

Teachers' Competence in Designing Educational Play Activities at RA An-Nurul Islam Medan Helvetia

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Abstract

This study aims to describe the competence of teachers in designing educational play activities at RA An-Nurul Islam Medan Helvetia. The research uses a qualitative approach with a descriptive method. Data collection techniques are carried out through observation, interviews, and documentation. The results of the study show that teachers already have a basic understanding of the importance of play as a means of early childhood learning. Teachers prepare play activity plans based on learning themes and use various educational media. However, some teachers still make general planning without a systematic structure and measurable evaluation. In the implementation, children are actively and enthusiastically involved in the designed play activities. Limited training and lack of time are the main obstacles in designing optimal activities. Therefore, improving teacher competence through training and mentoring is important to support the quality of play-based learning in RA.

Keywords: Teacher Competence, Educational Play Activities, Early Childhood Education, RA.

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Introduction

Early childhood is an individual who is in the early stages of life that greatly determines the direction of his future development and growth. This period is often referred to as the *golden age*, because in this period children experience rapid and comprehensive development, both in physical, intellectual, emotional, social, and moral aspects. Therefore, early childhood education (PAUD) has a strategic role in shaping the basis of children's personality and life skills.

In the early childhood education approach, play is one of the main and most effective learning methods. Play is not only a recreational activity, but it is also a natural and fun learning activity for children. Through play, children can explore the environment, develop creativity, train cognitive and motor skills, and build social relationships and moral values. Therefore, play activities that are designed in an educational manner have an important role in supporting children's growth and development optimally.

However, play activities carried out in a formal educational environment such as RA (Raudhatul Athfal) cannot be carried out carelessly. These play activities must be designed systematically, structured, and have a clear educational purpose. This is where the role of teachers becomes very central. PAUD teachers are required to have competence in designing play activities that are in accordance with the child's developmental stage, curriculum-based, contain educational values, and be able to integrate cognitive, affective, and psychomotor aspects in these activities.

Teacher competencies in this context include understanding of the characteristics of child development, mastery of play theory, creativity in developing educational game tools, and skills in designing play-based learning strategies that are fun and meaningful. Failure to design educational play activities can cause these activities to lose pedagogical value, and even have the potential to hinder children's development.

RA An-Nurul Islam Medan Helvetia as one of the Islamic-based early childhood education institutions seeks to integrate Islamic values in the children's learning process. One of the approaches used is through educational play activities that are adjusted to the vision of forming Islamic morals and character from an early age. However, the effectiveness of these play activities is highly dependent on the extent to which teachers have competence in designing and implementing play activities that are educational, creative, and fun.

In practice in the field, not all teachers have an adequate early childhood education background, or special training in designing play activities. Most teachers may still rely on play activities that are monotonous, not varied, or lack attention to the overall aspects of children's development. On the other hand, there are also teachers who are quite innovative but face limited institutional facilities and support.

This situation shows the importance of studying teachers' competence in designing educational play activities, especially at RA An-Nurul Islam Medan Helvetia. This research is relevant to delve deeper into the extent to which teachers have the understanding, skills, and creativity in designing games that are not only fun, but also able to develop children's potential holistically. In addition, this research is expected to provide practical recommendations in improving the quality of training and professional development of RA teachers, as well as becoming an institutional evaluation material in improving the quality of Islamic-based early childhood education.

By examining the competence of teachers in the context of educational play activities, this research not only contributes to improving the quality of learning in RA, but also supports national efforts in building the nation's character through quality, contextual, and rooted in Islamic cultural and spiritual values.

Theoretical Studies

Teacher competence is the ability or proficiency that an educator must have in carrying out his professional duties effectively and efficiently. Law Number 14 of 2005 concerning Teachers and Lecturers states that teacher competence includes four aspects, namely: pedagogical, personality, professional, and social competence. In the context of early childhood education, pedagogic competence is highly emphasized because teachers must be able to understand the characteristics of students, design appropriate learning, and create a fun and meaningful learning atmosphere (Suyadi, 2015). Competent teachers not only master the teaching material, but also be able to complement contextual, active, and creative learning strategies. Teachers must also be able to reflect on their own learning practices and continue to improve their abilities through continuous training and professional development.

