

Enhancing Interest in Reading Through Letter Puzzle Media in Early Childhood

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Abstract

The ability to read is essential for early childhood; seeing the current demands of elementary schools, students who will enter the elementary school level must have the ability to read, so this is urgent for early childhood educators to pay attention to oriented media to current needs. Therefore, this research seeks to enhance interest in reading through the media of letter puzzles in early childhood. Moreover, it aims to discover the inhibiting and supporting factors in increasing interest in reading in early childhood. Through a qualitative descriptive approach, data collection techniques used observation, interviews and documentation are complemented by data analysis techniques, namely data reduction, data presentation and conclusion. The results showed an increase in early childhood reading interest by using letter puzzle media in children's learning activities; this was indicated by the average child achieving learning mastery, meaning developing according to expectations. All of this cannot be separated from the supporting and inhibiting factors in terms of time, children's mood, and media design employed in the teacher's teaching and learning process. Thus, letter puzzle media is an alternative media teacher can use to enhance interest in reading in early childhood. It also helps teachers minimise time and creates a fun learning process for children.

Keywords: Teacher, Interest in Reading, Letter Puzzle Media, Early Childhood

INTRODUCTION

Early childhood is a child who is in the age range of 0-6 years or 0-8 years, this period is the golden age, where the growth and development of children develop rapidly. Therefore, stimulation from an early age is important for child development towards the optimization (Armanila, 2021). One fundamental aspect of development, a requirement for children to enter elementary school, especially favourite public and private-based schools – is reading ability. It is part of the aspect of children's language development (A. Armanila et al., 2022, p. 77). Language is acquired through listening and its development is influenced by the child's ability to read, thereby increasing his vocabulary. To be able to hone reading skills, the environment or the teacher must arouse children's interest in reading (Armanila, at. al. 2022, p. 65). Without children's interest, it will be challenging to learn to recognise vowels, spell and even read them into a good sentence.

The above statement aligns with the objectives of early childhood education, namely coaching efforts to be shown for children from birth to the age of six, which is carried out through providing educational stimuli to help physical and spiritual growth and development

K. Armanila, (2018) so that students have the readiness to enter further education, which is held in formal, non-formal, and informal ways (Wibowo, 2017, p. 45). In early childhood learning, interest plays an essential role, in playing while learning. Interests themselves can be interpreted as an interest in something so that it reflects the goal. Well, interest will bring children to the goal (Syardiansah, 2016, p. 243). If related to the concept of reading. Interest in reading is an encouragement to understand word for word the content contained in the reading text as outlined in the reading.

Tampubolon explained in the reading skills book that reading interest is a person's willingness or desire to recognise letters to capture the meaning of the writing (Dalman, 2018, p. 141). The purpose of reading will affect the type of reading chosen. There are seven kinds of goals for early childhood reading activities, namely: 1) Reading to get facts and details. 2) Read for main ideas. 3) Read to find out the order/composition of the essay structure. 5) Read to conclude. 6) Reading to categorize/classify. 8) Reading to assess, evaluate. 9) Read to compare. (Dalman, 2018). Therefore, the teacher must make effort to improve and choose appropriate learning media, and of course the design of the classroom and the tools in it must be a concern. (A. Armanila et al., 2022). These goals are basic in early childhood, only limited knowledge. In the development of this interest in reading, it does not develop by itself, but is influenced by various basic factors, namely the availability of media such as APE, books etc., then situational factors means that one must pay attention to the situation or condition of the child or place and parental factors related to parenting, namely how Foster a child's love for their world of reading (Maharani, 2017, p. 328).

The basis above, which is the background why early childhood learning media must be in accordance with the characteristics of child development, means that the media must be attractive, namely having bright colors, safe, multifunctional, according to the theme or material and of course its use must be adjusted to the time and method or strategy of use in order to achieve the learning objectives contained in the lesson plans and daily teaching modules. It is in line with the opinion of Arsyad (2015, p. 1) that the use and selection of media must be appropriate in order to achieve maximum learning outcomes. Thus, teachers and school officials must be able to recognize and understand what media should be applied for children motivate to learn, because so far in existing learning media, students are not encouraged to develop thinking skills (Nila et al., 2022, p. 486). The learning process in the classroom is directed at children's ability to memorise information, children are forced to remember without connecting information with existing media. And sometimes the teacher doesn't innovate the lesson system by using pictures or media according to the learning material so that the child can absorb it well. Because the media is an intermediary in delivering learning messages for early childhood in order to avoid boredom in children.

