

EFFORTS TO IMPROVE THE COGNITIVE DEVELOPMENT OF SYMBOLIC THINKING OF GROUP A CHILDREN THROUGH CONSTRUCTIVE PLAY METHOD IN AISYIYAH KINDERGARTEN PURWOKERTO BLITAR

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Abstract. This research aims to find out the application, affecting factors, and developmental achievement through the constructive play method. This research used a qualitative-description approach and the research design is a study case qualitative Research held on 9th January 2023 in Aisyiyah Kindergarten Purwokerto Blitar. The source data in this research was obtained from interviews with teachers and students' parents, moreover, the researcher observed 18 students in group A Aisyiyah Kindergarten Purwokerto Blitar which was guided by RPPH that adapted to the existing theme. Furthermore, the researcher applied general steps of block constructive play such as providing a mat (rug) for playing, preparing the number of blocks, sitting in a circle and having a dialogue about themes and activities, making agreements on the rules for playing blocks, then finally inviting the children to pick up the blocks for development play. Factors that affect the cognitive development of symbolism for group A in Aisyiyah kindergarten Purwokerto Blitar are caused by 2 stand-out factors namely environment and maturity factor. From the research's result, the researcher found that the developmental achievement of the students from group A Aisyiyah Bustanul Athfal Kindergarten Purwokerto Blitar is averagely Very Well Developed (VWD).

Keywords: Cognitive Developmental, Symbolic Thinking, Constructive Play Method.

INTRODUCTION

Early childhood is a child who has just been born until he is 6 years old. From the Islamic perspective, early childhood is a gift from God that is born through their mother, who must be cared for and educated by their parents from birth to the age of 7 years. Early age is the age when children experience rapid growth and development. At this age, it is often referred to as the golden age (Syifausakia, Ariyanto, and Aslina 2021). During this golden age, there is a need for education. Education for early childhood is often called ECE or Early Childhood Education, where this education can monitor the growth and development of children.

In law Number 20 of 2003 Article 1 paragraph 14 concerning the national education system it is stated that PAUD is a coaching effort aimed at children from birth to the age of six which is carried out through the provision of educational stimuli to help the physical and spiritual growth and development of children so that children have the readiness to enter further education. Ibid, 14. Education for early childhood is the formation of behavior, instilling noble moral values and morals, cognitive development, and physical motor development. Education carried out from the age early childhood has a very big influence on life in the future (Dadan Suryana 2021). One of them is cognitive development in children.

According to Husdarta and Nurlan, cognitive development is an ongoing process continuously, but the results are not continuous from every result that has been achieved previously. Every individual starting from childhood will pass through every stage of cognitive development, in a way he will seek to balance cognitive structure with new experiences. Jean Piaget believed that children actively construct their cognitive world. According to Jean Piaget, information is not just poured into the child's mind through the environment, but children adapt their thinking to understand new ideas (Aeni et al. 2022). Cognitive development in children is divided into several stages. Piaget divided the development of human cognitive abilities according to age into 4 stages, namely the sensory stage (sensorimotor) age 0-2 years, pre-operational stage (pre-operational) age 2-7 years, stage concrete operational (concrete operational) ages 7-11 years, and finally the operational stage formal (formal operational) age 11 years-adult. In early childhood stages of development cognitive abilities can be seen in the sensory and pre-operational stages (Marinda 2020).

In cognitive development according to the Standard Level of Achievement of Child Development Early Age (CDEA), the scope of development is divided into 3, namely learning and solving problems, logical thinking, and symbolic thinking. According to Piaget the ability to think symbolically is the ability to think about objects and events, even though objects and events are not present physically (physically) in front of the child. Children's symbolic thinking ability occurs in the age range of 2-7 years, this period is referred to as the pre-operational stage (Bodedarsyah and Yulianti 2019). Therefore, at the age of 4-5 years, children are said to be able to think symbolically. Thinking symbolically at the age of 4-5 years can be said to be developing if the child is under the level of achievement of cognitive development based on symbolic thinking CDEA, in the Regulation of the Minister of Education and Culture of the Republic of Indonesia number 137 2014, namely: counting the number of objects from one to ten, getting to know the concept of numbers, recognize number symbols, and recognize letter symbols (Permendikbud 2014). Cognitive development of children's symbolic thinking so that they can develop according to the level of development of STPPA must apply various learning methods that are appropriate for children, one method is the method of play.

