

Early Childhood Creativity Through Loose Parts Learning Media: Evidences from Muslimat NU Matesih Playgroup

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Abstract. The lack of a comfortable playing space and freedom to explore hinders children's creativity, thus, it is crucial to have the proper learning media to support creativity development in early childhood. This study aims to enhance early childhood creativity through the implementation of loose parts learning media at Muslimat NU Matesih Playgroup. Loose parts are open-ended materials that can be arranged, assembled, combined, or separated freely and flexibly according to the child's imagination. The research employed Classroom Action Research (CAR) conducted collaboratively between the researcher and classroom teachers over several learning cycles. The results indicate that the use of loose parts, such as leaves, twigs, stones, and other natural materials, strongly stimulates children's imagination and expression. A joyful and participative learning atmosphere further supports the development of creativity, as reflected in children's ability to create unique and original works. By providing opportunities for free exploration and using easily accessible materials, children are trained from an early age to think creatively, independently, and innovatively.

Keywords: *loose parts, child creativity, learning media, early childhood, PAUD*

Abstrak. Ketiadaan ruang bermain yang nyaman dan kebebasan untuk menjelajah menghambat kreativitas anak-anak, oleh karena itu, sangat penting untuk memiliki media pembelajaran yang tepat guna mendukung perkembangan kreativitas pada masa kanak-kanak. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk meningkatkan kreativitas anak usia dini melalui penerapan media pembelajaran loose parts di Kelompok Bermain (KB) Muslimat NU Matesih. Media loose parts merupakan material terbuka yang dapat disusun, dirakit, digabung, atau dipisah dengan cara yang bebas dan fleksibel sesuai imajinasi anak. Metode yang digunakan dalam penelitian ini adalah Penelitian Tindakan Kelas (PTK), yang dilaksanakan secara kolaboratif antara peneliti dan guru kelas dalam beberapa siklus pembelajaran. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa penggunaan media loose parts seperti daun, ranting, batu, dan bahan alam lainnya mampu memberikan stimulus yang kuat terhadap daya imajinasi dan ekspresi anak. Suasana pembelajaran yang menyenangkan dan partisipatif turut mendukung perkembangan kreativitas anak, yang tercermin dalam kemampuan mereka menciptakan karya unik dan orisinal. Dengan memberikan ruang eksplorasi bebas dan bahan yang mudah dijangkau, anak-anak dilatih untuk berpikir kreatif, mandiri, dan inovatif sejak usia dini.

Kata Kunci: *loose parts, kreativitas anak, media pembelajaran, anak usia dini, PAUD*

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Introduction

The Muslimat NU Matesih Playgroup is an early childhood education institution located in Matesih, at Pabelngan Matesih. The institution was established by a foundation consisting of Muslim women from the NU (*Nahdlatul Ulama*) organization in the Matesih sub-district. In carrying out teaching and learning activities and everything else in the learning process, the foundation, known as YPM (*Yayasan Pendidikan Muslimat*), provides support and guidance.

Loose parts media is a medium that can foster creativity in children, one of which is loose parts media. According to Sally Haughey as cited in (Siantajani, 2020), loose parts are open materials that can be separated, assembled, combined, arranged, moved, and whose components can be used separately or combined with other materials. They can be natural or man-made objects. Based on Haughey's definition, when children play with loose parts, they can freely play with them to create and shape works according to their wishes (Gull et al., 2019). Children can easily shift, move, combine, and even separate each component. When children shift or move one component of a work they have created, the structure of the work will change and a new work will be formed.

This is in line with Siantajani's (2020) explanation, loose parts materials are pieces or parts that are easy to remove and put together, can be used alone or with other objects to be combined or assembled into a single unit, and after use can be returned to their original condition and function. Loose parts are open items that are not difficult to find in everyday environments, so teachers can easily obtain them (Smith-Gilman, 2018). Creativity in children is the ability to produce original, unusual, and highly flexible thoughts in responding to and developing thoughts and activities (Abdurrahman, 2005).

In early childhood, creativity is clearly seen when children play, where they create various forms of art, paintings, or spontaneous fantasies with their play equipment/toys (Sardi & Mayar, 2023). Play is the world of children, so children cannot be separated from playing, which is a fun and spontaneous activity (Paley, 2021). This has a positive impact on children, such as how children can explore their environment while playing, release negative emotions,

and provide a sense of psychological security (Fjørtoft, 2021). In an active play environment, children have ample opportunity to explore to satisfy their curiosity. They are free to express their ideas through imagination, drama, constructive play, and so on. When children feel comfortable, safe, and free to explore their environment, this is where creativity will grow and develop. Therefore, a joyful play environment and space for children is closely related to efforts to develop their creativity.

