

# Language Games to Enhance Reading and Writing Comprehension for Kindergarten Children

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**Abstract:** Young children generally enjoy games and are content with their participation in a variety of activities. Making something by themselves and feeling proud of their creation may boost their self-confidence. They also learn from the praise or criticism by teachers, parents and other children about the work they made. Language games can stimulate children's motor nerves that allow to be creative without limits, form a creative mindset, and facilitate language skills. This paper aims to delineate literacy development of 24 kindergarten students after participating in a language games such as drawing an apple, fish, worm, bucket, and person. The game is designed to be attractive and suits the age of the children. The materials was made as stress-free materials and does not demand children to always produce a good work. The study conducted through surveys and interviews. The results showed that using games was effective to enhance student's reading and writing learning ability. By using language games, students also able to enjoy and learning happily without pressure.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

Early childhood education is deemed as a place to prepare children for school. Early Childhood Education learning includes many interesting yet educative activities, among others, playing by using educative toys. Learning reading, writing, and arithmetic is not allowed, except to the extent of introducing letters and numbers, carried out after the children enter level B. However, recent developments indicate that early childhood education outputs should possess the ability to read, write, and count because parents are afraid that their children are not able to follow the lessons in elementary school unless they have good reading, writing, and arithmetic skills beforehand.

To meet that need, finally many early childhood education institutions facilitate learning how to read and write for their students. They practice various teaching methods in the hope that they can help children master reading and writing skills before they enter elementary school.

Based on the observation, in language learning especially reading and writing, the methods frequently used are spelling and dictating. These methods are not suitable for children development in

those ages. Moreover, some argue that these methods force the teacher's will to the children, as if the teachers were depriving children's right of playing.

Early Childhood Education age is the period of linguistic creativity development (see also Brown, 1994; Vygotsky, 2004; Zaid, 2011; Cole and Pelaprat, 2011) in which young children are fond of rhymes, songs, and word games, and the success of developing language competence in these stages serve as the precursor for the success of their further language and learning competences, both in their first and second and even foreign languages. Every group of children is trying to develop a distinctive use of language. At this age, children still love to play (Lindqvist, 2001; Christie and Wardle, 1992; Frost, 1992; Cox, 1999). However, learning to read, write, math, and science is not necessarily taboo for young children. What is crucial is to reconstruct how to learn the skills so that children are learning like they are playing and their learning take various forms of games. Therefore, appropriate techniques and methods are called for to foster reading and writing skills for early childhood education students that are in accordance with their development stages that is learning with playing, learning how to read and write with language games.

This paper aims to explore the reading and writing skills of early childhood students based on their development tasks of language. Specific objectives include describing the reading and writing skills of early childhood education students in their development of their reading and writing skills of early childhood education students in the development of their writing, and describing the factors that determine the language development of early childhood education students.

Written language in early childhood education is introduced through integration with the development of fine motor skills (such as drawing), for writing is a continuation of drawing. In addition, written language activities need to be linked directly with spoken language activities (role playing, storytelling, spontaneous brainstorming) and social interaction (group or individual).

Introduction of written language should be done through playing as a source of development and the establishment of zones of proximal development (ZPD) (Vigotsky, 1980). Thus, a process of interaction of symbols, discovery, and self-development in responding to others takes place when children play. They also learn through the process of doing and touching real objects.

Moreover, the introduction of written language through play should be based on immersion, demonstration, engagement, expectations, responsibilities, approximation, use, and response. In addition, it also must pay attention to the development of child's writing. The principles of development of children's writing, according to Brewer (1995), cover the principles of signs, copying, flexibility, inventory, repeatability, and stimulation. Some components necessary in reading-writing among others are foundation of literacy, literacy sensitivity, interest and involvement of literacy, as well as the acquisition of productive-receptive literacy.

The foundation of literacy serves as the basic element that forms the basis for enhancing the ability to read and write (Suherdi, 2012). This includes eye-hand coordination, fine motor skills, the ability to identify symbols, and the ability to write meaning of a symbol. The introduction should be given to children to solidify children's literacy foundation so that children can appropriately develop their productive and receptive written language (Suherdi, 2012; Cummins, 1991). Therefore, various stimuli are to be made to engage children, which further stimulates their skills of scribbling, making letters, combining letters,

recognizing letters, knowing words, their pronunciations, and meanings.

Interest and involvement significantly facilitates children to engage in literacy. Interesting ways are required to make children interested and want to get involved in literacy. For example, these include games of own name symbol, idol, name of loved ones, label names of play equipment, food labels, shop signs, and stories.

Sensitivity to symbols can be honed with a variety of language games such as a play to find sounds, word card game, label cutting and label comparing.

Receptive and productive written language is acquirable by children through play. Reading acquisition consists of several stages, namely (i) differentiation stage (attentive to writing and distinguish it from images), (ii) mock reading stage (attentive to writing and discursive reading), (iii) image reading stage, (iv) random reading stage, (v) take-off stage (spelling, reading slowly without tones), and (vi) independent stage. Acquisition of writing is realized through such stages as scribble, linear repetition, similar letters, random letters, early spelling, phonetics, transition spelling, and conventional spelling stage.