In Piaget's theory, playing does not only reflect the stages of cognitive development in children but also contributes to cognitive development itself. Furthermore, Piaget explained that the development of play is related to children's development of intelligence. In line with Piaget, Vygotsky emphasizes that play has a role directly in a child's cognitive development. According to Vygotsky, a child is not yet can think abstractly, because for them meaning and object become one. Through play, children can separate the meaning from the actual object. Thus, playing is a process self-help tool. The involvement of children in play activities provides opportunities to acquire progress in development even advancing the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) so that it reaches a higher level in functioning its abilities (Yus 2013). Therefore, teachers must help develop children's cognitive symbolic thinking by playing, one of which is playing constructively. Constructive play is a game using physical objects to build or create something. This game occurs when children involve themselves in a solution to a problem of its own creation. This constructive play is a form of the most common game for kindergarten and elementary school children (M. Shoffa Saifillah Al-Faruq and Sukatin 2021). This constructive game is also done in Aisyiyah Kindergarten Purwokerto Blitar.

Aisyiyah Bustanul Athfal Kindergarten is one of the kindergartens in the Purwokerto, Village, Blitar Regency. Based on observations made by researchers in this kindergarten, especially in group A, several children are still lacking in recognizing number symbols like making the number 2 upside down, therefore it looks like the letter S, and it is hard to memorize numbers. To develop children's cognitive abilities in symbolic thinking, this kindergarten implements constructive play. The constructive play was carried out using block game media. The game is in the form of counting the number of blocks that have been arranged to become a building or showing the number of symbols printed on the blocks so that the child will be able to improve his cognitive arithmetic.

Based on the explanation above, the researcher is interested in conducting scientific research with the title "Efforts to Improve the Cognitive Development of Symbolic Thinking in Class A Children Through Constructive Method in Aisyiyah Kindergarten Purwokerto Blitar".

RESEARCH METHOD

This research used a qualitative descriptive approach. The researcher used a case study qualitative type of research because it conducts detailed and in-depth research on efforts to improve the cognitive development of symbolic thinking in group A children aged 4-5 years through constructive play methods in Aisiyiah Kindergarten Purwokerto Blitar. In this study, the researcher took the location at Aisiyiah Kindergarten, Purwokerto, Blitar. The time of the research was on January 9, 2023.

There were two sources of data in this study, namely primary data sources and secondary data sources. The primary data sources in this study were interview records, observation results, and data regarding informants from research subjects at Aisiyiah Purwokerto Blitar Kindergarten, namely one of group A teacher, two representatives of students' parents at Aisiyiah Purwokerto Blitar Kindergarten, and 18 students in group A experience cognitive problems with symbolic thinking. While secondary data sources in this study were documentation, including written data sources, inventories, and others needed in research such as documentation of children's activities, and other supporting documents. In this study, data collection techniques were more on observation, interviews, and documentation. For data analysis techniques, researchers used data analysis techniques belonging to Miles and Huberman. The data analysis techniques were data reduction, data presentation, and conclusions. Researchers use data instruments for interviews as follows:

Table 1. Group A Teacher Interview Instrument

NO	Question List	Answer
1.	Is the constructive play method often used in learning and teaching activity?	
2.	How did you initially come up with the idea of using the constructive play method for the cognitive development of children's symbolic thinking?	
3.	Why do you prefer the constructive play method as a learning medium for cognitive development of symbolic thinking in children?	
4.	How to apply the method of constructive play in every learning activity?	
5.	How is the increase and change in the cognitive development of children's symbolic thinking after the application of this method?	
6.	What are the factors that usually affect cognitive development of symbolic thinking in children?	
7.	At this time, are there still children who have difficulty recognizing number symbols after using the constructive play method?	
8.	How do you deal with children who are still having difficulty recognizing number symbols?	
9.	What are the obstacles encountered when using this constructive play method?	
10.	How do you overcome the obstacles encountered when using the constructive play method?	