The creativity of early childhood in the Playgroup can be developed through the use of loose parts media using various development strategies, namely product creation, imagination, exploration, experimentation, projects, music, and language strategies. This is supported by the loose parts media used and the attitude of teachers who give children the freedom to explore and create with the media available in the kindergarten, which usually uses local materials such as leaves, twigs, stones, and other local materials (Nurliana, Bachtiar, & Ichsan, 2022).

With the application of loose parts media in enhancing creativity, it is hoped that children can meet the various demands of knowledge and technological development that require children to be able to contribute creative thoughts, new ideas, and discover new things that are beneficial to society. Thus that from an early age, a person will have the concept of creating something without depending on the creations of others. By playing with loose parts, children become accustomed to being creative using materials that are simple, easily obtained, and harmless to children and the environment (Safitri and Lestarinigrum, 2021).

Research on the use of loose parts in learning is based on the need to develop the creativity of early childhood, which is an important aspect of their growth. Children at this age are in their golden age of development, where their imagination and curiosity are very high, so they need media that supports free and enjoyable exploration. Loose parts media were chosen because of their open, flexible nature and because they are easy to find in the surrounding environment. According to Siantajani (2020), loose parts are materials that can be assembled,

combined, separated, and used in various ways, either individually or in combination with other objects. This gives children the freedom to be creative, which ultimately fosters original and flexible thinking skills, as stated by Abdurrahman (2005) that creativity is the ability to produce original and unusual ideas. In addition, the researchers observed that a fun and participatory learning atmosphere greatly influences children's creativity development.

At Muslimat NU Matesih Playgroup, the use of natural materials such as leaves, twigs, and stones, as well as the teachers' attitude of supporting free exploration, are strong reasons for researching the effectiveness of loose parts media. In an active and safe play environment, children are free to express their ideas, create works, and exercise their imagination without fear of making mistakes. As explained by Nurliana, Bachtiar, & Ichsan (2022), loose part media supports creativity development strategies such as exploration, experimentation, and product creation. Additionally, Safitri and Lestarinigrum (2021) emphasize that playing with loose parts accustoms children to creating with simple, non-hazardous materials, thereby shaping them from an early age to think creatively and independently in creating their own items/objects/toys.

Loose parts, according to Sally Haughey as cited in Siantajani (2020), are open-ended materials that can be separated, assembled, combined, arranged, moved, and whose components can be used independently or in combination with other materials, thus, naturally providing space for a broader creative process. This is in line with the concept of children's creativity as the ability to produce original, unusual, and flexible ideas in responding to and developing thoughts and activities (Abdurrahman, 2005). In the classroom practice, the use of loose parts, supported by teachers who give children the freedom to explore, provides children with actual space to be creative with materials around them, such as leaves, twigs, or stones (Nurliana, Bachtiar, & Ichsan, 2022). Through these loose parts play activities, children also become accustomed to creating using simple, easily obtainable materials that are safe for children and the environment (Safitri & Lestarinigrum, 2021).

This study emphasizes the urgency of developing creativity in early childhood through a contextual and meaningful approach, one of which is through the use of loose parts learning media at the Muslimat NU Matesih Playgroup. The research questions

asked include: how loose parts media are applied in classroom learning activities; to what extent these media enhance children's creativity in terms of divergent thinking, imagination, and problem solving; and the factors that support and hinder their application in daily practice. In line with this, the objectives of this classroom action research are: to describe the process of implementing loose parts in learning; to analyze the increase in early childhood creativity after intervention through action cycles; and to identify optimization strategies, including the role of teachers, the learning environment, and the availability of materials, to ensure the sustainability and effectiveness of using loose parts in encouraging children's creativity.

Methodology

This study uses a descriptive qualitative method to describe in depth the process and impact of using loose parts media on the creativity of early childhood. Data were collected through direct observation of children's activities, documentation of their work, and open interviews with teachers at Muslimat NU Matesih Playgroup. The main objective of this approach is "to understand the phenomenon experienced by the research subjects holistically and through in-depth description" (Moleong, 2017). Data analysis was conducted qualitatively through data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing.

