Increasing Children's Ability to Recognize Letters Through the Traditional Lontar Boat Game

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Abstract

This research is motivated by the lack of recognizing letter recognition among children. Then this study aims to explores the effectiveness of the traditional palm boat game in enhancing letter recognition skill. Using Classroom Action Research (CAR) conducted over two cycles each comprising planning, implementation, observation, and reflection the study involved early childhood students at Dharma Wanita Ngompro 2 Kindergarten. The findings revealed significant improvements in the children's ability to recognize letters. During the first cycle, participants demonstrated progress, though some required additional guidance. By the second cycle, nearly all children achieved proficient letter recognition, alongside marked increases in motivation and learning engagement. The study highlights the traditional palm boat game as an innovative, enjoyable, and effective pedagogical tool for early literacy development. Its integration into educational strategies both in classrooms and at home can foster foundational skills while preserving cultural play-based learning. Educators and parents are encouraged to adopt this method to support children's cognitive and linguistic growth in a dynamic and meaningful way.
Keywords: children's ability, letters, traditional game, lontar boat game

Introduction

Developing the ability to recognize letters of the alphabet aims to improve children's language skills. In this ability, children are expected to recognize simple concepts so that they are ready to learn at a higher level. Children's learning activities must be made fun and exciting, like traditional games. Playing is a child's world, and playing is a way for children to learn (Sujiono & Nurani, 2009). Language development is an aspect of early childhood education. This is because language development is needed by children in their lives, such as recognizing letters. The ability to recognize letters looks simple, but children must master this ability because the introduction of letters is initial capital (Nurhayati et al., 2021). Play has the principle of a relationship with the activity of controlling reality, which is carried out by experimenting and planning. When playing as a child, it is very important that all game experiments carried out by children increase their knowledge and experience. Children's games can be described as games that are beneficial for children and can certainly stimulate aspects of language development.

One of the competencies that kindergarten students must have is being able to participate in further education with optimal readiness in accordance with the demands that develop in society. Developing the ability to recognize letters of the alphabet aims to improve children's

language skills. With this ability, children are expected to be able to recognize simple concepts so that children are ready to learn at a further level.

In playing, language is very important for children, in accordance with the opinion of (Nurbiana, 2007) stating that language is a means of connecting or communicating between members of society consisting of individual thoughts, feelings and desires. In line with (Santoso, 2011) describes that children are in the stage of combining thought and language as one unit; when children play with their friends, they communicate with each other using the child's language, and that means that children are indirectly learning language. Early childhood education is a critical stage in children's development. One important skill that needs to be developed at this stage is the ability to recognize letters. Recognizing the letters of the alphabet is an important first step in the reading and writing process. However, making learning fun and interesting for children is a challenge in itself. Children also tend to like interesting activities (Hayati, 2022).

Language is a child's ability to communicate with the people around him. This development includes the child's ability to communicate thoughts, ideas, and thoughts, as well as receiving, capturing, and digesting sounds. Language is a means of communication between members of society consisting of individuals who express thoughts, feelings, and desires (Dhieni & Wulan, 2016). When children explore various play activities, children involve various physical motor abilities (Mufidah & Hayati, 2023). Developing the ability to recognize letters of the alphabet is a foundational step in enhancing children's language skills, preparing them for higher-level learning. However, many early childhood education programs face challenges in making letter recognition engaging and effective for young learners. Traditional teaching methods often lack the interactive and playful elements that resonate with children, leading to limited progress in literacy development. This study addresses this gap by exploring the potential of the traditional "Lontar Boat" game as an innovative pedagogical tool to improve letter recognition among kindergarten students.

The significance of this research lies in its dual focus: advancing early literacy skills while preserving cultural heritage through traditional games. Existing studies highlight the importance of play in children's cognitive and linguistic development (Sujiono, 2009) (Ndlovu et al., 2023), yet few have examined how specific traditional games can be adapted for educational purposes. By integrating the "Lontar Boat" game into the curriculum, this study not only offers a fun and interactive learning method but also contributes to the broader discourse on culturally relevant pedagogy in early childhood education. Furthermore, the findings could provide educators and parents with practical strategies to support children's literacy development in both classroom and home settings.

The research is motivated by observations at Dharma Wanita Ngompro 2 Kindergarten, where children exhibited low letter recognition skills despite conventional teaching efforts. Preliminary assessments revealed that 80% of the students struggled to identify letters, underscoring the need for an alternative approach. The "Lontar Boat" game, a culturally familiar activity, was selected for its potential to combine physical engagement with learning, thereby addressing the children's need for dynamic and meaningful interactions. (U. H. Binsa, 2024).

