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Developing Thinking Skills in Early Childhood

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ABSTRACT

Early childhood thinking abilities are basic skills that are very important for children's cognitive development, which will influence their learning process in the future. This article aims to discuss the importance of developing thinking skills in early childhood, including critical, creative, logical and abstract thinking skills. Apart from that, this article also reviews various approaches and methods that can be applied to stimulate and develop the thinking abilities of young children, as well as the benefits that will be obtained both in academic and social aspects. Based on existing literature studies, developing thinking skills in early childhood has a significant impact on children's learning success and social skills.

1. Introduction

Early childhood is a very important developmental period because during this period the child's brain develops very quickly. At this age, children begin to learn to think, understand basic concepts and solve simple problems. Good thinking skills can accelerate their learning process and improve their social and emotional skills. Therefore, the development of thinking skills in early childhood needs to be given serious attention.

Early childhood is a child who has just been born until the age of 6 years. This age is the age of children who are very decisive in the formation of character and personality. Early childhood is an age where children experience very rapid growth and development, early age is referred to as the golden age or golden age. Balanced nutritious food and intensive stimulation are needed for growth and development (Khadijah, 2016: 3). In line with the definition of early childhood above, Khadijah also explains the growth and development of early childhood in her book entitled Cognitive Development, namely: "Early childhood is a child aged 0-6 years who has more rapid and fundamental growth and development in the early years of life. Where development points to a process towards a more perfect direction and cannot simply be repeated. Therefore, the quality of children's future development is largely determined by the stimulation they receive early on (Khadijah, 2016: 11).

Early childhood thinking skills cover a wide range of aspects, including critical, creative, logical and abstract thinking. Critical thinking helps children to analyze information and make thoughtful decisions. Creative thinking leads to a child's ability to imagine and create new solutions. Logical thinking teaches children to identify cause-and-effect relationships and patterns, while abstract thinking helps children to understand concepts that are not immediately visible or touchable. According to Ki Hajar Dewantara, early childhood education is a crucial phase that is very sensitive. During this time, the child's soul is very open and every experience they have under the age of seven will form the basis of a strong and lasting soul.

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Therefore, education during this period aims to enrich the child's psyche without changing the foundation of the psyche. Early childhood education should give children freedom as long as there is no risk of harm. Early childhood cognitive development can be divided into two parts, the first is the sensorimotor stage, the second is pre-operational. Cognitive development is one of a series that develops rapidly when individuals are in the early age phase, namely in the preoperational stage aged 2-7 years. What we usually know as early childhood at this time is known as the golden age. In the preoperational stage (early childhood), in this period, intelligence is demonstrated through the use of symbols or signs to express or explain a sign or object that is not currently in a subject. (Marinda, 2020).

According to Jean Piaget's cognitive theory, children's cognitive development can be shaped through biological factors and experiences. Children can actively build their own cognitive world. This is because the stages of development of each child are different. In addition, constructivism theory also believes that learning occurs when children try to understand the world around them, children build their own understanding of the world around them and each child builds their own knowledge thanks to experiences and active interaction with the surrounding environment and culture where they are through play.(Novita). Early childhood cognitive development is a fundamental process in shaping the ability to think, understand information, and solve problems. Early childhood, often referred to as the golden period, is a crucial phase because children's brains develop very rapidly. At this stage, children learn to recognize the world through direct experience, social interaction, and educationally oriented play activities (see Arkam et al., 2024; Nasution et al., 2023; Sabani, 2019). The importance of cognitive aspects in early childhood life makes proper stimulation indispensable.

The role of educators in inspiring meaningful education is very important because starting to provide good education can make children grow and develop into healthy, intelligent and moral children that parents generally desire. The world of early childhood is play, when children play children are very happy, therefore play activities must be able to develop aspects of child development. When playing, children have the opportunity to understand the world, get along with others, express and develop symbolic skills that make children actively build their knowledge. According to Dek Nugraha (2021: 8) cognitive development is all mental activities related to views, thinking, memory, and the way information is managed so that it can support individuals to gain knowledge, solve problems, predict the future, and all cognitive processes related to how a person learns, sees, observes, imagines, predicts, evaluates and thinks about his environment.(Nurdini, 2023: 518)..(Nurdini,2023:518).

