

Optimizing PAUD Teacher Creativity Through the 'Loose Parts' Workshop

¹Reni Rahmawati, ²Andepi Daryana, ³Faridah Hidayat

Sekolah Tinggi Agama Islam Siliwangi, Garut, Indonesia

*e-mail: renirahmawati@staisgarut.ac.id

Article Information

Received: November 2023

Revised: November 2023

Online: December 2023

ABSTRACT

This Community Service Activity highlights the importance of enriching children's play experiences with a variety of play tools and materials. This activity aims to change PAUD teachers' views on the tools and play materials available in their environment, which are often considered uninteresting or less educative. Through this workshop, participants are taught about the concept of loose parts and how to design a play environment that stimulates children's development in various aspects. This service activity is important because many PAUD teachers do not make optimal use of the tools and play materials around them. This workshop provides a platform for teachers to improve their understanding and skills in presenting interesting and educational play tools and materials. This activity took place for one day in the STAI SILIWANGI Garut Hall, attended by 100 PAUD teachers. This activity includes delivery of material, individual and group assignments, as well as direct practice. This activity is very relevant to the needs of PAUD children and teachers, especially in providing adequate tools and play materials. The results of this workshop show an increase in participants' insight in understanding the concept of children's play tools and materials, as well as their ability to prepare an attractive play environment and encourage children to play. This activity also resulted in an increase in the presentation of a variety of games and evaluation of children's activities. In conclusion, this workshop was successful in increasing the understanding and skills of PAUD teachers in using tools and play materials available around them. Suggestions for the future include ongoing training and the creation of a loose parts warehouse to exchange tools and materials between teachers.

Keywords: PAUD Teacher Creativity, 'Loose Parts' Concept, Children's Interactive Learning

INTRODUCTION

Community service through education, especially at the Early Childhood Education (PAUD) level, plays an important role in developing children's character and basic abilities. These activities, which involve direct interaction with children, not only enrich their learning experience but also hone essential social and cognitive skills. According to a study published by Johnson et al. (2014), early intervention in children's education can have a significant positive impact on children's cognitive and social-emotional development. This emphasizes the importance of innovative and inclusive approaches to teaching in PAUD.

The 'Loose Parts' method in early childhood education (PAUD) is an innovative approach that allows children to interact and be creative with various objects or materials that do not have specific instructions or ways of playing. This concept, which was first introduced by Simon Nicholson in 1971, focuses on the use of everyday or natural objects that can be found in the environment around

children. These objects can be rocks, twigs, cloth, cardboard boxes, or other recyclable items that are safe for children to use.

This approach relies on children's imagination and creativity as the main driver of their activities. In contrast to conventional toys which often have a specific purpose or way of playing, 'Loose Parts' offers children the freedom to explore, experiment and create new games or objects according to their imagination. This allows children to develop critical thinking, problem solving, and fine and gross motor skills.

In its application, PAUD teachers play an important role as facilitators who provide various 'Loose Parts' and observe children's interactions with these objects. Teachers can also provide inspiration or light challenges to stimulate children's creativity, for example by asking what they can make with these objects or how to combine them to create new structures. This method is very flexible and can be adapted to different learning themes, environmental conditions and children's characteristics.

Apart from developing individual skills, 'Loose Parts' also promotes social interaction among children. They learn about cooperation, sharing, and negotiation as they work together or share objects. Due to its open and unstructured nature, this method allows each child to contribute according to their abilities and interests, making the learning process more inclusive and enjoyable.

In this context, the use of loose parts, or play materials that are open and can be manipulated in various ways by children, becomes very important. This concept, which was first introduced by Nicholson (1971) and has become popular again in recent years, emphasizes the importance of providing play materials that can stimulate creativity and exploration in children. A study by Rahma (2023) shows that the use of loose parts in PAUD education can improve children's problem-solving abilities and creativity.

However, there are still many PAUD teachers who have not made optimal use of the resources available around them. According to Rinaldi (2016), many teachers still believe that effective play equipment must come from manufacturers and often ignore the potential of play tools that are simple and easy to find in the local environment. This paradigm shows the need to change the perspective and teaching strategies in PAUD.

In recent years, early childhood education (PAUD) has experienced a significant transformation, especially in terms of teaching and learning methods. Research by Muntomimah (2021) highlights the importance of integrating creative play materials and tools in the PAUD curriculum to stimulate children's cognitive and creative development. The concept of 'Loose Parts', first introduced by Nicholson in 1971, has regained attention as an effective tool in early childhood education. A study by Lawlor (2015) confirmed that the use of 'Loose Parts' in PAUD education can improve children's abilities in critical and creative thinking.

In response to this trend, many educational institutions have tried to adopt a 'Loose Parts' approach in their programs. A survey by Ismaniar (2023) at several PAUD institutions shows that there is increasing awareness and application of 'Loose Parts' in teaching and learning activities. However, the survey also revealed that many teachers still feel unsure and need more training and resources to implement these concepts effectively. This is in accordance with research findings by Hasanah (2022), which shows that teacher training and professional development is a key factor in implementing creative learning strategies in PAUD.