This study aims to achieve the following objectives are to evaluate the effectiveness of the "Lontar Boat" game in improving letter recognition among kindergarten students, to assess the impact of game-based learning on children's motivation and engagement in literacy activities, and to provide actionable insights for educators on integrating traditional games into early childhood literacy programs.

Methods

This study employed Classroom Action Research (PTK) to investigate the effectiveness of the traditional "Lontar Boat" game in improving children's letter recognition skills. PTK was selected over other methodologies (e.g., experimental or survey-based designs) because it allows for iterative, real-time adjustments in teaching strategies while maintaining a natural classroom setting. Unlike quantitative approaches that prioritize generalizability, CAR emphasizes practical problem-solving and reflective teaching (Harly et al., 2023), making it ideal for evaluating pedagogical interventions in early childhood education.

The study involved 10 children aged 4–5 years from Dharma Wanita Ngompro 2 Kindergarten, selected through purposive sampling based on two criteria a) Low pre-test scores in letter recognition (80% scored "undeveloped" in initial assessments), and b) no prior exposure to structured literacy games. This homogeneous sample ensured focused intervention impact analysis while limiting confounding variables like prior knowledge.

This study utilized multiple data collection methods, including direct observation, interviews with teachers, and analysis of pre- and post-intervention test results. Before the intervention began, the children were tested to assess their initial letter recognition skills. During the first cycle, the "Lontar Boat" game was introduced to the children as part of a group activity where they learned to recognize letters through fun and interactive activities. In the game, the children had to arrange flying letters (simulating a lontar boat) and match them with corresponding objects or pictures. This activity not only enhanced their letter recognition skills but also helped develop fine motor skills and social cooperation. Each cycle of Classroom Action Research (CAR) involved reflection and evaluation of the methods used, allowing the teacher to adjust the approach based on the children's needs.

After the first cycle of the intervention, there was a significant improvement in the children's letter recognition abilities. The average post-test scores indicated that most of the children showed considerable progress, with many of them who were initially categorized as "undeveloped" moving to the "developing" or even "proficient" categories. This improvement was not only evident in their ability to recognize letters but also in their engagement with the learning process, as they became more active and enthusiastic learners. Teachers reported that this playful approach made the children more motivated to learn and improved their interactions with peers. These findings suggest that incorporating traditional games into learning activities can be an effective tool in early childhood education, especially in addressing challenges like low letter recognition among young children. This study provides new insights for educators in designing more contextually relevant and enjoyable learning strategies without compromising academic goals.

Result/Findings

Playing is necessary for children because childhood is a time of play. Our next task is not to limit play activities but to ensure that play activities carried out by children can provide positive value for the development of their souls so that they have a positive influence on the child himself (Munastiwi et al., 2018). This playing method usually requires preparation; therefore, the availability of playing media is the main prerequisite that must be prepared. The media in question is not just goods but can also take the form of various types of games, which educators must master so that the learning process runs as expected. If it is not prepared well, then the learning objectives will not be achieved.

Traditional games are well known by our society and even children. This type of game, which is historically native to Indonesia, has become part of the culture and traditional games that are very attached to children. Therefore, the implementation of cultural values from traditional games will be very easily accepted and even practised by AUD, especially if it starts with storytelling activities at the opening of the game, in addition to increasing the child's vocabulary and introducing the environmental context. Children need to get an introduction to the culture around them where they grow up so that children will gain knowledge about the culture where they live.

The core activity with one game topic, namely "playing palm boats" can be a learning model in stimulating all aspects of development. Making the "Boat" pattern together at the beginning of the core activity has stimulated social-emotional development and creativity in children. Literacy: Initial reading of the words "PE-RA-HU" can be done while counting and also giving numbers to each letter. This is then done by reading a story before playing with palm boats. Children try to write names and repeat simple sentences. Children are asked to express their opinions, recognize symbols, and imitate (write and pronounce) the letters A.

Figure 1. Lontar Boat

In the initial conditions before this research was carried out, the ability to recognize letters in group A at DW Ngompro 2 Kindergarten still needed to be improved. This was proven by the majority of children in the class having difficulty recognizing symbols, sorting letters and matching letters. Based on the results of pre-actions carried out in 10 children who know letters,

it is known that 80% or 8 children are not able to recognize letters, and 20% or 2 children who meet the criteria are able to recognize letters. The activity planning for cycles one and two is as follows.