2. Method

This research uses a qualitative approach with literature review as the main method to develop early childhood thinking skills. The qualitative literature review was conducted by collecting and analyzing related literature that discusses theories of children's cognitive development, learning approaches that support the improvement of thinking skills, and previous research results in the field of early childhood education. The analysis process was carried out by identifying the main themes, emerging patterns, and gaps in previous research relevant to this topic. This literature review provides a strong basis for understanding the factors that influence the development of children's thinking skills and will be the basis for formulating more in-depth research questions in subsequent studies. With this approach, researchers are expected to explore existing concepts and methods and identify areas that need to be developed in early childhood education to support the development of their thinking skills.

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3. Results and Discussion

Early Childhood Thinking Skills Development

The development of early childhood thinking skills is highly dependent on a supportive environment, both at home and at school. At this age, children are very responsive to experiences that stimulate their cognitive development. Active and experiential learning allows children to learn through exploration and interaction, which supports the development of critical, creative and logical thinking. In addition, the importance of the role of adults in supporting children's thinking processes cannot be underestimated. Parents and educators should be facilitators who help children formulate questions, seek answers, and encourage children to think more deeply about the world around them. Positive social interactions are also very influential in improving children's thinking skills, because through discussion and collaboration, children can see various perspectives and develop new ideas.

The use of age-appropriate educational tools can maximize their thinking process. Educational games such as puzzles, construction games and role-playing games give children the opportunity to learn through fun and engaging activities. In this way, children not only develop thinking skills, but also social and emotional skills that are important for their future lives. In early childhood, children's thinking skills develop gradually through experience and interaction with the world around them. There are several types of thinking skills that need to be developed, including logical thinking, creative thinking, and critical thinking. Each type of thinking has its own role in shaping children's ability to solve problems and adapt to challenges.

Young children begin to develop logical thinking skills through their experiences of playing and interacting with objects. Through play that involves sorting objects, comparing and recognizing patterns, children begin to develop logical thinking skills that will support their ability to understand more complex concepts in the future. Creative thinking is the ability to generate new and original ideas. At an early age, children can be encouraged to think creatively through art activities, imaginative play and experimentation with various media. These experiences help children learn to tackle problems in innovative and different ways, and improve their ability to think outside the box. Critical thinking involves the ability to evaluate information, consider multiple perspectives and draw logical conclusions. Young children can begin to develop these skills through open-ended questions that encourage them to think more deeply about the world around them, as well as activities that stimulate them to analyze and solve problems independently.

In the opinion of Ningsih (2012) critical thinking is logical thinking and reflection centered on what you want to do or believe, reflection means polite actions that arise directly due to environmental influences. In line with the opinion of Mila R (2016: 3) critical thinking is a process that involves intellectually active and full of skills and analyzes, evaluates and synthesizes, so that it can be associated with Bloom's taxonomy, then the ability to think critically is at the level of analysis, evaluation and synthesis. The ability to think critically is not only a cognitive attribute that can remember information, but critical thinking involves higher-level thinking in developing the environment as a learning medium through activities to analyze information, create new ideas, and generators of knowledge in life.The purpose of stimulating critical thinking skills in children is to educate children to dare to communicate their thoughts, solve problems and be able to process the information received. In addition, by honing critical thinking skills from an early age, children are expected to become more conscientious, not easily discouraged and responsible.

Strategies for Developing Early Childhood Thinking Skills

The development of thinking skills in early childhood can be done through an approach that involves various activities that stimulate children's cognition. Here are some strategies that can be implemented: Children learn best through direct experience. Therefore, an

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experiential learning approach is essential. Activities such as role play, nature exploration and art activities can help children develop creative, logical and critical thinking skills. By stimulating children's curiosity and providing opportunities for exploration, they can develop strong thinking skills.

Asking children open-ended questions can stimulate them to think more deeply. For example, educators or parents can ask, "What would you do if..." or "What do you think if we tried something else? "These questions can encourage children to develop critical thinking and broaden their horizons. The use of educational tools that stimulate information processing and problem solving, such as puzzles, building blocks, and other games, can help children develop logical and analytical thinking skills. Through play, children learn to recognize patterns, strategize, and find solutions to problems they face. An effective type of game is puzzles. This game helps children develop logical thinking, problem solving, and pattern recognition skills. Children are asked to arrange the pieces into a whole picture, which requires concentration and analytical skills. According to Soetjiningsih (1995), puzzles teach children to understand the relationship between parts and the whole, as well as train them to think systematically. Veronica's research (2015) shows that puzzles can improve the cognitive abilities of children aged 5-6 years by 94.73%.