Play is the main and natural activity for early childhood. In the children's world, play is the most effective means of learning. Through play, children can explore the environment, develop motor, social, emotional, and cognitive skills, and learn to solve problems creatively. Jean Piaget said that play is an important part of the process of assimilation and accommodation that supports children's intellectual development. According to Bredekamp & Copple (2009), good play activities are those that are consciously designed by educators to achieve specific learning goals. Playing in the context of education is referred to as educational play, which is a fun play activity but still contains learning values that are systematically designed.

At RA (Raudhatul Athfal), educational play activities are an integral part of the curriculum. Teachers are required to be able to design various forms of play activities that are not only fun but also contain educational elements, such as role-playing, playing blocks, playing numbers and letters, playing sand, to games based on Islamic values.

The design of this activity must consider aspects of child development (age, interests, needs), learning objectives, the availability of educational game tools (APE), and the integration of character and religious values. Teachers must also understand scaffolding techniques, which are to provide enough help to children while playing so that they can reach a higher level of understanding.

Designing educational play activities requires pedagogic and professional competence of teachers. Teachers must be able to:

1. Analyze children's learning needs based on developmental stages.
2. Determine specific and measurable learning objectives.
3. Select and adapt games that are relevant to the theme and learning indicators.
4. Develop systematic and flexible implementation steps.
5. Use media or aids that are safe and attractive to children.
6. Evaluate children's involvement and achievement in play activities.

According to Permendikbud No. 137 of 2014 concerning National Standards for Early Childhood Education, early childhood teachers must be able to create a learning environment that is rich in stimulation and based on play activities as the main strategy in learning.

Research Methods

The research used in this study is qualitative research that provides descriptive information in written or oral narratives about the people and behaviors observed. In this study, the author examines the phenomenon that occurs at RA An-Nurul Islam Medan Helvetia to obtain the truth of information based on the theoretical framework of the questions asked scientifically. The research approach used is a field-based descriptive approach in natural conditions taken from written or oral narratives and the behavior of the people observed consisting of school principals, teachers and students.

Research and Discussion Results

This study aims to find out the extent of teachers' competence in designing educational play activities at RA An-Nurul Islam Medan Helvetia. Data was obtained through observation, in-depth interviews with teachers and principals, as well as documentation of the daily lesson plan and play media used.

The results of the study show that teachers at RA An-Nurul Islam have a fairly good understanding of the importance of play activities as a medium for early childhood learning. In the planning stage, teachers arrange play activities based on a predetermined weekly theme. The play activity plan is written in the RPPH (Daily Learning Implementation Plan) and is equipped with indicators of child development achievement. The activities designed include role-playing, playing blocks, playing numbers, and games based on Islamic values such as guessing hijaiyah letters and ablution simulations.

However, from the results of observations, it was found that not all teachers plan play activities with a systematic structure. Some teachers still organize activities in general without paying attention to the flow of learning objectives, clear activity steps, or measurable evaluation. This shows that the pedagogic and professional competence of some teachers still needs to be improved, especially in terms of designing play activities that are in harmony with the curriculum and children's development.

In the implementation of educational play activities, teachers tend to be enthusiastic and actively involve children. Children are seen fully participating in activities that are attractively designed and according to their interests. Teachers also use various auxiliary media such as educational game tools (APE), pictures, number cards, and hand puppets. However, some activities are not fully based on a structured approach to play, so the educational meaning of play has not been fully explored.

Based on interviews, several teachers said that the limited training and lack of time to design activities in depth were the main obstacles. Teachers rely more on teaching experiences and resources available on the internet. The principal is aware of the importance of improving teacher competence and has planned internal training to improve teachers' ability to design more creative and educational activities.

This finding is in line with the opinion of Suyadi (2015) that designing play activities requires strong pedagogic competence, an understanding of children's characteristics, and the ability to develop fun but directed media and methods. Competent teachers are not only able to create interesting play activities, but also able to relate them to the learning goals they want to achieve.

Overall, the results of this study show that teachers at RA An-Nurul Islam already have a competency basis in designing educational play activities, but still need assistance and reinforcement in terms of more structured planning and evaluation of more measurable activities. The support of the principal, continuous training, and collaboration between teachers are important factors in improving the quality of educational and fun play activities.

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