

The Application of Loose Parts Media in Play Activities to Improve Children's Letter Recognition

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ABSTRAK

Permasalahan utama dalam penelitian ini adalah masih rendahnya kemampuan pengenalan huruf pada anak yang disebabkan oleh penggunaan media pembelajaran yang kurang menarik dan cenderung konvensional. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengetahui penerapan media loose parts dalam kegiatan bermain untuk meningkatkan pengenalan huruf pada anak di TK Dharma Wanita Desa Gayam Kecamatan Gayam Kabupaten Bojonegoro. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif dengan metode studi kasus. Subjek penelitian terdiri dari anak kelompok taman kanak-kanak dan guru kelas sebagai informan utama. Teknik pengumpulan data dilakukan melalui observasi, wawancara, dan dokumentasi. Analisis data dilakukan melalui tahapan reduksi data, penyajian data, dan penarikan kesimpulan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa penerapan media loose parts dalam kegiatan bermain dapat meningkatkan keterlibatan anak dalam proses pembelajaran. Anak terlihat lebih aktif, antusias, dan kreatif dalam menyusun berbagai benda menjadi bentuk huruf. Kegiatan bermain menggunakan media loose parts juga membantu anak memahami bentuk huruf secara lebih konkret melalui pengalaman langsung. Interaksi sosial antar anak juga meningkat ketika mereka bekerja sama dalam menyusun huruf menggunakan bahan yang tersedia

ABSTRACT

The main problem in this study is the still low ability of letter recognition in children, which is caused by the use of less interesting and rather conventional learning media. This study aims to determine the application of loose parts media in play activities to improve letter recognition in children at TK Dharma Wanita, Gayam Village, Gayam District, Bojonegoro Regency. This study uses a qualitative approach with a case study method. The research subjects consist of kindergarten group children and classroom teachers as the main informants. Data collection techniques are carried out through observation, interviews, and documentation. Data analysis is carried out through the stages of data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions. The results of the study show that the application of loose parts media in play activities can increase children's involvement in the learning process. Children appear more active, enthusiastic, and creative in arranging various objects into letter shapes. Playing activities using loose parts media also help children understand letter shapes more concretely through direct experiences. Social interaction among children also increases when they cooperate in arranging letters using the available materials.

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INTRODUCTION

Early childhood education is a fundamental stage in the process of cognitive, language, social, and motor development of children, which will serve as the foundation for learning success in the next educational level (Beaver et al., 2017; Mamuladze et al., 2024; Sholeh, 20025). One important aspect of early childhood education is the development of early literacy skills, particularly the ability to recognize and form letters (Hand et al., 2024; Setianingsih & Abduh, 2025; Snow, 2017). The ability to form letters is not only related to language aspects but also linked to fine motor development, hand-eye coordination, and children's symbolic thinking abilities. During early childhood, children learn optimally through enjoyable, explorative, and meaningful play activities (Arnott, 2023; Keung & Fung, 2021; Zuhriyah, 2025). Therefore, the learning provided to children should be designed in the form of activities that are creative, innovative, and in accordance with the characteristics of children's development. Teachers need to use various interesting learning media so that children can more easily understand the concept of letters while also increasing their motivation to learn. Appropriate learning media can help children visualize the shape of letters concretely, making the learning process more effective.

One of the learning media currently widely used in early childhood education is loose parts media. Loose parts are various materials that can be moved, arranged, combined, taken apart, and reused by children to create various forms according to their imagination. This media can consist of simple objects that are easy to find in the surrounding environment, such as small stones, bottle caps, twigs, seeds, buttons, popsicle sticks, or pieces of wood. The use of loose parts media provides children with the opportunity to explore freely, creatively, and actively in learning activities (Budiarti & Darmayanti, 2020; Rianti et al., 2022). Through this media, children can arrange objects into letter shapes, allowing them to learn to recognize and form letters in a concrete and enjoyable way. In addition, activities using loose parts can also train creativity, problem-solving skills, and improve children's fine motor coordination (Dewi et al., 2022; Zahidah et al., 2024). Learning with this media also allows children to learn through direct experience, making the learning process more meaningful (Arsyad et al., 2024; Qureshi et al., 2022). Thus, loose parts media has the potential to become one of the effective learning media alternatives in developing early literacy skills in young children.