Table 2. Student's parent Interview Instrument

NO.	Daftar Pertanyaan	Jawaban
1.	What do you do at home?	
2.	Are you always able to accompany your child to study?	
3.	Do your children always repeat the lessons given at	

	school?	
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Meanwhile, the observation data instrument, the researcher used the STTPA guidelines for the observation instrument. The following are the observation data instruments:

Table 3. Students Observation Instrument

Aspect	Indicator	Resulet Finding			
		UD	SG	GE	VWG
Symbolic Thinking	Counting the number of objects 1-10				
	Recognize the concept of numbers				
	Recognize number symbol				
	Recognize letter symbol				

Achievement of cognitive development of symbolic thinking in activities that use constructive play methods

UD = Undevelopment

GE = Growing as Expected

SG = Start of Growing

VWG = Very Well Growing

Calculating the percentage of children's learning completeness using the constructive play method is as follows:

$$P = \frac{\sum f}{\sum n} \times 100\%$$

Explanation:

P = The presentation to be searched for

$\sum f$ = The number of children according to achievement

$\sum n$ = Total number of child (student)

RESULT AND ANALYSIS

1. Application of Constructive Play Methods in Improving the Symbolic Cognitive Development of Group A Children in Aisyiyah Bustanul Athfal Kindergarten Purwokerto Blitar

Constructive play is carried out through playing activities to make certain forms into works using various materials, both liquid and structured materials. Developmental play according to Piaget can help develop children's skills to succeed in their schooling in the future. Besides being able to develop children's cognitive development, through playing development children can also express themselves by developing sensorimotor play, role-playing, and cooperative relationships with other children and creating real work (Darmadi 2018).

Playing with blocks can be said to be playing constructively because playing with blocks is a type of activity that is constructive, where children can build something using the existing blocks. Playing with blocks is one of the playing methods commonly used in early childhood education. In playing with blocks themselves, children are expected to feel happy and excited. Apart from that playing with blocks is also expected to encourage children to move actively, naturally develop children's emotions, can develop children's intelligence, encourage or motivate children to achieve, so that children's independence will emerge by itself, and children can get along with their peers (Nafisah and Dkk 2022).

In kindergarten, the method of playing blocks certainly has its own rules. The steps for playing blocks include (Nafisah and Dkk 2022):

1. Plan density and intensity. Density is the variety and depth of experiences that children get through play. While intensity is the time needed for children to gain experience through play.
2. Provide a mat (rug) for playing
3. Prepare the number of blocks, both plain and colored and also the accessories
4. Sit in a circle, having a dialogue about building concepts such as towers, houses, and so on
5. Make an agreement on the rules of playing blocks
6. Invite children to pick up blocks to play developmen

The constructive play method is one of the methods in teaching and learning at Aisiyyah Kindergarten Purwokerto Blitar. This method is often used as a teaching and learning activity, by adjusting the existing theme. This kindergarten chose a constructive method as a learning medium, because learning while playing with blocks is one of the games that children at Aisiyyah Purwokerto Blitar Kindergarten really like. Based on interview with group A teacher in this kindergarten, apart from introducing children to geometric shapes and the numbers printed on balloons, the constructive play method also trains children's creativity in constructing a shape into a building. This constructive play method began to be used as a learning method, because it was difficult for group A children at Aisiyyah Bustanul Athfal Kindergarten Purwokerto Blitar to recognize number symbols. Then, with discussions with the principal and teachers in the kindergarten, the idea of a constructive play method was created.

The application of the constructive play method in Aisiyyah Bustanul Athfal Kindergarten Purwokerto Blitar is guided by the Daily Learning Implementation Plan (DLIP). DLIP itself is a teacher's guideline or reference when teaching and learning begin. This DLIP is prepared in following the WLIP that has been made, and adjusted to the existing themes.