There are many types of learning media, from audio, and visual to audio-visual. The media referred to here is in the form of visual media, namely artificial media or ready-to-use media. One of the media often used by the teacher is namely puzzle press, in the form of letter puzzles, because this media is very appropriate in arousing children's interest in reading related to letters (Zahara et al., 2023, p. 44). As stated by Yusuf, in Lilis Madyawati, letter puzzle media is one of the educational media tools that is easy for children to apply and understand, especially for early childhood. Letter puzzle media is made of separate letters and can be rearranged to be a string of words. Through this media, children are stimulated to make a series of words from the letters provided and to train in memory strengthening of letters (Madyawati, 2016, p. 154). The basis for using instructional media in the teaching and learning process can also be found in the Qur'an. Word of Allah SWT, which reads:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا اتَّقُوا اللَّهَ وَابْتَغُوا إِلَيْهِ الْوَسِيلَةَ وَجَاهًا

Meaning: "O you who believe, fear Allah and seek wasilah (way) to get closer to Him, and strive (fight) in His way so that you will be lucky". (Qs. Al Maidah: 35)

The interpretation in Tarbawi's Tafsir Al-Qur'an explains the term educational media, namely the word wasilah. The term media in Arabic is an intermediary or message delivery from the sender to the recipient of the message. Therefore, the tools educators use to convey material to students are called educational media. Based on the explanation above, the role of the teacher is essential in the teaching and learning process in early childhood. The teacher is the first and main mediator and source of learning after the letter puzzle media, the teacher's expertise and teacher's ability determine the success of children in reading or increasing children reading interest. For that reason, the teacher must be able to understand the characteristics of each student, and provide an explanation of the material in accordance with the implemented media. This is in line with research conducted by Christiana (2016, p. 1) with the title the effect of letter puzzle game media on the literacy skills of group A children, the results of his research shows that there is an influence of letter puzzle game media on the literacy skills of group A children, in line with research conducted by Amalia & Patiung (2021, p. 53) with the title development of puzzle media to foster the ability to recognize Latin letters for early childhood, where the results of the research show that puzzle media plays a role in increasing children's interest in reading and has interesting and fun methods so that this game provides benefits for aspects of development. The similarities between these two studies and the research that carried out are the similarity of variables, namely reading interest with puzzle media to increase children's reading interest, even though they have different age characteristics and different methods yet has the same goal.

Based on initial observations made at Raudhatul Athfal Bina Bangsa, regarding the letter puzzle media in early childhood, in this case the class teacher provided information that after the Covid 19 outbreak and restrictions on face-to-face learning or what is known as online, had an impact on children, thus hampering the rate of growth both in terms of reading interest and interest child study. When the Covid outbreak hit, learning was home-based, and children's interest in reading decreased, because, at that time, the only media children used online was books. Then, from the results of the observations that the researchers made, it was found that the use of this letter puzzle media was by arranging the pieces, both the pieces of letters so that they could form a word; the children arranged the letters that had been provided and then the children arranged them based on the order. As for how to use the letter puzzle media by 1) Remove the letter puzzle pieces from the board, 2) Randomize the puzzle pieces, 3) Put them back in order, 4) Challenging the children to do it quickly by measuring time. Based on the problems above, the researcher is keen on studying more in-depth research on improving reading interest through letter puzzle media in early childhood. Therefore, this research aims to determine how to enhance interest in reading in early childhood and the inhibiting and supporting factors of interest in reading in early childhood. This research is expected to contribute to educators finding out how to arouse early childhood interest in reading.

