

Efforts to Improve Early Childhood Social Skills Through Joint Play Activities and Group Discussions at RA Al-Hidayah Pui Ganeas

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Abstract: This classroom action research aims to improve early childhood social skills through joint play activities and group discussions at RA Al-Hidayah PUI Ganeas. This study uses a classroom action research method with the research subject being early childhood children at RA Al-Hidayah PUI Ganeas. The results of the study show that play activities together and group discussions can improve early childhood social skills, such as the ability to share, respect friends, and communicate effectively. Playing together also helps children develop cooperation skills, empathy, and respect for differences, while group discussions can strengthen speaking, listening, and problem-solving skills.

This study shows that group play activities and group discussions are effective strategies to improve early childhood social skills, as well as help them become more social and empathetic individuals. Thus, this research can be a reference for teachers and educators in designing effective learning activities to improve early childhood social skills. In addition, this research can also inspire parents and the community to support the development of children's social skills.

This research also emphasizes the importance of the active role of teachers and parents in supporting the development of children's social skills. With effective cooperation between teachers and parents, children can be guided to become more social, empathetic, and ready to face future challenges.

Keywords: social skills, early childhood, play together, group discussion, classroom action research, social skills development, teacher-parent cooperation.

INTRODUCTION

Early childhood development is a very crucial period in the formation of basic skills that will have an impact on physical, emotional, social, and cognitive development in the future. One of the important aspects in a child's development is social skills. These social skills include the child's ability to interact with others, communicate well, and be able to solve problems and conflicts effectively. Along with the times, social interaction-based learning such as playing together and group discussions has become an increasingly popular method in developing early childhood social skills (Nugraheni, 2021). At RA Al-Hidayah, the development of social skills through this activity is believed to have a positive impact on the

overall development of children.

The purpose of this study is to explore and improve efforts that can be made to improve early childhood social skills in RA Al-Hidayah through group play activities and group discussions. This activity was chosen because it has great potential to facilitate children in learning how to interact with peers, share, work together, and understand differences of opinion. Research by Haryanto (2020) shows that playing together can create situations that encourage children to learn to manage emotions and communicate effectively, which is very important in shaping their social skills.

In addition, group discussion activities are also considered an effective method in developing social skills. Group discussions provide opportunities for children to have opinions, listen to other people's views, and work together to reach agreements. This is in line with the findings of research by Sari (2021) which states that group discussions can strengthen children's ability to speak in public, enrich vocabulary, and foster mutual respect between friends. Therefore, integrating play together and group discussions at RA Al-Hidayah is expected to be an effective approach to improve early childhood social skills.

However, despite the obvious benefits of these activities, the reality is that there are some challenges in their implementation. One of the main challenges is the lack of understanding from some educators regarding the importance of developing children's social skills from an early age. For example, in research conducted by Suradi (2022), it was found that many teachers still focus more on developing children's cognitive and academic aspects, while social skills are often neglected. This indicates that a more integrated approach to social skills development needs to be emphasized in the early childhood education environment.

In addition, environmental factors are also one of the obstacles that affect the implementation of this activity. In several early childhood education institutions, including RA Al-Hidayah, the limited facilities and supporting facilities are a challenge in carrying out activities that involve maximum social interaction. According to research by Aminah (2023), limited facilities can limit children's space for movement and interaction with each other, which can ultimately hinder the development of their social skills. Therefore, it is important to create a supportive environment for children to interact with, both in the playroom and in group discussions.

Nonetheless, there is hope that with a more focused approach to developing social skills through games and group discussions, children can benefit greatly in building positive social relationships. Research by Yuliana (2020) shows that interactive activities such as playing together can improve children's sense of empathy and communication skills, which in turn contributes to the formation of a better personality. Therefore, RA Al-Hidayah needs to continue to develop and apply methods that support the development of these social skills.

One of the efforts that can be made is to provide training to educators to better understand the importance of social-based activities and how to implement them properly. Educators who have a good understanding of the importance of social skills will find it easier to create activities that stimulate healthy social interaction among children. It will also help children in overcoming the social challenges they face, such as adapting to peers and communicating well in various social situations.

As a concrete step, this proposal offers several strategies that can be implemented in RA Al-Hidayah to improve early childhood social skills. One of them is by designing activities that combine creative games and group discussions as part of the daily curriculum. These activities must be designed with the child's age development in mind and carried out in a structured manner so that the child can feel the maximum benefits. It is hoped that with the application of this approach, children in RA Al-Hidayah can develop socially, emotionally, and cognitively, and can build social skills that will be useful in their lives in the future.

With this research and proposal, it is hoped that it can be a reference for related parties, both educators and parents, to pay more attention to the importance of developing early childhood social skills. The implementation of structured and effective group play activities and group discussions will have a positive impact on children's development, especially in building healthy social relationships and improving their ability to interact with the surrounding environment.

