

Improving Reading Ability Through Creative Word

Play in Group B at TK 2 Wonoagung

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ABSTRACT

Reading ability in early childhood is an important aspect of language development because it forms the foundation for recognizing letters, syllables, and simple words. Preliminary observations at TK 2 Wonoagung, revealed that the reading ability of Group B children still needed improvement. Of the 10 children observed, 2 had difficulty distinguishing letters, 3 struggled to combine letters, 2 experienced difficulties reading syllables, and 3 were able to read simple words with teacher guidance. This study aimed to improve children's reading ability through creative word play activities. The research employed Classroom Action Research (CAR) using the Kemmis and McTaggart model, consisting of two cycles with the stages of planning, action, observation, and reflection. The subjects were 10 Group B children consisting of 6 girls and 4 boys. Data were collected through observation and documentation. The results showed a significant improvement in children's reading ability, increasing from 53.75% in the pre-cycle stage to 60% in Cycle

I, 77.5% in Cycle II Meeting 1, and 88.75% in Cycle II Meeting 2. Of the 10 children participating in the study, 9 children (90%) achieved the Very Well Developed (BSB) category by the end of Cycle II Meeting 2, while 1 child (10%) was in the Developed as Expected (BSH) category. These findings indicate that creative word play activities were effective in improving children's reading ability.

Introduction

Early Childhood Education (ECE) serves as the foundation for developing children's potential holistically. It plays a crucial role in determining early childhood development, as this stage involves rapid brain growth that is highly responsive to external stimuli (Agustin et al., 2025). Reading ability is one of the fundamental skills that should be developed from an early age. Reading is not merely the ability to recognize letters and words but also serves as the foundation for children's future development. Children who develop strong reading skills from an early age are better able to absorb information and acquire knowledge at subsequent levels of education (Elan et al., 2023). Cognitive development theory suggests that children's cognitive abilities evolve as they grow and mature. Cognitive development is not only concerned with acquiring knowledge but also with developing and constructing children's mental processes to enable them to think, understand, solve problems, and interact effectively with their environment (Pitriani et al., 2023)

Teaching reading to young children often faces various challenges, particularly when instructional methods are not aligned with their developmental needs and characteristics. Learning approaches that are overly formal and highly structured may cause children to become bored quickly and reduce their motivation to learn. In addition, reading instruction that focuses primarily on letter memorization and repetitive drills without meaningful variation can diminish children's interest in reading activities and may even lead to reluctance to learn to read in the future. According to developmental learning theories, early reading instruction should be engaging, interactive, and play-based to foster children's motivation, participation, and literacy development (Andayani et al., 2026). These findings support Rusminah et al., (2025) Young children learn most effectively through play; therefore, instructional methods should integrate learning with enjoyable play activities. Children are more likely to achieve meaningful learning outcomes when they actively participate in engaging and enjoyable experiences. Play-based learning has been shown to significantly enhance children's interest in learning and early literacy skills. Furthermore, the use of educational play media that is appropriate for children's developmental characteristics can effectively promote reading skills while increasing learning motivation in early childhood.

Education should be implemented in accordance with children's developmental stages at specific ages by taking into account each child's individual developmental progress (Montessori in Syahlita & Amelia,

2023). Physical activities play an important role in helping children understand learning concepts and acquire practical skills. Through creative word play activities, children not only learn to recognize letters and words but also expand their vocabulary and develop a positive attitude toward reading. These activities include forming words from scrambled letters, playing word lottery games, and assembling simple word puzzles, all of which can enhance children's motivation and strengthen their reading ability through meaningful hands-on experiences.

Based on a preliminary observation conducted at TK Dharma Wanita Persatuan 2 Wonoagung, the reading ability of Group B children still required improvement. Among the 10 children observed, 2 had difficulty distinguishing letters, 3 experienced challenges in blending two letters, 2 struggled to read syllables, and 3 were able to read simple words only with guidance from the teacher. These findings indicate the need for an engaging and developmentally appropriate learning strategy to improve children's early reading skills.

