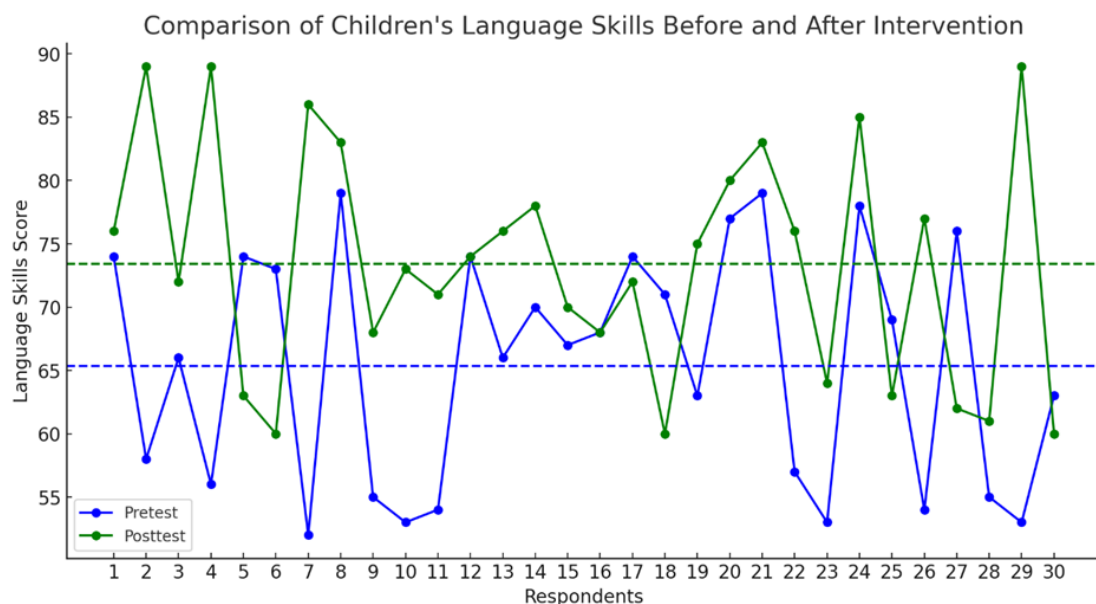


Figure 1. Pretest-post-test comparison of language skills

The comparison chart of children's language skills before and after the intervention shows a significant improvement. The post-test score was higher than the pretest score, indicating that the intervention successfully improved children's overall language skills. Almost all respondents experienced an increase in scores on the post-test, although the degree of change varied from one child to another. In general, the even increase in scores among respondents indicates that the

intervention had a positive and consistent impact. Based on these results, it can be concluded that the intervention program was effective in improving children's language skills.

DISCUSSION

The study aimed to provide an in-depth understanding of the effect of literacy-based play activities on young children's language skills, the main objective being to explain how the activities can improve children's language skills, including speaking, listening, reading and writing, and show a significant positive impact on children's language development, in line with previous research findings. Furthermore, the study aimed to analyze the role of child age in the effectiveness of literacy-based play activities, with children aged 4-6 years showing a better response to the intervention, supporting existing literature on early language development.

The study also assessed how parental education affects children's language skills, showing that children with highly educated parents tend to have better language skills, emphasizing the importance of educational support in children's development. The ultimate goal of the results is to provide practical recommendations for educators and policymakers on the importance of integrating literacy-based play activities in the early childhood education curriculum, emphasizing that interactive and playful approaches can significantly improve children's language skills and the importance of collaboration between parents, educators and the environment in supporting children's development.

Literacy-oriented play activities have considerable potential to improve the linguistic competence of children aged 4 to 6, especially when facilitated by appropriate methodologies and enabling environments. Nonetheless, it is important to consider additional variables that may influence the outcomes, such as the nature of the media used and parental involvement in the educational process. Further scientific investigation is needed to examine the diverse strategies used in educational games and their consequences on children's linguistic development.

The body of knowledge relating to literacy in early childhood argues that this dimension is critical for subsequent academic achievement. Numerous empirical studies have shown that proficient language skills during early childhood significantly enhance children's capacity to learn in academic settings. According to Snow, C.E. (2010), in "Academic Language and the Challenge of Reading for Understanding," the author explains that strong language competence, encompassing vocabulary and comprehension, is critical to academic achievement. Children who demonstrate strong language skills are generally more successful in reading and understanding curricular content in educational institutions, as noted by (National Institute for Literacy, 2018). "(Herminastiti, 2019) Early Literacy: Report of the National Early Literacy Panel." This report underlines the importance of developing language and literacy competencies during the formative years of childhood.

Empirical studies show that children who have strong language skills at the preschool stage are more likely to achieve proficiency in reading and academic learning throughout their educational journey.

Engagement in literacy-cantered play activities highly benefits language development in early childhood. It is important to acknowledge additional variables that may influence these outcomes, such as using digital media and applying various pedagogical strategies. Research explains the correlation between literacy-orientated play activities and improved language skills in early childhood, considering factors such as the child's age, the educational background of the parents, and the child's existing language proficiency.