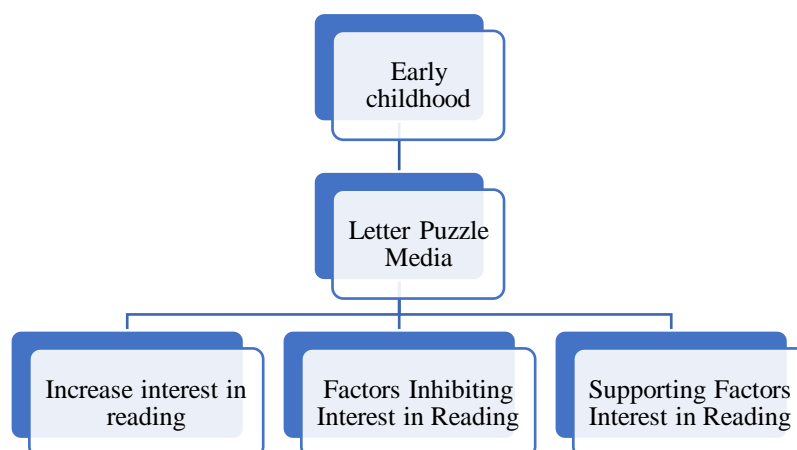
METHOD

This research was conducted at Raudhatul Athfal, in Hamlet III, Medan Senembah Village No.77A Kec. Tanjung Morawa Kab. Deli Serdang, North Sumatra. The type of research was field qualitative research, namely, a study conducted in the natural environment as a source of direct data and individuals investigated or research conducted in the field whe-

re symptoms occur (Hadi, 2016, p. 10). Field research to obtain existing data regarding how to increase interest in reading through the letter puzzle media is needed in this research. The approach authors employed in this study was to use a qualitative approach, namely a research procedure that produces descriptive data in the form of written or spoken words from people and behaviours that are observed and directed at the natural setting and the individual as a whole.

The research data source is the subject from which the data can be obtained. The data sources explored in this study consist of primary data sources in words and actions and additional data sources in documents. Researchers made this data for the specific purpose of solving the problem being handled. Data were collected by the researchers themselves directly from observation, and interviews. Meanwhile, secondary data, namely data that has been collected for purposes other than solving the problem at hand. this data can be found quickly. This study's secondary data sources are articles, books, journals, and others (Sugiyono, 2019, p. 137).

The data collection method used is in the form of observation to obtain research data and interviews are used by submitting questions according to needs (Arikunto, 2013, p. 197). Data analysis in qualitative research was carried out before entering the field, during and after finishing in the area. The author uses data analysis with the Miles and Huberman models, namely data analysis that is carried out directly and continues until complete so that the data is saturated through data reduction, data presentation and conclusion. (Salim, 2018, p. 147).



Picture 1. Flow of Research Methods

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Increasing Interest in Early Childhood Reading Through Letter Puzzle Media