A study conducted Sulistiyani et al., (2023) The findings indicated that the use of flashcard media in the learning process was effective in improving young children's reading ability. This improvement was reflected in children's enhanced ability to recognize letters, associate symbols with their corresponding sounds, and read simple words. The study also demonstrated that play-based activities using flashcards provide an effective stimulus for early literacy development, as they are

engaging and aligned with the play-oriented learning characteristics of young children. Therefore, flashcard media can serve as an effective instructional strategy for optimizing children's early reading skills.

A study conducted Zulianingsih et al., (2020) stated that the word wheel media can be used as both a teaching aid and an educational game in early reading instruction for young children. The use of this media creates an enjoyable learning environment, enabling children to participate in reading activities with interest, enthusiasm, and without pressure. Such a positive learning atmosphere encourages children's active engagement in the learning process and supports the optimal development of early literacy skills in accordance with their developmental characteristics and learning needs.

A previous study by Muis & Amal, (2019) The study found that word card and picture activities effectively improved the early reading skills of Group B children. Children's reading ability increased from the Beginning to Develop category to the Developing as Expected category following the implementation of the intervention. Logan et al., (2024) found that early language development significantly contributes to kindergarten readiness and later reading achievement. Salamah & Sarjiyem, (2025) reported that game-based educational media effectively improved kindergarten children's early reading and writing skills. Similarly, word cards and picture media have been shown to enhance children's early reading ability.

An engaging instructional approach is therefore needed to increase

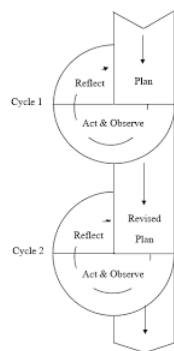
children's interest in reading at TK Dharma Wanita Persatuan 2 Wonoagung, as an alternative to the previous book-based reading method. According to the 2025 Early Childhood Education (ECE) Graduate Competency Standards (Standar Kompetensi Lulusan/SKL) under the Merdeka Curriculum, literacy development for children aged 5–6 years emphasizes literacy readiness rather than formal reading instruction. The expected learning outcomes include: (1) demonstrating interest and active participation in reading-related activities, (2) understanding that words consist of sounds or syllables, (3) recognizing letter symbols and associating them with their initial sounds, and (4) expressing ideas, questions, and opinions through storytelling and conversation.

Creative word play activities are consistent with the principles of early childhood education in the Merdeka Curriculum because they position children as active participants in meaningful play-based learning. Enjoyable word games can enhance children's intrinsic motivation, encouraging voluntary participation without pressure. Moreover, these activities can be adapted to each child's developmental level and learning needs while utilizing concrete learning materials that accommodate diverse learning styles among young children.

Methods

This study employed the Classroom Action Research (CAR) method, which is a systematic effort to improve learning practices in order to enhance the quality of both the learning process and learning outcomes. According to (Kurt Lewin in Machali, 2022), Classroom Action Research consists of four main stages: planning, action, observation, and reflection. Furthermore, developed and refined. The Kemmis and McTaggart model consists of two cycles, and each cycle includes four components: planning, action, observation, and reflection

Figure 1. Kemmis and McTaggart Diagram



The data collection techniques used in this study were observation and documentation. The research indicators are presented in the following table:

Table 1. Activity Indicators

No	Indicator	Activity
1	Ability to recognize letter symbols	Children arrange letters into words
2	Reading simple words	Children read animal names

This study was conducted at TK Dharma Wanita Persatuan 2 Wonoagung, Kasembon District, Malang Regency. The research

employed a Classroom Action Research (CAR) design, which is intended to improve teaching and learning practices through iterative cycles of planning, action, observation, and reflection (Wijaya et al., 2023). The research subjects consisted of 10 Group B children, including 6 girls and 4 boys. The learning media used in this study included letter cards, word cards, word lottery games, and simple word puzzles designed to support creative word play activities. Data were collected through observation and documentation, which are widely recognized as appropriate techniques for obtaining comprehensive information about participants' learning processes and outcomes in educational research (Creswell, 2019). The learning media used in this study included:

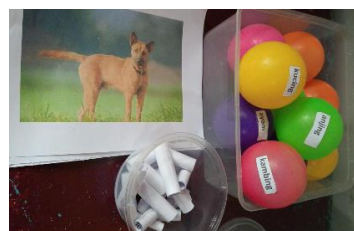


Figure 2. Letter Card: Figure 3. Word Ball Figure 4. Word Lottery

The learning media above were designed to attract children's interest in learning, facilitate the gradual introduction of letters and words, and create enjoyable and interactive reading learning activities.