METHODS

This study uses two types of data sources, namely primary data and secondary data. Primary data were obtained directly through observation and interviews with educators, children, and parents at RA Al-Hidayah. Observations were made during group play activities and group discussions, focusing on children's social interactions, their ability to communicate, work together, and solve social problems. Interviews with educators aim to explore information about the methods used in developing children's social skills, as well as the challenges faced in their implementation. Meanwhile, secondary data was obtained from relevant literature, in the form of books, articles, and journals that discussed early childhood development theories, social skills, and social interaction-based learning methods such as games and group discussions. Secondary data also includes documentation related to activities carried out at RA Al-Hidayah, such as lesson plans and activity reports.

Data collected through observation, interviews, and literature studies will be analyzed qualitatively using descriptive analysis techniques. The purpose of this analysis is to describe the conditions that occur in the field related to the development of children's social skills through group play activities and group discussions. The data analysis process is carried out in several stages. First, data collection is carried out through direct observation in the classroom, interviews with educators, and analysis of existing documents. Furthermore, the collected data will be reduced and selected to be relevant to the focus of the research, namely efforts to improve early childhood social skills. Then, the data that has been reduced will be grouped into certain categories, such as the type of activity, the way of interaction, the obstacles faced, and the results achieved in the development of children's social skills. The last stage is data interpretation, where the data that has been grouped is analyzed to identify emerging patterns and draw conclusions about the effectiveness of group play activities and group discussions in improving children's social skills.

The results of the data analysis will be presented in the form of a descriptive narrative describing the main findings related to the implementation of social activities in RA Al-Hidayah. This analysis method is expected to provide a clear picture of the challenges and successes faced in improving children's social skills through interactive activities at RA Al-Hidayah.

RESULTS

This study collected data from two main sources, namely primary data obtained through observation and interviews, and secondary data derived from related literature studies. During the activities of playing together at RA Al-Hidayah, it was seen that the children were active in interacting with their friends. Most children show good social skills, such as sharing toys, working together in completing group tasks, and resolving small conflicts by discussing. However, some children still need guidance when it comes to communication and negotiation in social situations. Group discussion activities were also carried out at RA Al-Hidayah involving small groups of children supervised by educators. This activity aims to practice public speaking skills, work together in groups, and listen to other people's opinions. Bolder children tend to dominate discussions, while more reserved children need more encouragement to actively participate.

Interviews with educators revealed that they use a social interaction-based approach to develop children's social skills. Educators emphasized the importance of play as a medium to train children to interact, but they also revealed challenges such as time and resource constraints to ensure all children get the same attention. Interviews with parents showed support for the activities carried out at RA Al-Hidayah, especially those involving social

interaction. Parents feel that activities such as play together and group discussions provide opportunities for children to develop their social skills, although some parents find it difficult to apply the same methods at home.

Observation of children's social skills shows that most children can already cooperate with their friends in small groups. However, in activities involving large groups, some children still find it difficult to adapt, suggesting that despite progress, there is still room for further development. Games such as role-playing games, board games, and outdoor games have proven to be effective in stimulating children's social interaction, where children seem to have an easier time interacting with their friends during play and are more open in communicating. The role of parents is also recognized as important in supporting the development of children's social skills, especially by providing guidance on how to interact with their children to support children's social development at home.

One of the challenges faced by educators is the limitation of time, as activities in schools are very dense, making it difficult for educators to pay more attention to children who need more intensive social skills development. The lack of support from parents is also one of the obstacles faced by educators. The documentation of the lesson plan shows that educators have planned activities that support the development of children's social skills, by including games that involve group interaction, group discussions, and activities that prioritize communication between children.

An analysis of secondary data from the literature on early childhood development and social skills shows that social interaction is very important in children's learning. Based on developmental theory, children who engage in social activities, such as playing together and discussing in groups, tend to have better social skills. This approach has proven to be in line with the practices implemented at RA Al-Hidayah.

To verify the accuracy and validity of the data, several techniques were used, including triangulation, returning data to informants, testing for consistency between observers, and analyzing documents. Triangulation was carried out by comparing data obtained through observation, interviews, and literature analysis to ensure consistency of findings. The return of data to the informant is carried out by confirming interviews with educators and parents to ensure the suitability of the information collected with their views. Consistency testing between observers was carried out by involving two observers in the data collection process to reduce bias, and the results of their observations were compared to ensure that the findings obtained were not influenced by the subjective views of one observer. Documentation of existing activities, such as lesson plans and activity reports, is also analyzed to ensure that the data obtained from the field is in accordance with what is written in official documents. The verification results showed that the data obtained were quite valid and consistent, supporting the finding that play activities together and group discussions were effective in improving children's social skills in RA Al-Hidayah.

