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THE INFLUENCE OF THE OPEN ENVIRONMENT ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF CREATIVE THINKING SKILLS IN CHILDREN AGED 5-6 YEARS AT RA NURUL ISTIQOMAH

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Abstract

This study aims to determine the influence of the open environment on the development of creative thinking in children aged 5-6 years at RA Nurul Istiqomah. Nature-based learning environments provide hands-on experience through interaction with real objects, so that they can stimulate children's curiosity, imagination, and ability to explore new ideas. The method used in this study is a descriptive qualitative approach with data collection techniques in the form of observation, interviews, and documentation. The study subjects were group B children who participated in open environment learning activities. The study results show that activities such as playing in nature, using natural materials in learning, and exploring the surrounding environment directly can improve children's ability to think divergently, solve problems, and come up with original ideas. In addition, teachers also play an important role in facilitating and directing children's activities to remain under learning goals. These findings reinforce the importance of an open-environment learning approach as an effective strategy for supporting the development of creative thinking in early childhood.

Keywords: Outdoor natural environment; Creative thinking; Early childhood

Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengetahui pengaruh lingkungan alam terbuka terhadap pengembangan berpikir kreatif anak usia 5-6 tahun di RA Nurul Istiqomah. Lingkungan belajar yang berbasis alam memberikan pengalaman langsung melalui interaksi dengan objek nyata, sehingga mampu merangsang rasa ingin tahu, imajinasi, serta kemampuan anak dalam mengeksplorasi ide-ide baru. Metode yang digunakan dalam penelitian ini adalah pendekatan kualitatif deskriptif dengan teknik pengumpulan data berupa observasi, wawancara, dan dokumentasi. Subjek penelitian adalah anak kelompok B yang mengikuti kegiatan pembelajaran luar ruangan secara aktif. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa kegiatan seperti bermain di alam, menggunakan bahan alam dalam pembelajaran, serta eksplorasi lingkungan sekitar secara langsung mampu meningkatkan kemampuan anak dalam berpikir divergen, memecahkan masalah, dan mengemukakan gagasan orisinal. Selain itu, guru juga berperan penting dalam memfasilitasi dan mengarahkan aktivitas anak agar tetap sesuai dengan tujuan pembelajaran. Temuan ini memperkuat pentingnya pendekatan pembelajaran berbasis lingkungan alam terbuka sebagai strategi efektif dalam mendukung perkembangan berpikir kreatif pada anak usia dini.

Kata Kunci: Lingkungan alam terbuka; Berpikir kreatif; Anak usia dini

Introduction

Early childhood education is the main foundation in shaping children's character and potential as a whole. The age period of 5–6 years is the golden age where children experience rapid development in cognitive, affective, and psychomotor aspects. One of the important aspects that must be developed during this period is the ability to think creatively. The ability to think creatively not only supports academic success in the future but also forms children's independence, curiosity, and problem-solving skills from an early age.

Although many learning approaches are designed to stimulate children's creativity, most of them still focus on indoor activities that are limited and structured. This is a major problem because a monotonous learning environment that does not provide space for exploration can inhibit the potential for children's divergent thinking. Various studies have shown that children's creativity is greatly influenced by environmental contexts that are rich in stimulation and provide freedom of expression.

One of the potential alternatives that has not been utilized optimally in learning practices is the use of the open environment. The outdoor environment has a significant role in supporting the development of children's creativity. Through open environment activities, children can do exploration, observation, and direct experience that cannot be obtained indoors. When children are actively involved with nature, they devise new ideas, solve simple problems, and create works from materials available in the environment.

Early childhood is in a very rapid phase of cognitive development. At this age, children begin to actively explore their surroundings to form an initial understanding of the world. In this process, interaction with the open environment has an important role because it can provide a concrete, direct, and fun learning experience. When children play in nature, they not only use their senses actively, but also build understanding through activities that stimulate creativity, through playing in the water, on the land, or observing living things around. The outdoor environment provides space for children to develop new ideas and flexible ways of thinking, especially since activities in nature allow children to use real and varied objects in the learning process (Piaget, J. 1969).

In addition, educational principles that emphasize experiential learning have been widely applied in early childhood education. By giving children the opportunity to learn open environment, they not only train their physical, but also social and emotional abilities. The outside environment stimulates children to interact, collaborate, and find solutions independently. When children are asked to solve simple problems in nature, such as finding the fastest path among bushes or sorting leaves by size, they are actually developing critical and creative thinking skills naturally. The freedom to explore the environment also provides space for children to create their own learning meanings (Montessori, M. 2007).