As cited in Siantajani (2020), the use of loose parts in learning refers to Sally Haughey's theory, which states that "loose parts are open materials that can be separated, assembled, combined, arranged, moved, and whose components can be used separately or combined with other materials". Children's creativity is defined as "the ability to produce original, unusual, and highly flexible thinking in responding to and developing activities" (Abdurrahman, 2005). Piaget's theory also supports that play is the main form of learning for children, while Vygotsky emphasizes the importance of social interaction and the environment in child development.

Findings and Discussions

This study used a descriptive qualitative research method conducted at Muslimat NU Matesih Playgroup by observing the activities every time, but in this study, I observed for more than a month from the beginning of the school year in August. I conducted the study based on my free time, visiting five times to observe the children's

learning activities with creativity, with the aim of increasing children's creativity through the use of media loose parts. From the observations and assessments conducted, it was found that children's creativity increased significantly after the use of loose parts media in learning.

Children were more free to express themselves, showed courage in trying new ideas, and were able to create works from simple materials such as leaves, stones, and sticks. Teachers also played an important role in creating an atmosphere that supported exploration and active participation (Rahman & Yuzar, 2020). Loose parts are open-ended materials that can be separated, assembled, combined, arranged, and transported, their components can be used separately or combined (Siantajani, 2020). Creativity is the ability to produce original, unusual, and highly flexible thinking in responding to and developing activities (Abdurrahman, 2005). Piaget stated that play is the main form of learning in early childhood. Children learn through active interaction with their environment.

In addition, Vygotsky emphasized the importance of the social and environmental roles in supporting children's creativity development (Muntasir & Akbar, 2023). Teachers who provide space and freedom for children's exploration are very important in children's proximal development zone.

Teachers at Muslimat NU Matesih Playgroup also play an important role in this success by providing full support, not limiting children's exploration, and providing sufficient time and space for children to play while learning. The use of loose parts media not only encourages individual creativity but also enhances social interaction among children, as they often work together to create their works (Nasution et al., 2024). Further, the findings show that loose parts media is very effective in enhancing the creativity of early childhood (Novitasari, 2024). This media is able to stimulate imagination, foster self-confidence, and encourage children to think flexibly and originally (Richert et al., 2024). Therefore, this approach is highly recommended for widespread application in early childhood education institutions, especially to build a strong foundation for creativity from an early age.

In conducting this classroom action research, the researcher found that the use of loose parts not only had an impact on increasing children's creativity in general, but also had a positive impact on other aspects of development, especially in the Muslimat NU Matesih Playgroup settings, which has its own social and cultural characteristics. The majority of children in this institution come from families with lower-middle-class

economic backgrounds, who tend to have limited access to expensive or modern educational toys. Therefore, the use of loose parts as learning media is a relevant, inexpensive, and easy-to-implement solution in the local context.

The loose parts used are natural objects such as stones, leaves, sticks, seed shells, and man-made objects such as bottle caps, ice cream sticks, and cardboard pieces (Priyanti & Warmansyah, 2021). These materials are obtained from the school's surroundings and from the participation of the students' parents. This activity indirectly builds synergy between the school and families in supporting children's learning process. This collaboration is an important finding that strengthens the participatory aspect of early childhood education.

During the learning process, teachers provide open stimuli to children, such as questions like "What can you make from this object?" or "What if you combine these objects into one shape?". The children showed great enthusiasm, exploring unusual shapes and giving meaning to their creations, for example, saying "This is my car," "This is a tree house," or "This is a flying ship." This shows that loose parts stimulate children's symbolic and narrative abilities, which are part of linguistic and cognitive intelligence.

In addition to individual creativity, this medium has also proven to be effective in fostering cooperation and empathy. When children play in small groups, they learn to share, convey ideas, and resolve conflicts independently. In several observations, it was seen that children who were previously passive or quiet began to actively participate because they felt unpressured and had the freedom to express themselves. This is an important finding that supports the importance of an inclusive and non-judgmental learning environment in developing children's potential.

Based on teacher reflections and observation data collected over several cycles, an increase in children's creativity can be seen from progress in indicators such as the ability to create new patterns, change the function of objects, create imaginative forms, and the emotional involvement of children in each process. The creativity that emerges is not only limited to the final product, but also includes the children's thinking and exploration processes during play.

Conclusion

This study revealed that loose parts media are highly effective in enhancing creativity in early childhood. By using simple objects such as stones, leaves, buttons, and

bottle caps, children become more enthusiastic, active, and courageous in trying new things. They can create freely, without fear of getting it wrong. Learning becomes more enjoyable because children are free to play while learning. Teachers also play an important role in guiding and providing opportunities for children to explore their ideas. As a result, children become more confident, more creative, and more independent in their play and learning.

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