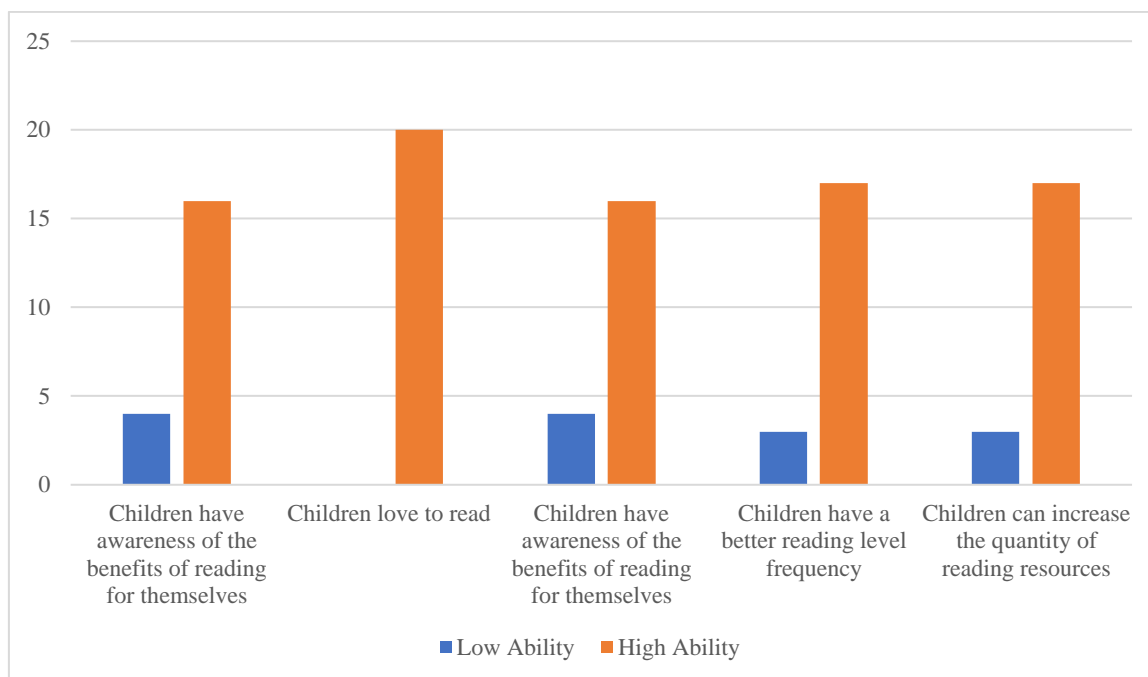
Based on the research results obtained through observation, interviews, and documentation, puzzle learning media can enhance children's interest in reading early on; this is in line with interviews conducted with the school principal Nur Asiah, S.Pd.I which was conducted at RA Bina Bangsa Cape Morawa. "It is media that supports and attracts children's attention which can enhance children's interest in reading, especially letter puzzle media. In fact, letter puzzle media is beneficial in the learning process in class." Puzzle media is media that can help students in learning, and help to increase interest in reading to students. Learning media must be adapted to the abilities of students,

Children's interest in reading enhances when media puzzles are implemented. The teacher previously made a learning plan and developed it into modules, with a predetermined

theme, namely the environmental theme, with school environment material and sub-material in the form of game tools at the school. For the initial stage, the teacher did an apperception by explaining environmental themes that were related to the previous theme, the children were so enthusiastic about hearing the teacher's explanation by responding in the form of a number of questions while raising their hands. Then the teacher asked the children to sit with the letter "U", then starts the core activity, with the first step: the teacher gives the children a puzzle with a picture of my environment, then gives it to each child and asks the children to release the letters arranged on the puzzle board these letters. Then the children were asked to scramble the released puzzle letters scatteredly, meaning that the children scrambled the pieces letter by letter. After that, the child is asked to rearrange the letter puzzle pieces that have been released and randomized according to the order. And finally, the teacher gives a task in the form of a challenge to the child to arrange a letter puzzle in accordance with the allotted time "the core activity ends, then the teacher evaluates the child's performance in the form of rigging and punishment.

This reading routine activity using letter puzzle media aims to become a habit that is carried out at school every Monday and Thursday. So, it can be understood that basically the teacher has been trying to guide and stimulate or direct teaching and learning interactions so that what the teacher conveys can influence the success of children in increasing interest in reading. This is because early childhood requires proper stimulation, one of which is through learning activities that are able to develop the growth and development of children as a whole. This media turns out to be able to foster interest in reading in early childhood. In addition, letter puzzle media can be used as educational media and has educational values for students which allows students to learn efficiently related to the use of letter puzzle media in the teaching and learning process. Letter puzzle is a game that arranges pieces of letters into a complete word form, students are trained to think and be active, besides that it is also to train children's memory. But keep in mind that the teacher must prepare a mature lesson plan in the use of letter puzzle media in increasing interest in reading in early childhood, namely with the teaching preparation stage, selectively introducing material through new themes related to the media, so that the materials taught to children have special themes and sub-themes that differ each week. One of the flexible media for early childhood learning is the letter puzzle media.