Many studies show that the natural environment can be an effective source of learning to develop children's creativity. Learning activities carried out outdoors, such as using natural materials to make artwork or making direct observations of plants, have been proven to be able to increase children's creativity. In addition, these activities also

strengthen the connection between children and the surrounding environment, build a sense of responsibility towards nature, and train their aesthetic sensitivity. Open environments provide more varied stimuli than closed classrooms, allowing children to find inspiration more broadly and spontaneously (Hidayani et al., 2010).

Early childhood creativity is part of the basic potential that must be developed optimally. Creativity is not only related to artistic ability, but also concerns how to think flexibly, originally, and dare to try new things. Therefore, it is important for educators to provide a learning environment that can stimulate children's divergent thinking abilities. One of the approaches that is now increasingly being applied is open-environment-based learning activities, which lead to direct interaction between children and the surrounding environment.

The open environment provides a wide exploration space for children to interact with various natural elements such as soil, water, leaves, rocks, and others. When children are free to move, touch, smell, and observe natural objects, this process stimulates various senses and supports their cognitive and imaginative development. Children learn actively through hands-on experience that cannot be fully acquired in a classroom with limited space and activities. Activities in nature also allow children to make their own decisions, solve problems, and experiment with new ways without rigid boundaries like in traditional classrooms (Mayar et al., 2022).

In addition, outdoor activities can increase children's enthusiasm for learning and form an emotional connection with nature, which has an impact on their social and emotional development. When children work together, share tasks, and communicate with their peers while playing outside, they learn to respect the opinions of others and practice social skills that are important for the future (Nabilla & Desmon, 2022).

Furthermore, the use of natural materials as a medium for play and learning is also an effective means of building creativity. For example, children can make artwork out of leaves, twigs, or stones, or make buildings out of soil and water. This process allows children to develop original ideas, explore various possibilities, and practice fine motor skills as well as eye and hand coordination (Hidayah, 2023).

Outdoor learning activities provide opportunities for children to experience a contextual and meaningful learning process. Direct interaction with nature facilitates the formation of concepts through real experience. For example, when children observe fallen leaves, they not only learn about the seasons, but also develop curiosity, observation skills, and the ability to make cause-and-effect relationships. This process supports the development of creative thinking because children are given space to ask questions, make predictions, and draw conclusions independently (School et al., 2015).

In addition, the open environment also reduces the structural stress often found in the classroom. Children are free to choose activities that suit their interests, which can increase intrinsic motivation. When children are given the opportunity to explore without rigid direction, they are more likely to exhibit creative behaviors, such as creating their own games, using objects in unusual ways, and developing original solutions to challenges encountered during play (Heldanita, 2019).

In this study, there is a lack in exploring in depth the direct relationship between

experiences in the open environment and the creative thinking aspect of early childhood. In addition, there have not been many studies that have specifically examined how children's interaction with natural elements such as soil, water, and plants can encourage creativity dimensions such as fluency, flexibility, originality, and elaboration.

This research lies in its approach that focuses on the open environment as a medium for stimulating creative thinking for children aged 5–6 years through direct, exploratory, and contextual experiences. This research not only highlights the results of creativity produced by children, but also the natural learning process that occurs during the child's interaction with the outside environment.

Thus, the purpose of this study is to find out and analyze the influence of the open environment on the development of creative thinking skills of children aged 5–6 years. This research is expected to make a theoretical and practical contribution for educators and policy makers in designing a learning environment that supports the development of creativity holistically.

Research Methods

This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach, which aims to describe in depth the influence of the open environment on the development of creative thinking skills of children aged 5–6 years at RA Nurul Istiqomah. This approach was chosen because it allows researchers to understand phenomena naturally, by looking directly at how children respond to stimuli from the surrounding environment (Sofwan, 2014).

The data collection techniques used include observation, interviews, and documentation. Observation is carried out directly during outdoor learning activities to observe children's behaviours that reflect creativity, such as the way they utilize natural objects, express ideas, or solve problems. Interviews were conducted with teachers and parents to obtain additional information about the development of children's creativity seen at home and school. Documentation is carried out by recording photos, videos, and children's work to strengthen field findings.

The data obtained was then analysed through qualitative descriptive analysis techniques, with stages: data reduction (filtering relevant information), data presentation (grouping data based on theme), and drawing conclusions. Researchers act as the main instruments, directly involved in the process of observation and interaction with children, to be able to understand the dynamics that occur contextually (Nurjanah, 2018).

Result and Discussion

Based on the results of participatory observations conducted by researchers at RA Nurul Istiqomah, the activities of children aged 5–6 years in the open environment show various forms of behaviour related to the development of creative thinking. Researchers actively engaged in open environment activities with children and recorded children's behaviour and responses during activities. In such situations, children seem enthusiastic and show high interest when interacting with natural elements such as rocks, leaves, water, and soil.

During the observation activity, it was found that children tended to be freer to

express their ideas and feelings. For example, some children use leaves to create animal shapes or combine rocks into the shape of houses. This exploratory activity illustrates the existence of a divergent thinking process, which is the ability to produce various ideas from one simple object. Their creativity is also seen when imagining making stories from natural objects that are found.