However, in reality, children's ability to form letters has not yet developed optimally in several early childhood education institutions. Based on initial observations conducted at Dharma Wanita Kindergarten in Gayam Village, Gayam District, Bojonegoro Regency, it was found that some children still experience difficulty in forming letters properly and correctly. Some children are still unable to imitate the letter shapes demonstrated by the teacher and often write letters backward or not according to their actual shapes. This is suspected to be because letter learning activities are still conventional in nature and mostly use the method of writing on children's worksheets. Learning that focuses too much on writing activities sometimes makes children feel bored and less interested in participating in learning activities. In addition, the use of less varied learning media is also one of the factors that cause children to be less active in the learning process. This condition impacts the low ability of children to recognize and form letters independently. Therefore, an educational innovation is needed that can increase children's active involvement in the learning process. One alternative that can be done is to utilize learning media that is more engaging and in accordance with the child's play world.

In line with research conducted by Aerin Wafa et al., the use of loose parts media has a positive effect on the ability of children aged 4–5 years to recognize letters, because this media can increase children's engagement, interest, and learning activities in the early literacy learning process (Aerin et al., 2025). In line with research conducted by Iin Iryanti, Suzana, and Fitri Meilani, the implementation of loose parts media has been proven to improve letter recognition skills in early childhood because it provides a more concrete, engaging learning experience and encourages more active learning activities (Iryanti et al., 2024). Research conducted by Mei Purnama Nasution et al. shows that the use of loose parts media has a positive effect on children's cognitive development, especially in mathematical play activities in early childhood education (Nasution et al., 2024).

Various previous studies have shown that the use of creative and innovative learning media can improve the early literacy skills of young children. Some studies have discussed the use of play media in enhancing the ability to recognize letters as well as early reading skills in children. However, most of these studies have focused more on the use of picture media, letter cards, or digital media in the learning process. Research that specifically examines the use of loose parts media to improve letter-forming skills in

young children is still relatively limited, especially in the context of educational institutions in rural areas. In addition, the implementation of loose parts media in letter learning activities has not been extensively studied in the form of classroom action research involving a gradual improvement process in learning. This condition indicates a research gap that needs to be further investigated in order to contribute to the development of literacy learning strategies for early childhood. Research on the use of loose parts media in letter formation learning is expected to provide a more comprehensive picture of the effectiveness of this media in enhancing children's abilities. With this research, it is hoped that a more innovative learning approach can be discovered, one that is suitable for the learning characteristics of early childhood.

This study aims to improve children's letter-forming abilities at TK Dharma Wanita, Gayam Village, through the use of loose parts media. It investigates the implementation process of loose parts media in early childhood learning activities. The study also examines the extent to which this media increases children's engagement and activeness. Furthermore, it observes changes in children's abilities in forming letters after the learning activities. The findings are expected to provide an alternative strategy for teachers and contribute to the development of innovative early childhood learning practices.

METHOD

This study uses a qualitative research method with a case study approach. Qualitative research aims to understand phenomena in depth through the collection of descriptive data so that researchers can obtain a comprehensive picture of an event or process that occurs in the field (Majid, 2017; Prastowo, 2016). This approach is used to describe in detail how the implementation of loose parts media in play activities can help improve letter recognition in early childhood. Qualitative research is chosen because it is able to provide a deeper understanding of the learning process that occurs in the classroom, including the interaction between teachers and children during the activities. In addition, this approach also allows researchers to understand children's learning experiences in a more contextual way according to the school environment conditions. This study not only focuses on the final learning outcomes but also on the process of play activities carried out by children when using loose parts media. The research was conducted at Dharma Wanita Kindergarten in Gayam Village, Gayam District, Bojonegoro Regency, which was chosen because it is an early childhood education institution that

implements play-based learning and has student characteristics at the early literacy development stage. A conducive school environment as well as teacher support in utilizing creative learning media are important considerations in choosing the research location. This research was conducted for 1 month, specifically in December 2025.