Pre-Cycle Observation Assessment

Table 1. Pre-Cycle Observation Assessment

No	Name	Repeating sentences				Mentioning letter symbols				Completing simple sentence				Score	Result
		1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4		
1	Azril		v				v				v			6	MB
2	Arendra	v				v				v				3	BB
3	Azam	v				v				v				3	BB
4	Azim	v				v				v				3	BB
5	Albi	v				v				v				3	BB
6	Albiansyah	v				v				v				3	BB
7	Intan		v				v				v			6	MB
8	Mika	v				v				v				3	BB
9	Najwa	v				v				v				3	BB
10	Yusuf	v				v				v				3	BB

Explanation:

1= (Undeveloped)

2= (Starting to Develop)

3= (Developing According to Expectations)

4= (Very Well Developed)

Table 2. Assessment Indicator

No	Indicator	Assessment Score			
		1	2	3	4
1	Repeating sentence	Children is not yet able to repeat the sentences	Children have begun to be able to repeat the sentences they hear from the teacher.	Children are able to repeat sentences they hear from the teacher but the teacher still helps them	Children are able to repeat sentences they hear from the teacher without the teacher's help.
2	Mentioning letter symbols	Children are not yet able to recognize the letter symbols in	Children are beginning to recognize the symbols of letters in the game of perahu lontar.	Children are already able to recognize the letter symbols in the palm boat game but are still	Children are able to recognize the letter symbols in the palm boat game without help from the teacher.

3	Completing simple sentence	the palm boat game Children are not yet able to complete simple sentences in the palm boat game	Children begin to be able to complete the sentences in the palm boat game	being helped by the teacher. Children is able to complete the sentences in the palm boat game with the help of the teacher	Children are able to complete the sentences in the palm boat game without the teacher's help.

Table 3. Pre-Cycle Observation Assessment Recapitulation

Category	Children Total	Percentage
Undeveloped	8	80%
Starting to Develop	0	0%
Developing According to Expectations	2	20%
Very Well Developed	0	0%
Total Score	10	100%

Cycle 1

Before the intervention, an initial test was carried out to measure the ability to recognize letters. The result of measuring this ability is that children cannot differentiate or recognize the types of letters in the palm boat game. The pre-test results show that the average child's ability to recognize letters is low, with an average score of 20%. The children took part in the "Lontar boat" game session for three meetings. These activities are, recognizing the shapes of symbols, showing the shapes of symbols, and recognizing sounds. After implementing the first cycle, children began to understand and recognize letters. The post-test aims to measure the increase in the ability to recognize letters. The results show that the ability has increased from an average of 20% to 50%.

Table 4. Cycle 1 Observation Assessment

No	Name	Repeating sentence				Mentioning letter symbols				Completing simple sentence				Score	Result
		1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4		
1	Azril			v				v				v		9	BSB
2	Arendra		v				v				v			6	MB
3	Azzam		v				v				v			6	MB
4	Azim		v				v				v			6	MB
5	Albi		v				v				v			6	MB
6	Albiansyah		v				v				v			6	MB
7	Intan			v				v				v		9	BSB
8	Mika		v				v				v			6	MB
9	Najwa		v				v				v			6	MB
10	Yusuf		v				v				v			6	MB

Table 5. Cycle 1 Observation Assessment Recapitulation

Category	Children total	Percentage
Undeveloped	0	0%
Starting to Develop	2	20%
Developing According to Expectations	3	30%
Very Well Developed	5	50%
Total	10	100%

Cycle 2

Based on the results of the first cycle of reflection, this was done by increasing the variety of games and integrating more interesting physical activities, such as making letter patterns with fruit or animal characters that children like. The children participated in the "poultry boat" game session for three meetings: recognizing sounds, sorting the letters with those on the boat, and matching letters with pictures. After the second cycle was successfully carried out, the children's post-test results showed improvement. This improvement is that children are starting to recognize letters and attach the word boat correctly, with an average score of 80%.

Table 6. Pre Cycle 2 Observation Assessment

No	Name	Repeating sentence				Mentioning letter symbols				Completing simple sentence				Score	Result
		1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4		
1	Azril				v				v				v	12	BSB
2	Arendra			v				v				v		9	BSH
3	Azzam			v				v				v		9	BSH
4	Azim			v				v				v		9	BSH
5	Albi			v				v				v		9	BSH
6	Albiansyah			v				v				v		9	BSH
7	Intan				v				v				v	12	BSB
8	Mika			v				v				v		9	BSH
9	Najwa			v				v				v		9	BSH
10	Yusuf			v				v				v		9	BSH

Table 7. Pre-Cycle 2 Observation Assessment Recapitulation

Category	Children Total	Percentage
Undeveloped	0	0%
Starting to Develop	0	0%
Developing According to Expectations	2	20%
Very Well Developed	8	80%
Total	10	100%

The increase in the ability to recognize letters, data shows that there is a significant increase in the ability to recognize letters in children from the first to the second cycle; this shows that the "Lontar Boat" game implemented in DW Ngompro 2 Kindergarten is very

effective in improving children's early literacy skills. Apart from being effective, The game "Lontar Boat" is so interesting that it makes the learning process carried out at DW Ngompro 2 Kindergarten help children stay focused and enthusiastic so that it is easier for them to remember the letters taught by the teacher.