This is in accordance with the expression of one teacher that "the use of this puzzle media aims to train cognitive in children to train memory in children, so that children understand what they have learned about the letter puzzle media, and the child also randomizes the letter puzzle media based on the order. Playing looking for missing letters can make the class atmosphere less boring, children can improve their reading even more, and can recall missing letter after letter so that they can be arranged by forming the correct word and according to the order. From the results of interviews with researchers playing looking for missing letters has a good function for children, besides arousing children's enthusiasm so they don't get bored in using letter puzzle media, also the child can explore what he knows, and the child can also recall the appropriate letters, can train fine motor skills in children. With this activity aims to recall what he has done in the previous lesson, to show that the child really understands, and remembers what he has learned so that the child understands reading word by word, besides that the teacher sees where the child is capable or understands with the use of this media, if there are children who do not understand about the media the teacher continues to try until the child understands. That evaluation in learning using puzzle media in early childhood is very important in order to find out how far the child's understanding of the use of the learning media. Thus, there is an increase in children's interest in reading, as shown in the table. 1, as follows:



Picture 2. Enhancing Interest in Early Childhood Reading Through Letter Puzzle Games

The table above shows that, at the pre-test stage, the first indicator shows that there are 5 children who have not developed their awareness of the benefits of reading for themselves and 15 people are starting to develop, in the second indicator there are 10 children who have not yet developed a love of reading, 10 children who are starting to develop, on the third indicator the children have an awareness of the benefits of reading for themselves there are 15 people who have not yet developed and 5 people who are starting to develop, on the fourth indicator the children who have a frequency of reading levels that are better there are 15 children who have not yet developed and 5 children who are starting to develop, while in the 5th indicator, namely children can increase the quantity of their reading resources, there are 15 children who have not yet developed and 5 children who are starting to develop.

At the post-test stage, the first indicator shows that two children have not yet developed their awareness of the benefits of reading for themselves and two children are starting to create, 15 children are designing according to expectations, and one child is developing very well. In the second indicator, 17 children developed according to the expectations of reading pleasure and three children developed very well. In the third indicator, children have an awareness of the benefits of reading for themselves; there is one person who has not yet developed, and three people are starting to grow; 15 children are developing as expected, and one child is developing very well. on the fourth indicator, there is one child who has not yet developed and, two children who are starting to create, 17 children who are developing as expected.

2. Supporting and Inhibiting Factors for teachers in enhancing interest in reading through letter puzzle media in early childhood

The implementation of the use of puzzle media in enhancing early childhood reading interest is not simply successful without supporting factors. Supporting factors are one of the causes of success in achieving learning objectives. The first supporting factor is the teacher makes the puzzle media as interesting as possible which can attract children's attention to the puzzle media. Therefore, children do not experience boredom during learning process. Which in the end will be enthusiastic about participating in learning, strengthens

children's memory in long-term memory and can train children's fine motor skills. This means that it can sharpen children's development towards optimization. In line with research by found out that puzzle learning media help children improve their letter recognition skills, and teachers can use this media as a complement to class in the learning process (Zahara et al., 2023). The second factor is the child's mood, where the mood determines how excited the child is in the learning process, therefore a teacher must be able to make the child's mood better. As a parent, of course, you have to be able to repeat the learning that the teacher has given at school, because if you expect that what is given from school is not enough for your child, there must be repetition of learning at home, with the aim that the child will improve in reading again.

Intelligence in children is one of the aspects in determining whether a child is successful or not in the learning process, therefore if a child is lacking in reading motivation it will affect the child's intelligence. The next supporting factor is the teacher, if a teacher is able to use learning media properly learning will automatically go well, and vice versa if the media used by the teacher cannot use it properly, then learning will not go well, of course this is the most significant supporting factor in using this letter puzzle media. Thus, the advantage of this letter puzzle media is it can be made by yourself by utilizing used goods and can create it yourself, another advantage is it is easier for children to remember or understand learning by using this letter puzzle media, children are able to solve simple problems, and are able to increase their vocabulary. words to children, increase the curiosity of students. In line with the results of research conducted by Agustina, et al (2022, p. 95) that puzzle media can arouse children's interest and motivation in reading, because it can strengthen children's memory. Memory is the ability of the brain to remember something (Khadijah, 2017, p. 5) especially long-term memory. The stronger the child's memory, the easier it is for him to repeat learning properly so that the child can more quickly grasp the material presented by the teacher (Ps & Amalia, 2022, p. 165). As in cognitive theory, the process of cognition begins with the schemata that the child has, then moves on to imitation, a child who has a good cognitive level will be better at imitation, of course the same thing was stated by Bandura (Khadijah, 2013, p. 23) that good imitation occurs when there is attention, and attention arises because of an interest in something so that a desire or motivation arises to repeat it, if the experience is fun, then the child will continue to repeat it, which will eventually form a certain skill or ability.