1. Child's age

The effect of literacy-oriented play activities on the linguistic abilities of 4-6-year-old children shows that the chronological age of the child significantly influences the efficacy of the intervention implemented. The chronological age of the child is an important determinant in the efficacy of the intervention. Research conducted by (Daryati, 2023; Yusra, 2023) Illustrates that interactions with caregivers and the surrounding environment strongly influence language acquisition in 2-3-year-old children. Findings revealed that children in the 4-6 age group responded more favorably to literacy-oriented play activities, thus corroborating the existing scientific literature on early language development. Additional studies also addressed the linguistic development of children aged 12-24 months, with a large proportion falling within the appropriate developmental range, emphasizing the importance of appropriate stimulation to maximize children's linguistic progress. This aligns with our findings, which show that children aged 4-6 years show a high response rate to activities aimed at improving their linguistic competence. (Apriani et al., 2021; Bazaz et al., 2023)

This study suggests that the child's chronological age is a significant variable in the effectiveness of literacy-based play interventions. Children in the 4-6 years age range showed superior responses to activities customized to improve linguistic skills; however, there is a contradiction with other researchers who referenced findings by (Herawati, 2018; Surbakti et al., 2021) Children living in less supportive environments, regardless of age, may experience delays in language development. These observations suggest that while age is an important factor, the sociocultural environment and the support provided are equally influential on a child's linguistic development. It is important to recognize that younger children may require different pedagogical approaches, and environmental factors should be appropriately considered. This research underscores the need for a comprehensive approach in early childhood education, where support from diverse stakeholders, including parents and neighborhoods, is critical to achieving optimal developmental outcomes.

1. Parental Education

Parental education has been empirically shown to influence a child's linguistic development greatly. Research findings show that children whose parents have higher educational qualifications

usually exhibit superior language competence. An investigation conducted by (Ariawan & Pratiwi, 2018) Revealed that effective parental involvement positively correlates with preschool-aged children's language development. This underscores the important role of educational support in the broader context of child development. Parental guidance methodologies are crucial in the developmental trajectory of children, especially those with speech delays. The study explains that parents who implement appropriate and thoughtful parenting strategies are more adept at encouraging children's linguistic growth.

Research conducted by Setyaningsih, (2023) This investigation corroborates the assertion that parental involvement in a child's educational journey is recognized as a significant determinant of a child's academic performance. It illustrates that parental involvement in the learning process, as well as emotional encouragement and supervision, contributes positively to academic success among students. This conclusion is in line with the results of our study, which showed that children with parents who actively participated in their educational activities tended to exhibit enhanced language abilities; however, there were differences from the findings. (Daryati, 2023; Rofi'ah, 2021) This emphasizes that while parental education is significant, parents' active involvement in the child's educational process is equally impactful. This suggests that educational attainment alone is insufficient; ongoing interaction and support from parents in the child's learning activities are also important to promote linguistic development.

3. Language Skills

Based on the empirical findings obtained from the assessments, data analysis revealed a statistically significant increase in early childhood language competence following the literacy-oriented play intervention. The average language skills score for children pre-intervention was recorded at 63.5. In contrast, post-intervention, this score increased to 78.5, accompanied by a t-statistic value of 12.25 and a p-value of 0.001. This investigation corroborates the findings of Ningrum (Bazaz et al., 2023) This suggests that educational play is important in fostering preschoolers' social development, which influences their linguistic abilities. This study supports the assertion that engagements involving social interaction and play significantly improve children's linguistic abilities, aligning with the empirical results obtained here.

Research conducted by Yusra (2023) This study showed that structured center-based pedagogical approaches can also enhance children's literacy development. However, although the main focus of this study was on play-based activities, these findings imply that various methodologies in early childhood education can produce beneficial outcomes in language acquisition; there is a difference with other scholars who state that despite the efficacy of storytelling techniques in enhancing language skills, not all children show uniform responses. Confident children may face challenges in understanding narratives or engaging in dialogue, which may hinder the

development of their language skills, thus suggesting that the intervention strategies used should be tailored to meet the unique needs of each child, as stated by (Herawati, 2018).

In summary, the findings of this discourse suggest that literacy-oriented play activities positively influence young children's language skills. While variations in children's reactions to interventions exist, this study emphasizes the need to adopt a comprehensive approach coupled with parental involvement in the educational process. By carefully considering the factors that influence language development, we can foster a more conducive environment to enable children to achieve optimal language proficiency.

The uniqueness of this study lies in the focused analysis of literacy-oriented play activities as an effective intervention for language development within an early childhood framework. A number of previous studies have emphasized the importance of fostering language competence; however, this investigation features a pioneering methodology based on engaging and interactive play experiences using literacy-cantered play. This study aims to provide empirical evidence regarding the efficacy of this strategy in improving the linguistic abilities of children aged 4 to 6.

A constraint of the study comes from the limited sample size, which consists of only 30 participants who are children in the age range of 4-6 years. This limited sample size may hinder the extrapolation of the study results to a broader demographic. It is important to acknowledge this limitation, as findings derived from small samples may fail to summarise the diversity inherent in larger populations. However, the results suggest that literacy-based play activities positively influence children's language skills; the limitations associated with this sample size warrant caution in deriving more general conclusions. An additional constraint associated with the sample size is the inadequate representation of diverse socioeconomic backgrounds and educational levels of parents; thus, it is anticipated that future research involving larger and more representative sample sizes is essential to corroborate these findings and offer more comprehensive insights into the impact of literacy-oriented play activities on language skills in early childhood.

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