Interviews conducted with teachers and parents also corroborated the observational findings. The teacher said that children are more active and cheerful when learning is carried out outdoors. Parents also admitted that their children told more stories and seemed more enthusiastic after participating in extracurricular activities. This activity not only provides a wide space for exploration, but also encourages children to work together, discuss, and express opinions, which is part of the creative thinking aspect.

Documentation in the form of photos and activity notes shows various forms of creativity that emerged, both individually and in groups. Children not only show creativity in visual or physical form, but also in the way they solve simple problems, such as figuring out how to keep sand from spilling when it is moved to another container.

Based on data analysis through coding techniques and theme identification, several main themes were found that reflect the development of children's creative thinking, such; active involvement of children in natural exploration, the use of natural objects as a creative medium, and increased communication and social interaction when open environment. The themes are then categorized into two broad categories: children's creativity development and contextual learning experiences outside the classroom.

From the results of the analysis, it can be concluded that the open environment provides a rich and diverse stimulus for early childhood to develop their creative thinking skills. Activities in nature support freedom of expression, natural problem-solving, and the strengthening of social interaction, all of which play an important role in a fun and meaningful learning process for children.

1.1. Definition of the Open Environment

The environment is everything that exists around an individual that can affect their development and behaviour, both directly and indirectly. In the context of early childhood education, the environment plays an important role as the main stimulus in encouraging the learning process and the development of children's creativity. The environment can be classified into two categories, namely the internal and external environment. The internal environment includes the physical condition, health, and psychological aspects of the child, while the external environment includes the family, school, community, and the surrounding environment which also shape the child's character and mindset (Kadir, 2023).

One form of external environment that has a significant impact on early childhood development is the outdoor environment. This environment provides a contextual and real learning experience through direct interaction of children with natural objects such as soil, water, rocks, leaves, and animals. Through the exploration of nature, children not only acquire factual knowledge, but also

develop cognitive abilities such as grouping objects by color, size, and shape, as well as honing critical thinking and problem-solving skills (Mayar et al., 2022).

In the early childhood learning approach, the concept of a natural material center is known as an educational play area by utilizing materials from the surrounding nature. The center is designed to strengthen children's sensory and fine motor skills, especially in writing preparation. Activities such as sorting grains, arranging stones, or molding clay shapes can improve a child's concentration, hand-eye coordination, and overall creativity (Elkhusnah & Indrayeni, 2023).

In addition to the physical environment, social factors around children, such as the role of teachers and parents, also play an important role in creating an environment that stimulates creativity. Emotional support, freedom of expression, and the opportunity to try and experiment are important elements in the development process of children's creative thinking. An environment that is responsive to children's exploratory needs will motivate them to be more active in imagining, asking questions, and creating new things independently (Mayar et al., 2022).

1.2. Definition of Creative Thinking in Early Childhood

Creative thinking in early childhood is the ability to generate new ideas, visual, or solutions that are original and useful in responding to a problem or activity. At the age of 5–6 years, this ability begins to be seen in the way children express their imagination through games, language, and artwork. Children at this stage tend to show high curiosity and can convey unique ideas even in simple form. Yulianti and Mariana explain that early childhood creativity develops through stimuli involving positive emotions, a supportive environment, and opportunities to try new ideas freely (Fajar, n.d.).

The creative thinking process includes several important aspects such as fluency in coming out ideas, flexibility in thinking from various perspectives, originality in creating new ideas, and elaboration in developing an idea into more detail. Asep Rahmat and Sumiyati emphasized that children who are given the opportunity to explore in inquiry learning tend to show development in these four aspects of creative thinking because they are encouraged to ask questions, make predictions, and try different solutions (Rahmat & Sumiyati. 2017).

Creativity is not an ability that appears suddenly, but develops through the right stimulation, such as a supportive atmosphere, guidance from adults, and opportunities to experiment. Umi Khasanah stated that children's creativity develops optimally when children are involved in activities that allow them to think freely, without pressure to produce correct or perfect answers (Khasanah, 2019). This shows that educators and parents have an important role in providing constructive freedom for children.

In the context of early childhood education, creative thinking is also closely related to simple problem-solving skills, decision-making skills, and the courage to try new things. Children who are used to being given the opportunity to think

freely tend to have high imagination and confidence in displaying their ideas. Yuni Astuti and Abdul Aziz mentioned that factors from the family environment such as open communication, emotional support, and the provision of space for exploration contribute greatly to shaping children's courage to think creatively (Astuti & Aziz, 2019).