The subjects of this study are kindergarten children at TK Dharma Wanita in Gayam Village, Gayam District, Bojonegoro Regency who are at the early literacy development stage. The number of research subjects consisted of 20 children and 2 classroom teachers who were directly involved in learning activities. At this stage, children are introduced to letter symbols as a foundation for reading and writing skills in the next level of education. In addition to children as the main research subjects, classroom teachers also become important sources of information because teachers play a role in designing and implementing learning activities using loose parts media. Through the teachers, the researcher can obtain information regarding the learning strategies used, the process of playing activities, and the development of children's abilities in recognizing letters. In addition, learning activities in the classroom also become a part of the observational focus in this study. By involving children, teachers, as well as the learning situations that occur in the classroom, it is expected that this study can provide a more comprehensive picture of the application of loose parts media in play activities. This approach allows researchers to gain a deeper understanding of how children interact with learning media and how play activities can support the process of letter recognition. The criteria for selecting child subjects are being 4–5 years old, being in group A, and being at the early stage of literacy development, while teachers are selected based on direct involvement in classroom learning.

Data collection in this study was carried out through observation, interviews, and documentation (Gunawan, 2023; Roosinda et al., 2021). Observation was conducted to directly observe play activities using loose parts media and to see children's interactions with the learning media used. Interviews were conducted with classroom teachers to obtain information about the teachers' experiences in using loose parts media, the learning process carried out, and the challenges faced during the activities. Documentation was used to complement the research data in the form of photos of learning activities, notes on children's development, as well as other documents relevant to the research. The data obtained were then analyzed using qualitative data analysis, which includes three stages: data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions.

Data reduction is carried out by selecting and simplifying data relevant to the research focus, while data presentation is done by organizing the data in the form of descriptive narratives to make it easily understood. The final stage is drawing conclusions to find meanings from the analyzed data. To ensure the validity of the data, this study uses triangulation techniques, which involve comparing data obtained from various sources and data collection methods so that the resulting data can be trusted and scientifically accountable.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

RESULT

1. Implementation of Play Activities Using Loose Parts Media

The implementation of play activities using loose parts media is carried out in classroom learning activities with the aim of helping children recognize various letter shapes more concretely. The learning activity begins with the teacher providing an apperception about the letters to be studied that day. The teacher introduces the letter shapes to the children through a simple discussion and shows examples of letters using letter cards. The teacher then invites the children to say the letters being shown together. After the letter introduction activity is carried out, the teacher begins to introduce the loose parts media that will be used in the play activity. The media consists of various simple materials such as small stones, bottle caps, ice cream sticks, buttons, and pieces of wood. These materials are placed on the table so they can be easily seen and taken by the children.

The observation results show that the children seemed interested when the teacher introduced loose parts materials. The children appeared to pay close attention when the teacher explained how to use the materials to form letters. Some children seemed to try to hold and examine the objects available on the table. The classroom atmosphere became livelier as the children showed curiosity toward the media being used. The children also appeared to talk to each other about the objects they were holding. The learning activities seemed more active compared to the previous lessons that used conventional methods. This condition indicates that loose parts media can capture children's attention during learning activities.

The teacher then gave an example of how to arrange letters using loose parts. The teacher arranged several objects into letter shapes in front of the class so that the children could see clearly. The children were asked to observe the process of

arranging letters carried out by the teacher. After that, the teacher asked the children to try arranging letters using the materials provided. The children were given the freedom to choose the materials they wanted to form letters. Some children used bottle caps to form letter lines, while others used popsicle sticks or small stones. This activity made the children directly involved in the learning process.

Observation results also show that the children appeared active during the activities. The children tried various ways to arrange letters using the available materials. Some children were seen cooperating with their friends in arranging certain letters. The children seemed to discuss the shapes of the letters they were making. The teacher provided guidance to children who experienced difficulties in arranging letters. The activity helped the children understand letter shapes better. The learning process took place in a fun and interactive atmosphere. Interviews conducted with the school principal also support these findings. “The number of research subjects consisted of 20 children and 2 classroom teachers who were directly involved in learning activities “ the principal stated. This indicates that the school management views loose parts media as an effective learning innovation in early childhood education.

Interviews conducted with the classroom teacher showed that the use of loose parts media provides a different learning experience for children. The teacher explained that the children seemed more enthusiastic when participating in learning activities using the media. The teacher stated, “*Children are usually more active when learning with objects that they can hold and arrange themselves.*” The teacher also revealed that play activities make children more interested in following the learning process. The teacher observed that children do not easily get bored during the activities. Loose parts media help the teacher create more creative learning activities. The teacher assessed that these activities can support children's letter recognition learning.