Language is a means to express one's thoughts and feelings. It serves as a tool of communication among humans and a tool for thinking. Language games is referring to children plays designed for the development of language, especially the development of early reading skills in children. Children plays comprise:

### **1.1 Initial Letters Game (a, i, u, e, o)**

The game is aimed to introduce initial letters such as a, i, u, e, o through images of an apple, fish, worm, bucket, and person.

### **1.2 Puzzle Letters Game (Aa - Zz)**

Puzzle letters game is a game of introducing alphabets from A to Z (uppercase and lowercase).

### **1.3 Assembling Letters into Words and Names**

Children assemble given letters to make a child's name and name of an animal. The latter can be supplied with images of animals.

### **1.4 Syllable Game**

It is a game of images and words cut outs. Children try to combine the cut outs to make a complete image and word. The word is the name of the image in question.

### **1.5 Word Hunting Game**

Teachers attach a number of words around the school. They are taped to the wall, door, window, playground, and etc. Children search for the words that have been taped and then try to read them.

### **1.6 Connecting a Picture with a Word Game**

Teachers provide 1 (one) sheet of cardboard on which initial letters of the names of objects, are presented, then the teachers share pictures that come with the names of objects. Children match the pictures with the initial letters of the names of the pictures.

### **1.7 Word Choice Game**

Cards are provided with three choices of words. Children choose the right words for the images available on the card by placing clips on the correct word.

### **1.8 Jump Name Game**

Teachers write the names of the children in a circle in the school yard. Children read to identify their own name and names of their friends. They jump from one circle to another while saying the names written in a circle.

### **1.9 Sentence Assembling Game**

Teachers prepare cards made up of several words, then distribute them to children. After each child gets one word, s/he is asked to find word pairs to make a simple sentence.

## **2 RESEARCH METHODS**

This study employed a survey method, which is aimed to obtain immediate answers regarding the literacy level of Indonesian of kindergarten students based on language development tasks which include

the development of reading and writing. The population of this study were kindergarten students of *Pustaka Ceria Lembang*. The sample were 5-6 year-old students, randomly picked. This is in accordance with the notion that sampling in survey research needs to be randomly taken.

## **3 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

Based on observation and data analysis, the results can be described as follows.

### **3.1 Reading Skills Profile**

The research found that 45.8% of children (11 children) have rather poor reading skills, while 50.2% (13 children) have moderate reading skills. Poor reading skills revolve around letter/alphabet recognition. Their ability is only at the stage of recognizing initial letters (a, i, u, e, o). In addition, they still have not been able to follow the letter puzzle game (Aa - Zz), assembling letters into words and names, and syllables game. For example, while M. Ikhsan could not read the letters well, Crisda Wibawa was able to read the letters fluently, but still lacking in assembling words and names. The children who had difficulty reading could be attributed to the amount of vocabulary the children were unfamiliar with.

### **3.2 Writing Skills Profile**

As regards writing skills, around 62% or 15 children have low skills, thus deserve a lot of attention. Most of them could simply scribble. They largely lacked the skills of writing letters and drawing images. In writing words, the children have not been able to write complete words. M Akbar, for instance, wrote words with many missing letters. In writing of words, some children only drew lines. 38% or 9 children were able to imitate the writing, although it was rather less neat. Haidar, for example, could write fairly neatly but still spelled long words and sometimes some letters were missing when writing certain words, which affects his pace in writing.

### **3.3 Language Acquisition Profile**

Altogether, of the 24 children under study, 20 children reached the operational stage. Children are able to think logically about concrete objects and some master words as symbols and concepts embodied in the word. Almost half of the children merely reached the preoperational stage in terms of

understanding the symbolic mind and have not been able to think logically. In terms of language skills, they demonstrate grammatical awareness, but were only able to use grammatical sentences in initial level.

Of all the students, 90% of which speak Indonesian as a second language, their proficiency of Indonesian is fairly good, especially the development of their phonological skills and vocabulary. This, most likely, is influenced by the input from the environment, especially television. Overall, they have acquired operational skills. Pragmatically, the children on average are able to use the language to tell about something they have seen or experienced. With respect to language development, what should receive a lot of attention is the development of writing skills and the development of semantic skills, especially in the conceptual level that requires complex thinking.

### 3.4 Literacy Development with Language Games

Based on the results of the test and observation, children's literacy increased. This is indicated by the fact that 20 children or 83% have been able to achieve the stage of connecting pictures with meanings. As many as 17 children, or 71% have reached the stage of spelling, which indicates an increase of literacy skills.

As for children language development, it evolves according to their activeness in kindergarten. Based on the interviews and house visits, it is found that children's language development develops largely in school because children use their mother tongue at home. The increase is mainly attributed to story-telling games. Children are most pleased if the teacher tells stories. They were actively competing to retell the stories.