Result and Discussions

The researcher conducted observations by recording children's

development and documenting the observation results. The findings of this study are presented from the pre-cycle stage, Cycle I, and Cycle II in Table 2 below:

Table 2. *Research Results*

Description	Indicator A	Indicator B	Average
Pre-cycle	55%	52.75%	53.75%
Cycle I Meeting 1	55%	52.75%	53.75%
Cycle I Meeting 2	67.5%	67.5%	60%
Cycle II Meeting 1	77.5%	77.5%	77.5%
Cycle II Meeting 2	92.5%	85%	88.75%

In Cycle II Meeting 1, a more significant improvement occurred, with both Indicator A and Indicator B reaching 77.5%, resulting in an average of 77.5%. In Cycle II Meeting 2, the highest improvement was achieved, with Indicator A reaching 92.5% and Indicator B 85%, resulting in an average of 88.75%. Based on the research findings, reading instruction delivered through creative word play activities was able to create a meaningful and enjoyable learning atmosphere, enabling children to understand beginning reading concepts more easily.

This finding is consistent with Piaget’s cognitive development theory cited in (Istiqomah & Maemonah, 2021) and (A’yun & Sa’diyah, 2024), which states that kindergarten-aged children are in the preoperational stage, where learning becomes more effective when carried out through concrete and enjoyable activities. This theoretical

perspective is further supported by the findings of Afandi et al., (2022) who reported that creative word play activities provide direct experiences for children in recognizing letter symbols and words, making the reading process easier to understand.

The concept of creative word play offers meaningful and new learning experiences for early childhood learners because it allows children to learn actively while exploring their abilities to recognize letter symbols and read simple words. Through creative play, children not only gain instructional knowledge but are also trained to generate new ideas, adapt to changes, and develop positive competitiveness (Halisah & Muthohar, 2024). The implementation of this concept helps children improve reading skills and assists teachers in presenting material concretely so that learning objectives can be achieved (Hanafy, 2014).

Beginning reading is the initial stage in the development of children's literacy skills, starting with the recognition of letters and their sounds, both vowels and consonants (Riska, 2024). At this stage, children begin to recognize various images and symbols in their surroundings and associate them with meaningful words. At the age of five to six years, particularly among Group B children in early childhood education, children begin to demonstrate the ability to understand word meanings in simple contexts (Marlina et al., 2022). In addition, reading activities involve visual skills, such as directing eye movement from left to right, as well as the ability to recognize the

relationship between letters and sounds (Herlina et al., 2018).

The findings of this study support previous research stating that reading activities can improve children's interest, concentration, and reading ability in early childhood. Nasem & Tanjung, (2022) explained that reading is the activity of recognizing and interpreting written symbols and understanding the meaning conveyed through the sense of sight. Reading activities are not merely about pronouncing written text but also aim to obtain new information or knowledge contained in reading materials.

Conclusion

Based on the research findings, the average reading ability of the children was 53.75% in the pre-cycle stage. The average score remained at 53.75% in Cycle I Meeting 1, increased to 60% in Cycle I Meeting 2, reached 77.5% in Cycle II Meeting 1, and finally improved to 88.75% in Cycle II Meeting 2. In addition to the quantitative improvement, qualitative changes were also observed throughout the implementation of the creative word play activities. The children became more enthusiastic and actively participated in learning, showed greater confidence in recognizing letters and reading simple words, collaborated more effectively with their peers during word games, and demonstrated increased interest in reading activities. The play-based learning environment encouraged children to engage voluntarily and enjoy the learning process without feeling pressured. Therefore, it can be concluded that the implementation of creative word play activities

was effective in improving both the reading ability and learning engagement of Group B children at TK Dharma Wanita Persatuan 2 Wonoagung, Kasembon District, Malang Regency.

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