Figure 1 Media Loose Parts Learning Process

Interviews with teachers also indicate that loose parts media help children understand letters more concretely. The teacher explained that children find it easier to remember the shapes of letters when they arrange them using real objects. The teacher said, *"When children arrange letters by themselves, they usually remember the shapes of the letters more quickly."* The teacher also conveyed that the activity trains children's fine motor skills. Children have to carefully arrange small objects to form the correct letters. The activity makes children more focused during the learning process. The teacher assessed that loose parts media can be an effective alternative learning medium in the classroom.

2. Children's Response to the Use of Loose Parts Media

The observation results show that the children responded positively to the use of loose parts media in learning activities. The children seemed more interested in participating in play activities conducted in the classroom. When the teacher introduced the loose parts materials, the children appeared enthusiastic to see and touch the objects. The children also seemed active in asking the teacher about how to use the materials to form letters. The classroom atmosphere became livelier because the children showed high interest in the play activities. The children seemed more focused during the learning activities. This condition indicates that loose parts media are able to increase children's learning motivation.

The observation results also showed that the children were more actively participating in learning activities. The children not only listened to the teacher's explanations but also directly tried to arrange letters using the available materials. Some children were seen experimenting with various materials to form different letters. The children seemed to enjoy the learning process because the activities were conducted through play. The activities provided opportunities for the children to

explore various objects. The children appeared more confident when trying to arrange letters independently. The learning process became more interesting for the children.

Children also appear to be more confident in showing their work to teachers and classmates. Some children seem proud when they successfully arrange letters correctly. The children then show the letter arrangements they made to the teacher. The teacher appreciates the effort made by the children. Positive responses from the teacher make the children even more motivated to try again. The children appear happy participating in the learning activities. This situation shows that play activities can increase children's self-confidence.



Figure 2 Use of Loose Parts Media

The observation results also showed that interactions among children increased during the activities. The children were seen helping each other in arranging letters using loose parts. Some children shared materials with their friends to arrange the letters better. The children appeared to discuss the shapes of the letters they were making. The activity trained the children's social skills in working together with friends. The children also learned to appreciate each other's work. The classroom atmosphere became more active and communicative.

Interviews with the classroom teacher showed that the children appeared more enthusiastic when participating in learning activities using loose parts media. The teacher explained that children are usually more interested when learning through play activities. The teacher stated, "When this media is used, the children immediately want to try arranging the objects into letters." The teacher also observed that the children became more active in asking questions and trying various ways to form letters. The teacher noticed an increase in the children's interest in learning during the activities. The children appeared more focused when participating in the

learning activities. The use of loose parts media helps create an enjoyable learning atmosphere.

Interviews with teachers also showed that the use of loose parts media helps increase children's confidence in learning activities. Teachers explained that some children who previously appeared passive began to dare to try arranging letters on their own. The teacher said, "Some children who are usually hesitant are now more daring to try making letters by themselves." Teachers also conveyed that children feel proud when they successfully form the correct letters. Children often show their work to teachers and their friends. This indicates that play activities can boost children's self-confidence. Teachers assess that loose parts media provides positive learning experiences for children.

3. Development of Children's Ability in Recognizing Letters

The observation results showed that the children's ability to recognize letters improved after activities using loose parts media. At the beginning of the learning activities, some children still had difficulty recognizing letter shapes. The children appeared confused when asked to arrange letters using the available materials. Some children still needed help from the teacher in arranging the letters. The children also seemed not to fully understand the shapes of the letters. This condition indicates that the children's letter recognition skills still need to be developed. Learning activities were then carried out using loose parts media to help children understand letters more concretely.

The observation results in the following activities show the development of the child's ability to recognize letters. The child has begun to be able to arrange loose parts materials into letter shapes that match the example. The child appears more meticulous in arranging these objects. Some children are even able to arrange letters without looking at examples from the teacher. The child seems more confident when trying to arrange letters. The activity helps the child understand letter shapes better. The learning process becomes more meaningful because it is carried out through direct experience.

Playing activities using loose parts media also help children remember letter shapes better. Children can mention the letters they have made using the available materials. The teacher asks the children to name the letters they have arranged, and the children are able to answer correctly. Children seem to remember the letters they

have previously learned more easily. These activities help reinforce children's understanding of letters. Children also appear more confident when asked to name letters in front of the class. The learning process becomes more effective for the children.

The observation results also show that the children are more motivated to participate in learning activities. The children no longer feel hesitant when asked to arrange letters using the available materials. The children appear to be more confident in trying various ways to form letters. Some children try to arrange letters using different materials. These activities indicate that the children are beginning to understand letter shapes well. The children also seem to enjoy participating in learning activities more. Loose parts media help to create an enjoyable learning atmosphere.