## 4 DISCUSSIONS

During the period of school age and into adulthood, individuals increase the number of vocabulary and meanings of special terms. One generally studies specific meanings in context. In such a process, one reconstructs aspects of linguistic competence. The resulting arrangement is reflected in the way one uses words. As a result, use of figurative language or creativity in speaking progresses quite rapidly. The entire process of semantic development that begins in the early years of primary school can be attributed to the overall cognitive processes (Owens, 1992).

### 4.1 The Development of Reading

Like speaking, early reading skills may be obtained through social interactions, not through formal learning. In story-telling activities undertaken by the parents, both parents and children participate in social activities. Parents employ various techniques to make their children focused, ask questions, and encourage them to try to read.

Parents should introduce story books to children as early as possible. Of course the kinds of books used are those with many colorful pictures to garner children's attention. At the beginning, the children may simply look at the drawings in the book. However, as parents read the story next to the drawings, they indirectly teach their children the composition of the story.

In addition to reading activities, some television shows are beneficial for the development of literacy. For example, *Sesame Street* (in English) and "A Ba Ta Tsa" (Arabic reading and writing Arabic by Neno Warisman) offer activities in which children indirectly study the writings that contain the information they obtain.

There are several phases of development of reading. In a pre-reading phase, which occurs at the age of 6 years, children learn the differences of numbers and letters, and later they get to know every letter and every number. Most children can recognize their names when written. Typically, by learning from the environment, e.g. learning on the signs and names of objects they see, the words they know will gradually grow out of context and eventually the children can recognize these words in writing. Approximately 60% of children aged 3 years and 80% of those aged 4 and 5 years in the United States recognize the word staff (Owens, 1992, p.400).

In phase-1, up to about second grade, children focus on free words in a simple story. In order to read, children need to know the system of writing, how to read smoothly, free of reading errors. Therefore, they should be able to integrate sounds and writing systems. At the age of seven or eight, most children have acquired knowledge of letters, syllables and words required for reading. This knowledge in most countries is acquired in school.

In phase 2, around third and fourth grade, children can analyze words they do not know by using writing patterns and conclusions they draw from context. In phase 3, from fourth grade to second grade of junior, rapid development in reading emerges; that is, the focus of reading is no longer on writing symbols but more on understanding. In the 4<sup>th</sup> phase, namely end of junior high school up to high school, teens use high-level skills such as inferences and identification of authors' view to

improve understanding. Finally, in phase 5, the college level and beyond, adults can integrate things they read with their existing knowledge and critically examine reading material (Owens, 1992, pp. 400-401).

## 4.2 The Development of Writing

There is a parallel between the development of reading and writing skills. In general, a good writer is a good reader, and vice versa. The process of writing is close to drawing in that both represent certain symbols. However, writing is different from drawing, and it is known by a child when s/he is about 3 years (Owens, 1992).

Children begin by drawing, scribble, then make shapes. At first, school children learn to write, even though they do not know names of the alphabets. The words they are highly familiar such as their name help them learn that different letters symbolize different sounds.

Children try to use rules in writing by matching sounds and writing. The sounds in the name of the letter is matched to the sounds they hear. In the beginning they only pay attention to the first letter of each word, other letters receive less attention. This is similar to the early stages of reading, in which case children only pay attention to the first letter. In light of this when children are faced with a story written by using large fonts on the first word of each paragraph, especially using striking colors, it will be easier for them to differentiate letters from one another. In other words, their readiness to read and write will happen relatively quickly with without burden. Later children write syllables, without vowels and no space between. For example, "ball" is written "bl" or "glass" is written "gls", and so on. With the guidance of the teachers, children can recognize the existing writing system.

Many spelling errors occur in the lower grades of elementary schools that are phonological, namely in the form of deletion, replacement, or addition of phonemes, especially to sound clusters, and replacement of the sound based on phonological similarity (e.g. *pawa* replaces *bawa*). There may be similarities between spelling errors and children's expressions. This needs to be further investigated.

Writing is not simply about spelling. Children who are just learning to write often forget the need to read. A 6 year-old pays less attention to the format, writing distance, spelling, and punctuation. If one aspect is prioritized, other aspects deteriorate. For example, when children are taught to write Latin alphabets (a switch from print writings to the Latin alphabets), errors in spelling and sentence structure predominate. Apart from these shortcomings, the

stories children write are often direct and simple yet quite beautiful.

First and second graders (the lower grades of elementary school) have not noticed readers since they are egocentric. When they turn grade 3 or 4, changes take place. They began to observe the reaction of readers. They begin to revise and edit their writings (Owens, 1992). This is influenced by the syntactic knowledge they acquire. In general, during the period of school age, the ability to generate complete sentences rises both orally and in writing. There is also an increase in the use of complex and more varied phrases, clauses and sentences.

## 5 CONCLUSIONS

Learning to read and write can be introduced to students of early childhood education. It would be more interesting if integrated with games. In the process, reading and writing activities can be combined with other learning activities that are designed in the early childhood curriculum without having to burden the children. Sometimes special time or momentum is unnecessary to teach reading, writing and counting. Children can learn how to read through pictures, letters and words games. This is evidenced by 20 children or 83% were able to read and write. In addition, as many as 17 children, or 71% exhibited language development in line with expectations.

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