The next game is role-playing. This game allows children to pretend to be a certain character, such as a doctor, teacher, or merchant. Role play helps children understand abstract and symbolic concepts, and introduces them to social roles in everyday life. Worthington & Oers (2016) mentioned that role play not only supports the development of imagination but also trains children's communication and language skills. For example, when children play as doctors, they learn to interact with "patients," recognize medical tools, and understand the responsibilities of the profession.

Furthermore, traditional games such as congklak are educational and entertaining. The congklak game hones counting skills, strategic thinking, and patience. In this game, children need to move the congklak seeds to certain holes to collect as many seeds as possible. Heryanti (2014) found that this game can improve children's counting and logic skills by 75%. In addition, traditional games such as congklak also introduce children to rich cultural values.(Rina Windah,2024:82).

Vygotsky emphasized the importance of social interaction in children's cognitive development. By giving children the opportunity to work in groups, both with peers and with adults, they can learn to solve problems together, share ideas and discuss various solutions. This helps develop critical and collaborative thinking skills in children. An environment that supports children's cognitive development is very important. Educators and parents should create an atmosphere that is safe, supportive and stimulates children's curiosity. Providing space for children to ask questions, explore and experiment can maximize the development of their thinking skills.

Learning Approaches to Develop Thinking Skills

To optimize the development of early childhood thinking skills, various learning approaches can be applied. Some approaches that have proven effective in stimulating children's thinking skills include: Play is a natural way for children to learn. Through play, children not only have fun, but also develop critical and creative thinking skills. For example, games that require children to make decisions, plan strategies or solve problems will help them hone their thinking skills.

This approach encourages children to think critically in solving problems. Although it is more often applied to higher levels of education, it can also be modified for early childhood by providing simple problems that can be solved through discussion or small experiments, such as determining how water flows through a particular object. In this approach, children are involved in long-term projects that require them to plan, perform and complete a task. For

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example, children can be encouraged to grow plants, create artwork, or build something using certain materials. Project-based learning helps children develop analytical thinking skills, creativity and cooperation.

This approach emphasizes providing opportunities for children to explore their own ideas and find answers to their questions. The teacher or educator functions as a facilitator who guides the child in the discovery process, provides appropriate challenges, and rewards every effort and achievement made by the child.

Challenges and Solutions in Developing Early Childhood Thinking Skills

One of the main challenges in developing early childhood thinking skills is the limited learning methods that can stimulate critical and creative thinking in children. Many methods focus more on memorization or routine activities that do not sufficiently stimulate children to think deeply or solve problems. This inhibits development. The solution to this challenge is to implement more interactive and educational game-based learning approaches that can stimulate children to think creatively. Approaches such as project-based activities, role-playing and group discussions involving problem solving can be effective ways to stimulate critical and creative thinking in early childhood.

Early childhood has a varied pace of cognitive development, which makes the same learning approach not always effective for every child. Some children may be faster at grasping abstract concepts, while others may need more time and support to reach the same understanding. These differences can lead to an imbalance in the development of children's thinking skills in the classroom. To overcome this challenge, educators need to implement a more personalized or individualized approach, where learning activities are tailored to the needs and developmental level of each child. Providing challenges that match each child's ability, as well as using a variety of different learning strategies, such as game-based learning or activities that stimulate logical thinking, will help children develop in a way that is more optimal for their cognitive abilities.

Unsupportive learning environments, such as lack of adequate facilities or limited resources, can pose significant challenges in developing young children's thinking skills. Children need an environment rich in stimuli to develop cognitively, including a variety of learning aids that stimulate creativity and problem solving. The solution to this challenge is to create a more supportive learning environment, by providing a variety of resources and learning aids that stimulate children's creativity, such as teaching aids, storybooks, or educational digital media. In addition, creating a fun and safe environment will help children feel comfortable to explore ideas and think creatively without fear of getting it wrong.

4. Conclusion

The development of thinking skills in early childhood is a very important aspect in the formation of basic cognitive abilities that will continue into adulthood. Experiential learning, positive social interactions, and the use of age-appropriate educational tools can stimulate the development of logical, creative and critical thinking in children. Young children learn best through hands-on experiences, educational play, and opportunities for discussion and collaboration. In addition, learning approaches such as experiential learning, play and projects can maximize children's thinking potential. Although there are challenges such as limitations in learning methods, differences in cognitive development speed and lack of environmental support, the right solutions such as the use of a more individualized approach and a supportive learning environment can help children develop optimally.

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