Interviews with the classroom teacher indicate that the use of loose parts media has a positive impact on the development of children's ability to recognize letters. The teacher explained that children find it easier to understand letters when they arrange them using real objects. The teacher stated, 'Children recognize letters more quickly when they arrange the letters themselves using available objects.' The teacher also observed that children are more active during learning activities. Children appear to be more focused when participating in learning activities. The teacher assessed that play activities help children understand letter concepts better.

Interviews with teachers also showed that playing activities using loose parts media help improve children's ability to arrange letters. The teacher explained that some children have begun to be able to arrange letters more neatly than before. The teacher said, "Now the children have started to be able to form letters better." The teacher also observed that children are more confident when showing their work. Children looked proud when they successfully arranged letters correctly. Playing activities provide enjoyable learning experiences for children. The teacher assessed that loose parts media can be an effective learning tool to enhance letter recognition in early childhood.

Table 1 3. Development of Children's

No	Development Criteria	Number of Children	Description
1	Not Developed (ND)	2 children	The child is not yet able to recognize or arrange letters
2	Starting to Grow (MB)	4 children	The child is beginning to recognize letters but still needs help
3	Developing According to Expectations (BSH)	5 children	The child is able to recognize and arrange letters quite well
4	Developing Very Well (DVB)	13 children	Children are able to recognize and arrange letters independently

Discussion

Research results show that the application of loose parts media in play activities can provide meaningful learning experiences for children in recognizing letters. Loose parts media are materials that can be moved, arranged, combined, taken apart, and reused by children to create various shapes according to their imagination. This concept aligns with the theory of loose parts proposed by Nicholson, which states that an environment that provides a variety of open-ended materials can stimulate creativity, exploration, and problem-solving in children. In this study, the use of various materials such as bottle caps, small stones, popsicle sticks, and buttons gave children the opportunity to freely arrange letters according to their abilities and creativity. Children not only see the shape of letters abstractly, but can also form them directly using real objects. The process helps children understand letter shapes in a more concrete way. Learning that involves direct activities makes it easier for children to remember the letters they have learned. This shows that the use of loose parts media can support the process of letter recognition in early childhood.

The implementation of play activities using loose parts media also shows that children become more active in the learning process. Activities involving arranging letters using various objects give children the opportunity to be directly involved in learning activities. The loose parts theory emphasizes that children learn optimally when they have the freedom to explore various materials available in their environment. In this activity, children are given the freedom to choose the materials they will use to form letters. This freedom allows children to try various ways of arranging letters according to their imagination. This reinforces previous findings by Iryanti, Suzana, and Meilani (2024)

which stated that loose parts media are able to improve letter recognition skills because they provide a more active and meaningful learning experience. Children can be seen trying different combinations of objects to form different letters. These activities show that loose parts media can stimulate children's creativity and curiosity. Open-ended play activities provide children with the opportunity to develop various skills at the same time.

The research results also show that the use of loose parts media can increase children's interest and motivation in learning activities related to letter recognition. Children appear more enthusiastic in participating in learning activities compared to previous activities that mostly used conventional methods. These findings are also in line with Aerin Wafa et al. (2025) who emphasized that loose parts media can increase engagement and learning interest of young children in recognizing letters. The loose parts theory explains that materials that can be freely manipulated can attract children's attention because they provide an engaging and challenging play experience. In this study, children appeared interested when seeing various materials that could be used to form letters. Children also showed curiosity about how to use those materials. This interest makes children more focused on following learning activities. Children seem to enjoy the learning process because it is carried out through play activities. This shows that loose parts media can increase children's learning motivation in letter introduction activities.

The application of loose parts media in learning activities also provides children with the opportunity to learn through direct experience. Children can touch, move, and arrange various objects to form the letters they are learning. This process aligns with the principles of early childhood education that emphasize the importance of concrete experiences in learning activities. Compared to Nasution et al. (2024), who highlight the role of loose parts in cognitive development through mathematical activities, this study expands on those findings by showing that the same media is also effective in early literacy development, particularly in letter recognition. The loose parts theory states that children's interactions with various objects in their environment can help them understand concepts more deeply. In this study, children can see directly how letter shapes are formed from arrangements of small objects. This activity helps children understand the structure and shape of letters more clearly. Children can also remember the letters they have made through this playful experience. Direct learning experiences make children's understanding of letters stronger.