Based on observations, the application of the constructive play method in kindergarten is the same as the steps for constructive play with blocks in general. The application is the first, before starting the lesson the teacher prepares carpet mats for the children to play with. Next, the teacher prepares the blocks to be used for playing. After that, when teaching and learning have started, the teacher invites the children to sit in a circle on the carpet and conduct a dialogue regarding the theme and activities to be carried out. After conducting a dialogue about themes and activities, the teacher also explains the rules for constructive play with blocks. Then the children are welcome to play constructively with blocks, but before that, the children have been divided into groups to do other activities.

When implementing a method, it certainly has its constraints. It is the same with this method of constructive play. The obstacle that is often encountered by teachers at Aisiyyah Bustanul Athfal Kindergarten Purwokerto Blitar is that children are bored with playing with blocks. From the obstacles encountered, the teacher must be able to rack his brain to resolve or overcome the obstacles encountered. At Aisiyyah Kindergarten, the way the teacher overcomes these obstacles is by preparing safety games for children, such as being given other supporting activities or by playing freely after playing constructive games.

2. Factors Affecting the Cognitive Development of Symbolic Thinking in Group A Children in Aisiyyah Bustanul Athfal Kindergarten Purwokerto Blitar

Cognitive development certainly can not be separated from the factors that influence it. The factors that affect cognitive development according to Ahmad Susanto include (Saripudin and Faujiah 2020):

- a. Heredity/ descent Factors. The theory of heredity, pioneered by the philosopher Scopenhauer, suggests that humans are born with certain potentials that cannot be influenced by other natural environments. The level of intelligence has been determined since birth, so it is these heredity factors that influence early childhood cognition..
- b. Environmental factor. John Locke argues that humans are born in a state of purity like a white paper that has not been stained. This is known as the tabula rasa theory. intelligence level is determined by experience and knowledge obtained from the environment.

- c. Maturity factor. Each organ (physical or psychological) is said to be mature if it has achieved the ability to carry out its respective functions. This is related to chronological age.
- d. Formation factor. The formation is all circumstances outside of a person that affects the development of intelligence. There are two formations, namely intentional formation (formal school) and accidental formation (the influence of the environment).
- e. Factors of interest and talent. Interest leads to action to the goal and is an encouragement to do more and better. One's talent will affect the level of intelligence. Someone who has a certain talent will learn it more easily and quickly.
- f. Freedom factor. The freedom of humans to think is divergent (spread) which means humans can choose certain methods of solving problems and are free to choose problems according to needs.

Every child has different developments, for example, the development of symbolic thinking in children. These different developments can be triggered by various factors. These factors can affect the cognitive development of symbolic thinking in children. Like the children in group A at Aisyiyah Bustanul Athfal Kindergarten Purwokerto Blitar, the cognitive development of symbolic thinking in each child is different. This was triggered by several factors that might influence the cognitive development of symbolic thinking in children.

In Aisyiyah Bustanul Athfal Kindergarten Purwokerto Blitar itself, especially in group A children, the factors that might affect the cognitive development of symbolic thinking are caused by 2 factors, namely environmental factors, and the maturity factor in children. Environmental factors, from the environment where the child lives can affect the cognitive development of symbolic thinking in children. This is because parents are busy, so children are sometimes not given much attention. When children are not paid attention to, that is an opportunity for children to ask to play with cell phones. Moreover, children are not accompanied to repeat the lessons taught at school. This factor must be considered because it can be the main factor affecting the cognitive development of symbolic thinking in children. The second factor is the maturity factor, this factor is caused by the child's age being less mature than most other children or it can be called the age of the child who is younger than his friends, so that it can affect cognitive symbolic thinking in children..