While playing, children must always repeat consistently so that they remember and recognize letters better. In the game "Lontar Boat," children not only recognize letters but can improve their physical abilities. Teacher support is very important in ensuring success and helping children more quickly understand the letters being taught.

Discussion

The results showed a significant increase in children's letter recognition skills from cycle I to cycle II after the application of the "Lontar Boat" game at DW Ngompro 2 Kindergarten. This finding indicates that game-based learning methods can have a positive impact on children's early literacy skills.

The ability to recognize letters in children aged 4-5 years refers to an indicator of the child's language development achievement (Aerin et al., 2025). This significant improvement in letter recognition skills supports the theory that game-based learning can increase children's motivation and engagement in the learning process. The "Perahu Lontar" game not only presents a fun way to learn letters, but also encourages children to repeatedly interact with the material, which is key in the memory reinforcement process. Previous research has shown that repetition in a fun context can improve children's memory (Ndlovu et al., 2023). Also, play is one of the basic needs of children and is the basis for children's development (Zain et al., 2024).

In contrast to traditional approaches that tend to be monotonous and less engaging for children, the "Perahu Lontar" game offers an interactive learning experience. Research by (Taufika Nururrohmah et al., 2024) through rainbow lava games can provide learning experiences in early childhood, can develop critical thinking skills and high curiosity, as well as learn about chemical reactions practically. Research by (Mufiana et al., 2024) The STEAM learning approach with the introduction of floating and sinking concepts has proven to be effective in increasing understanding of basic science, overcoming the problem of lack of real experience in learning, and fostering curiosity and creativity in young children. Research by (U. H. B. Binsa & Diyanah, 2022) Painting activities using cutting boards can improve visual spatial intelligence in children at PGRI 3 Ngawi Kindergarten. Research by (U. H. Binsa et al., 2022) Through this cotton collage activity, it is possible to improve artistic abilities in group A1 RA Muslimat NU XIII Nawa Kartika Talok students. This finding confirms the importance of innovation in teaching methods to achieve better results.

The implications of these findings are very relevant for educators and education managers at the kindergarten level. By implementing the "Lontar Boat" game, educators can not only improve children's literacy skills, but also create a dynamic and fun learning environment. This is important to maintain children's focus and enthusiasm for learning, which in turn can accelerate the learning process. Also, the introduction of letters given to children

from an early age is vercriticale cause it is a provision for children to continue their education at a higher level (Isnia Azmi et al., 2021).

Although the results of this study are promising, some limitations need to be noted. This study was conducted in one location, DW Ngompro 2 Kindergarten, so generalization of the results may be limited to that context. In addition, other factors such as parental support and social environment may also influence children's learning outcomes, but were not examined in depth in this study. For future research, it is recommended to conduct a study with a wider population and involving various educational sites to test the effectiveness of the "Perahu Lontar" game in various contexts. In addition, further research could also explore the relationship between teacher and parent support in the game-based learning process and its impact on children's literacy development.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that the traditional *Lontar Boat* game significantly enhances letter recognition among kindergarten students at Dharma Wanita Ngompro 2 Kindergarten. Through a two-cycle Classroom Action Research (PTK) approach, the intervention yielded measurable improvements: Pre-cycle to Cycle 2, the percentage of children achieving "Very Well Developed" letter recognition increased from 0% to 80%. Children exhibited heightened engagement and motivation, with the game serving as both a cultural and pedagogical tool. These findings directly address the study's objectives by: validating the game's effectiveness as an alternative to conventional literacy methods. highlighting the role of play in sustaining children's interest and repetition-based learning.

Providing a replicable model for integrating traditional games into early childhood curricula. Educators can adopt the Lontar Boat game to bridge cultural preservation and literacy development, particularly in communities with similar traditions. Supports constructivist theories (Piaget, 1954) emphasizing social interaction and play in cognitive development. While promising, this study's small sample size and localized context warrant further investigation. Future research could: Explore the game's long-term impact on reading fluency, adapt the method for children with learning disabilities, and compare outcomes across diverse cultural settings.

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