The use of loose parts media also has a positive impact on children's creativity development. Children appear to try various ways to arrange letters using different materials. Unlike conventional learning, which tends to imitate letter shapes in a limited way, the use of loose parts in this study provides children with a wider space to create and build letter shapes according to their imagination. The loose parts theory emphasizes that open materials allow children to use their imagination in creating various forms. In this activity, children do not only imitate the letter examples provided by the teacher, but also try to make letters in their own way. Children use various available objects to arrange letters in different variations. This activity shows that children are able to develop their creativity in learning activities. Children's creativity emerges when they are given the opportunity to explore freely. This shows that loose parts media can support the development of children's creativity in learning activities.

The research results also show that playing activities using loose parts media can increase children's social interaction. Children are seen discussing with their friends while arranging letters using the available materials. The loose parts theory explains that open-ended play activities can encourage children to cooperate and communicate with their peers. In this study, children were seen sharing materials and helping their friends in arranging letters. These interactions show that playing activities can train children's social skills. Children learn to work together to complete a task. These activities also help children develop communication skills with their friends. Thus, loose parts media not only supports cognitive development but also children's social development.

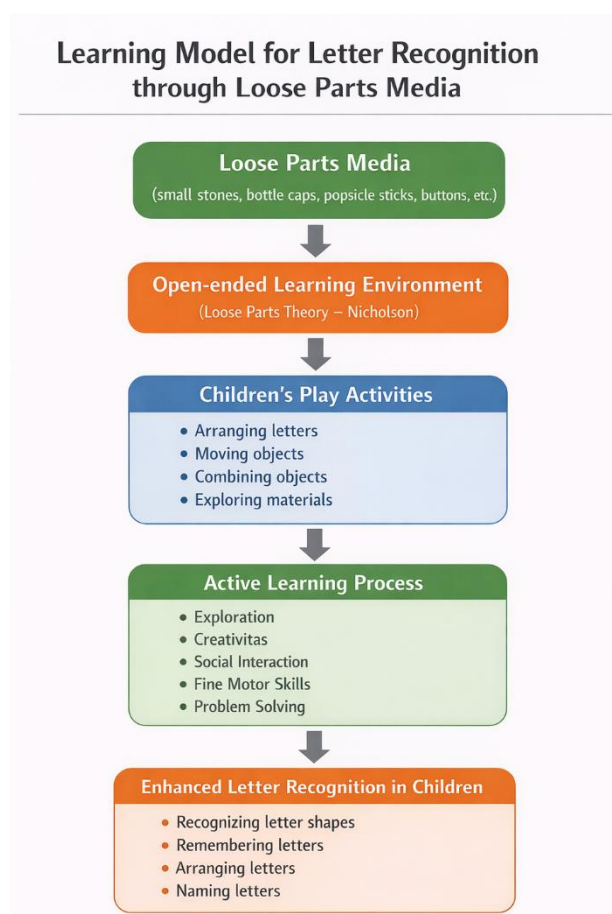


Figure 3 Loose Parts Learning Model

The research results show that the use of loose parts media in play activities can help improve children's ability to recognize letters. Loose parts media provide an enjoyable and meaningful learning experience for early childhood. The loose parts theory emphasizes that an environment rich in open-ended materials can stimulate creativity, exploration, and active learning in children. In this study, children appeared more active, enthusiastic, and confident in participating in learning activities. Children were also able to understand letter shapes more concretely through activities of arranging letters using various objects. Enjoyable learning experiences make it easier for children to understand letter concepts. Therefore, the use of loose parts media can become one of the effective learning media alternatives in letter recognition activities for early childhood.

CONCLUSION

Based on the research results, it can be concluded that the use of loose parts media in play activities at Dharma Wanita Gayam Kindergarten is effective in enhancing letter recognition skills in early childhood. Children showed improvements in their ability to

recognize, arrange, and pronounce letters through play activities involving various materials such as used bottles, small stones, popsicle sticks, and buttons, making learning more concrete, meaningful, and enjoyable. In addition, loose parts media can also increase children's activeness, motivation, creativity, and self-confidence in the learning process, as evidenced by their active involvement and ability to collaborate with peers. Thus, loose parts media can be used as an effective alternative learning tool to support early literacy development in young children, including initial reading and writing.

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