3. Achievements of Cognitive Development of Symbolic Thinking After Teachers Apply Constructive Play Methods in Aisyiyah Bustanul Athfal Kindergarten Purwokerto Blitar

According to the regulation of the Minister of Education and Culture number 137 of 2014 concerning national standards for early childhood education. Where is the level of achievement of children's development at the age of 4-5 in the scope of cognitive development of symbolic thinking is (Permendikbud 2014):

- a. Count the number of objects one to ten
- b. Recognize the concept of numbers
- c. Recognize number symbol
- d. Recognize letter symbol

The achievement of cognitive development of symbolic thinking in group A at Aisyiyah Bustanul Athfal Kindergarten Purwokerto Blitar is also guided by Permendikbud number 137 of 2014.

According to Jean Piaget, the achievement of cognitive development begins with several stages, namely sensorimotor, pre-operational, concrete operational, and formal operational stages. For children aged 0-7 years who are categorized as early childhood, Piaget focuses on the pre-operational stage. At the pre-operational stage, children can make judgments by involving intuition, connecting objects, and thinking symbols. One characteristic of this stage is that children begin to learn skills in symbolic thinking. The process of symbolic thinking is part of critical thinking that supports basic skills in recognizing mathematical concepts, reading, and writing (Sufa et al. 2022).

After the application of a method, there must be results obtained. Likewise with this, after applying the constructive play method, of course, there will be achievements. This achievement

was obtained from the results of observations and assessments taken by educators when the constructive play method was implemented. The achievement of cognitive development of symbolic thinking in children will show an increase in the results of the teacher's assessment.



Figure 1. Constructive Play Method Activity

Not all children have reached the expected level of development, because the level of development of each child is different, moreover, the factors that affect each child are different. The developmental achievements of 18 children in group A Aisiyyah Bustanul Athfal Kindergarten Purwokerto Blitar, 14 children have experienced a perfect level of development. This can be seen from the number of children who are able and fluent in knowing the symbol numbers 1-10. While the remaining 4 children still experience problems in the cognitive development of symbolic thinking. This is because children still have difficulty remembering numbers. The results of the researchers' observations, researchers use achievement indicators guided by the Early Childhood Development Achievement Level Standard (STPPA). Where the observed aspect only focuses on cognitive symbolic thinking. The following are the results of conservation carried out by researchers.

Table 4. Observation Result of Constructive Play Method Activity

Informant	achievement indicators				Explanation
	1	2	3	4	
1.	VWG	VWG	VWG	VWG	VWG
2.	VWG	VWG	VWG	GE	VWG
3.	VWG	GE	GE	GE	GE
4.	VWG	VWG	VWG	GE	VWG
5.	VWG	VWG	VWG	VWG	VWG
6.	VWG	VWG	VWG	GE	VWG
7.	VWG	VWG	VWG	VWG	VWG
8.	GE	GE	GE	GE	GE
9.	VWG	VWG	GE	VWG	VWG
10.	VWG	VWG	VWG	VWG	VWG
11.	GE	SG	SG	SG	SG
12.	VWG	VWG	VWG	VWG	VWG
13.	VWG	GE	VWG	VWG	VWG
14.	VWG	VWG	VWG	VWG	VWG
15.	VWG	VWG	VWG	GE	VWG
16.	VWG	VWG	VWG	VWG	VWG
17.	VWG	VWG	VWG	GE	VWG
18.	VWG	GE	GE	GE	GE

Source : Observation on January 9, 2023 in Group A Children Aisiyyah Bustanul Athfal Kindergarten, Purwokerto Blitar.

Number Explanation:

- 1 : Count the number of objects one to ten
- 2 : Recognize the concept of numbers
- 3 : Recognize number symbol
- 4 : Recognize letter symbol

Letter Explanation:

UD : Undevelopment
SG : Start of Growing
GE : Growing as Expected
VWG : Very Well Growing

The percentage of children's learning completeness uses the constructive play method as follows:

$$P = \frac{\sum f}{\sum n} \times 100\%$$

Explanation:

P = The presentation to be searched for
 $\sum f$ = The number of children according to achievement
 $\sum n$ = Total number of child (student)