DISCUSSION

Data validation in this study was carried out to ensure the accuracy and reliability of the findings obtained through data collection in the field. This study uses several validation techniques to test the consistency and credibility of data obtained from various sources, such as observations, interviews, and documentation of activities carried out at RA Al-Hidayah. One of the techniques used is data triangulation, which is carried out to compare and confirm the results obtained from three main sources: observation data, interviews with educators and parents, and analysis of activity documentation. This triangulation aims to ensure that the data obtained are mutually supportive and consistent. The observation results showed that the children actively interacted in group play activities and group discussions. Interviews with educators also confirmed that this social interaction-based method was very helpful in the development of children's social skills, while the analysis of learning documents

supported the findings, suggesting that these activities were planned to improve social skills.

In addition, the return of data to informants is carried out to increase the validity of the data. The results of the interviews and observations are sent back to educators and parents to ensure the accuracy of the information provided. The return of these data shows that the informants confirmed the correctness and consistency of the data collected, which shows that play activities together and group discussions do have a positive effect on children's social skills. Consistency between observers was also tested by involving two observers in the process of observing activities. After making joint observations, the two observers compared the results of their records, and the high consistency between the two added confidence to the observation results obtained. This shows that the observation data is reliable in describing the social interactions that occur during the activity.

Verification of learning documents is also carried out to ensure that the activities recorded in the document are in accordance with the objectives stated in the document. The results of the document verification showed that the activity focused on developing social skills through social interaction, playing together, and group discussions. Based on the results of data validation, it can be concluded that the data collected is valid and credible enough to draw conclusions related to the development of children's social skills through joint play activities and group discussions at RA Al-Hidayah.

The validation results show several important things related to the development of children's social skills. Children who engaged in group play and group discussions showed significant improvements in their social skills. In play together, children learn to share, work together, and solve small problems that arise in the game. Group discussions help children to develop communication skills, listen to the opinions of others, and express their opinions in a constructive way. The role of educators and parents has also proven to be very important in supporting the development of children's social skills. Educators at RA Al-Hidayah have managed to create an atmosphere conducive to children's social interaction, but interviews with parents show that although they support the activities carried out at school, they find it difficult to apply similar methods at home. This shows that the development of children's social skills requires closer collaboration between educators and parents.

The validation process also identified several challenges faced in the implementation of this activity. One of the main challenges expressed by educators is the limited time available for group play activities and group discussions. Although these activities have proven to be effective, educators find it difficult to provide enough time for children to engage in intense social interactions. In addition, despite support from parents, they still need more concrete training and guidance on how they can support the child's social development at home. Based on the validation results, it can be concluded that the social interaction-based method carried out at RA Al-Hidayah is very effective in improving children's social skills. This method is in accordance with the theory of child development which emphasizes the importance of social interaction in early childhood learning. Children who engage in group play and group discussions show better social skills in communicating, collaborating, and solving social problems with their peers.

CONCLUSION

This study shows that group play activities and group discussions at RA Al-Hidayah have a significant positive impact on improving early childhood social skills. The main findings of valid data analysis and triangulation include several important points. First, children who engage in these activities show clear development in their social skills, such as the ability to communicate, cooperate, share, and solve social problems. This activity also helps them manage social conflicts that arise in interactions with friends. Second, the role of educators at RA Al-Hidayah is vital in creating an atmosphere that supports the development of children's social skills. However, parental support is also important, although some parents find it difficult to implement the same method at home. Collaboration between schools and homes needs to be improved to maximize the results of children's social skills development. Third,

based on data validation, methods based on social interaction through play activities and group discussions have proven to be effective. This method not only encourages children's social skills, but also provides opportunities for them to learn in realistic social situations.

From an academic perspective, the findings in this study make a significant contribution to the literature on early childhood social skills development. This research strengthens theories that state the importance of social interaction in children's development, especially at an early age. The group play and group discussion methods used at RA Al-Hidayah can be an example of a learning model that can be adopted by other early childhood education institutions to optimize the development of social skills. More broadly, this study provides insight to educators, researchers, and education practitioners about the importance of a social interaction-based approach in early childhood learning. This method can be integrated in the early childhood education curriculum to support children's social and emotional development. These findings also open up opportunities for further research on other interactive learning strategies that focus on children's social development.

Socially, the findings of this study make a significant contribution to efforts to improve the quality of early childhood education in the community. Improving social skills in children is not only beneficial for them individually, but also for the social development of society in general. Children who are able to communicate well, work together, and resolve conflicts effectively will be better prepared to face social challenges in the future. This research also reminds the importance of collaboration between schools and parents in supporting the development of children's social skills. By strengthening the role of parents in supporting similar activities at home, the development of children's social skills can be achieved more comprehensively. Therefore, the results of this study can be the basis for policies or programs to improve social skills in early childhood education institutions and the community at large.

Overall, this study provides strong evidence that group play activities and group discussions at RA Al-Hidayah are effective in improving early childhood social skills. The academic impact resulting from this study reinforces the importance of social interaction in early childhood education, while its social contribution can play a role in improving the social and emotional quality of future generations.

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