In implementing letter puzzle media to enhance early childhood reading interest, of course, does not run smoothly in such a way. The inhibiting factor in increasing reading interest through letter puzzle media is the child's mood which often changes, making children not enthusiastic about reading. The mood is closely related to emotions, especially what is meant here negative emotions. Like sadness or anger, a child's sadness sometimes arises because his parents didn't buy him something he wanted, so when he arrives at school and attends lessons, the child sulks. Although this attitude is not always and includes emotions that do not usually appear. And the thing that often triggers children to get angry when learning to use puzzles is severe drowsiness so that children are weak and lethargic, meaning they are not enthusiastic when learning; this is related to physical discomfort. This usually happens to children whose sleeping hours are longer or unnatural for a child due to parenting parents who do not apply time discipline in daily life. For that reason, the child's concentration or attention decreases at school. Then, another factor that becomes an obstacle is that children want to finish quickly so they can play quickly because children sometimes see friends who have finished being called so children want to finish quickly too. Playing with many kinds of children (Lubis et al., 2021, p. 11); otherwise, if the child is often taught to read automatically the child's reading habits will increase. Here it can be seen that, the in-

fluence of peers is very strong in the child's learning process (A. Armanila et al., 2022). This is because children aged 5-6 years have entered the stage of social play, they are able to play cooperatively and enjoy playing with friends (Izzaty, 2013, p. 1). The next factor is the lack of children's time at school but parents do not want to work with teachers to stimulate children's reading interest with programs that are in line with school programs. Even though this is very important as a form of parenting. Because to create children who love the world of literacy, it must be built from the smallest environment, namely the family which is the smallest part of society. Therefore, parents must pay attention to the care they provide.

Thus, based on the results of the research described above, regarding increasing interest in reading through the media of letter puzzles in early childhood it was found that there was an increase before the pre-test and post-test in children's reading interest, this is indicated by the average child reach the level of completeness or are at the level of developing assessment according to expectations, although there are still only a few children who have not yet developed, and are at a very good level of development, only a few children. So, this means that there is an increase in interest in reading in early childhood. This has proven the truth of previous research. This shows that to increase interest must start from attention or attention, which is then followed by efforts to imitation, then do experiments with these different objects, so that the child will learn and continue to try how to put together the letter puzzle and automatically the child will recognise the letters by playing and in a fun way, so that word for word will be assembled through this activity, and this will be repeated by the child if there is reward and punishment so that it forms a habit and may be replicated in a different context with the essence of the same goal. All of this cannot be separated from the supporting and inhibiting factors in terms of time, children's mood, and media design to its use in the teacher's teaching and learning process. Finally, letter puzzle media is an alternative media that can be used by teachers to increase early childhood reading interest.

CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the study entitled increasing reading interest through letter puzzle media in early childhood at Raudhatul Athfal found in Tanjung Morawa, the researchers concluded as follows: There is an increase in early childhood reading interest by using letter puzzle media in children's learning activities, p. this is indicated by the average child achieving learning mastery means developing according to expectations. All of this cannot be separated from the supporting and inhibiting factors in terms of time, children's mood, and media design to its use in the teacher's teaching and learning process. In conclusion, letter puzzle media is an alternative media teacher can use to increase interest in reading in early childhood. It also helps teachers minimise time and create a fun learning process for children.

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