Percentage of Children Very Well Growing

$$P_{VWG} = \frac{14}{18} \times 100\% = 77,8\%$$

Percentage of Children Growing as Expected

$$P_{GE} = \frac{3}{18} \times 100\% = 16,7\%$$

Percentage of Children Start of Growing

$$P_{SG} = \frac{1}{18} \times 100\% = 5,5\%$$

The table shows that almost all children have reached the target of cognitive development of symbolic thinking. It can be seen from the percentage of children's learning completeness using constructive play methods, 77.8% of children have developed very well (VWG), then 16.7% of children are developing according to expectations (GE), and 5.5% of children are still starting to develop (SG)

In informant 11, on the indicator of counting many objects 1-10, the child can say numbers 1-10, but there are still some numbers that are missed. The next indicator is getting to know the concept of numbers, children are only able to remember numbers 1-5 but sometimes they still mispronounce the numbers. The third indicator, knowing the number symbol, the child does not fully know the numbers 1-10. If a child counts with his fingers, he will memorize it, but when faced with a number symbol, the child becomes confused. The last indicator is getting to know the symbol of the letter, the child still needs guidance when the child shows the number he is showing. According to the class teacher, who was teaching, informant 11 progressed relatively slowly compared to his other friends. Therefore, it requires extra guidance and assistance from the teacher. From here the researchers assessed that the child still starts of growing (SG)

While the observations on informants 3, 8 and 18 they have in common. In the observation the first indicator was able to see many objects 1-10, informants 3 and 18 were able to say numbers from 1-10, different from informant 8 there were still some numbers that were sometimes not remembered or missed. In the second indicator, knowing the concept of numbers, children are able to name the sequence of numbers 1-10, but sometimes children do not remember the number symbols shown. The third indicator, getting to know the number symbol, here the child already knows the number symbols 1-10, but sometimes there are still numbers that are reversed, for example number 5 they say the number 2. In the last indicator, the child is able to show numbers according to the number symbol, but sometimes there are still wrong. From here, the researchers assessed that the child was still growing as expected (GE).

With children who are still experiencing this difficulty, it must be addressed immediately so that the achievements of their symbolic thinking cognitive development grow as expected. Therefore, the group A teacher at Aisyiyah Bustanul Athfal Kindergarten Purwokerto Blitar looked for ways to deal with children who were still having difficulties. The method used by the teacher in group A Aisyiyah Bustanul Athfal Kindergarten Purwokerto Blitar is with special assistance by the teacher through constructive playing methods or using other playing methods, so that children quickly recognize and remember numbers.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results of research related to efforts to improve the cognitive development of symbolic thinking in group A children through constructive play methods at TK Aisyiyah Purwokerto Blitar, it can be concluded that:

The application of the constructive play method to improve the cognitive development of symbolic thinking in group A children at Aisyiyah Kindergarten Purwokerto Blitar used the general steps of constructive play with blocks, namely providing a mat (rug) for playing, preparing the number of blocks, sitting in a circle having a dialogue about themes and activities, making agreements on rules -the rules for playing blocks, then the last one invites the child to take the blocks to play development. In addition, the application of the constructive play method for each lesson was adjusted to the existing theme and also the DLIP that had been provided.

The factors that influence the cognitive development of symbolic thinking in group A children at Aisyiyah Kindergarten Purwokerto Blitar were caused by 2 prominent factors, namely environmental factors and maturity factors. Environmental factors were caused by busy parents of students so that children were not given enough attention. From the lack of parental attention, the child became less able to explore something that the child should have learned. From the maturity factor, the age of the child was somewhat younger than the others, therefore the child was slower to grasp learning than other children.

The achievement of cognitive development of symbolic thinking after the teacher applied the method of constructive play was when the child could remember the symbols of numbers or symbols of numbers. From the results of the study, the average developmental achievement of group A children in Aisyiyah Bustanul Athfal Kindergarten Purwokerto Blitar was Very Well Growing (VWG). Besides that, there were still 4 children who had not reached the target of cognitive development of symbolic thinking. For this method to achieve maximum development targets, it should not be used just once or twice. But it has to be done many times so that the child can remember the number symbol.

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