Children's creative thinking skills can develop optimally if educators and parents provide positive encouragement, pay attention to children's interests, and provide a stimulating learning environment. Sunanik said that nature-based learning, for example through direct interaction with open environments, can stimulate children's ability to imagine, take initiative, and think divergently through meaningful hands-on experiences (Sunanik, 2018). That way, children will get used to thinking openly, finding alternative solutions, and becoming more innovative individuals in their daily lives.

1.3. The Influence of the Natural Environment on Children's Creative Thinking

The outdoor environment makes a great contribution to the development of early childhood creative thinking skills. Children's direct interaction with the natural elements allows them to explore the world around them freely, without the rigid structural limitations of the classroom. This situation provides space for children to think flexibly, find various possible solutions, and develop innovative ways of thinking.

Children who engage in exploratory activities in nature will naturally be encouraged to use their imagination. The diversity of natural elements such as stones, leaves, water, and wood, provides visual and tactile stimuli that children can process into unique new ideas. For example, when children imagine leaves as hats or shape stones as houses, they are practicing divergent thinking skills (Heldanita, 2019).

In addition, games in nature often involve small challenges or obstacles that encourage children to solve problems independently. For example, when children are asked to make a bridge out of branches to cross a small stream of water, they will try several ways to find the most suitable solution (Yuliantina & Mariana, 2023).

More than that, contextual learning that occurs in natural environments is multisensory and directly related to the child's real experience. Children can observe firsthand natural processes such as plant growth, cloud movements, or animal tracks, which spark curiosity and encourage them to think critically. Activities such as tasting leaves, printing patterns from stones, or designing the arrangement of natural objects into certain forms train children to think creatively while creating something meaningful (Khasanah, 2019).

1.4. Benefits of Outdoor Environments for Children's Education

An outdoor environment provides many benefits for early childhood development because it creates a natural, open, and stress-free learning environment. The spacious outdoor space with natural elements such as trees, rocks, water, and soil provides a learning experience that cannot be found in the

classroom. In this setting, children learn through hands-on experience by touching, smelling, seeing, and hearing, which stimulates their entire senses thoroughly (Susanti & Purnamasari, 2021).

One of the main benefits of the natural environment is that it supports cognitive development. Through exploration activities in the outdoors, children are encouraged to ask, observe, compare, and draw conclusions. This process strengthens critical and logical thinking skills that are important in the learning process. Children can also build an early understanding of scientific concepts through hands-on experience, such as looking at plant cycles or understanding the nature of water while playing in rivers or puddles (Susanti & Purnamasari, 2021).

Not only that, but the benefits of the natural environment are also seen in the social-emotional development of children. When playing with friends in nature, children learn how to communicate, work together, and resolve conflicts. Dynamic social situations encourage children to adapt, be patient, and understand each other, so that their empathy and emotional intelligence are further developed. Outdoor activities also help reduce stress and improve children's mood, as being in nature has been shown to have a calming and refreshing effect on children's psyches (Adelita et al., 2020).

The natural environment is also very rich in stimulating creativity. The various shapes and textures of natural objects such as leaves, twigs, stones, and soil are a medium that challenges children's imagination. Children can create games, stories, or artwork from these materials spontaneously and freely. In this process, they not only express themselves but also learn to think innovatively, find solutions, and make their own decisions. For example, weaving or arranging the shape of leaves helps children think out of the box while practicing their fine motor coordination (Ningsih, 2022).

With these benefits, it is clear that the outdoor environment is not just a playground, but also a place of holistic and contextual learning. Nature-based learning is able to stimulate children's overall development, both cognitive, social-emotional, physical, and creative aspects. Therefore, teachers and early childhood education institutions need to integrate the use of the open environment in learning activities so that children can grow and develop optimally according to their natural potential.

Conclusion

Based on the results of the research, it can be concluded that the open environment has a significant influence on the development of creative thinking in children aged 5–6 years. This answers the research question about how the natural environment influences children's creativity, by showing that direct experience in nature supports the fluency of ideas, flexibility of thinking, originality, and the ability to develop ideas better than in a closed learning environment. Exploratory activities such as playing sand, getting to know plants, and role-playing in nature provide concrete stimuli that are able to

stimulate children's creativity naturally.

These findings have important implications for early childhood education practices. Teachers and ECE institutions are expected to be able to utilize the potential of the open environment as a contextual and fun learning resource, as well as develop structured outdoor activities to support the development of creativity. In addition, parental involvement in supporting nature activities is also an important part in encouraging children's character growth and creativity holistically.

Based on these findings, it is recommended that early childhood education institutions integrate an open-nature-based learning approach into the curriculum on an ongoing basis. Teachers need to be given training on planning and implementing educational and safe outdoor activities. The government and policymakers are also advised to provide facilities and policies that support the creation of inclusive and accessible natural learning spaces. Follow-up research can be conducted with a more diverse range of ages and environments to reinforce the specialization of this study.

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