The importance of teacher training in this context cannot be underestimated. A longitudinal study by Siraj (2019) shows that ongoing professional development can improve the quality of teaching and children's learning outcomes. In particular, training in using innovative play materials and tools, such as 'Loose Parts', can provide teachers with the tools necessary to create more dynamic and interactive learning environments, which in turn can help children develop skills that are important for the 20th century

METHODS

Optimizing PAUD Teacher Creativity through the 'Loose Parts' Workshop is an innovative approach to improving the skills and understanding of PAUD teachers in designing and implementing more creative and interactive learning activities. The essence of this workshop is to teach teachers to make use of 'Loose Parts' - a variety of everyday or natural objects that can be manipulated, changed and used in various ways by children to support their learning.

In this workshop, teachers are invited to explore and understand how various objects such as wooden sticks, stones, cloth, cardboard boxes, etc. can be used as learning media that stimulate children's creativity and exploration. This concept focuses on giving children the freedom to be creative without restrictions or special instructions, allowing them to develop critical thinking, problem-solving abilities, and motor skills. Apart from that, 'Loose Parts' also supports children's social emotional development through interaction and cooperation in play.

This workshop not only provides theory, but also direct practice and evaluation of 'Loose Parts' based play activities. Teachers are taught to be facilitators who provide these materials and observe and direct children in their learning process. In this way, teachers can maximize the resources around them to create fun and meaningful learning experiences for PAUD children.

RESULTS

The results of the Workshop "Optimizing PAUD Teacher Creativity Through the 'Loose Parts' Workshop" held by PIAUD STAI SILIWANGI Garut lecturers have had a significant positive impact on the knowledge and teaching practices of PAUD teachers. Based on interviews, questions and answers, and direct observation, the main results of this activity can be described as follows:

1. Improved Understanding of the 'Loose Parts' Concept:

Workshop participants who are PAUD teachers have shown substantial development in their understanding of the 'Loose Parts' concept. Previously, many of them tended to rely on educational game tools that were produced commercially, with the assumption that only these objects were able to provide educational value in accordance with the needs of PAUD children. However, through this workshop, they became aware that the materials and tools in their environment can also be used as effective and stimulative play tools.

This paradigm shift is important because it marks a transition from traditional thinking about learning materials to a more open and creative approach. Teachers learn to recognize the potential of everyday objects such as tree branches, rocks, used cardboard and other recycled materials, all of which can be turned into creative and stimulating learning tools. This allows them to see their environment with a new perspective, identifying resources they previously would not have thought of as effective learning media.

With this new knowledge and skills, PAUD teachers can be more creative in designing learning activities. They are no longer limited by the availability or cost of commercial educational gaming tools, but instead, can take advantage of the resources around them, which are often more affordable and easily accessible. It also teaches children to appreciate and use the resources around them, developing their creativity and imagination in a more free and natural way.

In addition, this 'Loose Parts' approach supports the development of various skills in children, such as motor skills, critical thinking, and social abilities, because they learn to interact not only with these objects but also with their peers in the process of exploration and learning. Thus, this paradigm shift not only changes the way teachers teach, but also how children learn and interact with the world around them.

2. Ability to Design an Attractive Playing Environment

This workshop for PAUD teachers paves the way for a new approach in early childhood education, where creativity and innovation are the main keys. In this workshop, teachers are taught to change their perspective on everyday objects and materials, which are often considered unimportant, into interesting and interactive learning resources. For example, used

materials such as plastic bottles or cardboard can be turned into educational games that stimulate children's curiosity. More than that, this workshop also emphasizes the importance of creating an interactive learning environment, where children can be actively involved in the learning process through group games, exploration and other creative activities. In this way, PAUD teachers are not only taught how to create a more interesting play environment, but also strategies to trigger and maintain children's natural curiosity and creativity.

3. Skills for Managing Children's Play Activities

Workshop participants consisting of educators and child care providers have shown significant improvements in their ability to manage children's play activities. Previously, they may have relied on traditional methods or activities that were more structured and lacking variety. However, through this workshop, they have learned to create more varied and interesting activities, which better suit the children's interests and needs.

In its implementation, workshop participants have observed that children become more involved in play activities. Children tend to be more focused and show greater joy when interacting with 'Loose Parts'. It also helps them in developing fine and gross motor skills, as well as critical thinking and problem-solving abilities. For example, children might use rocks and twigs to make patterns or constructions, or they might use cloth and rope to make tents or play clothes.

Overall, the use of the 'Loose Parts' concept in children's play activities has shown positive results in this workshop. Workshop participants have been able to apply this concept effectively, creating a richer and more stimulating play environment for children, which in turn helps in their holistic development

4. Evaluation and Follow-up

Participants in this workshop were able to evaluate this play activity by observing how children interact with these materials, how they use their creativity and imagination, and the impact on the development of children's social, motor and cognitive skills. This evaluation is important to find out whether the activity is successful in meeting the learning objectives and stimulating children's development in an appropriate way.

Furthermore, based on the results of the evaluation, workshop participants can take action to adjust learning strategies. This could be a change in the way the 'Loose Parts' material is presented, a modification in the rules or instructions of the game, or even the introduction of a new type of material to add variety and challenge children in a different way. The aim is to continuously improve the quality of children's learning experiences, ensure that they get maximum benefit from 'Loose Parts' based play activities, and continue to motivate them to learn and develop.

Overall, this community service activity has succeeded in increasing the abilities and creativity of PAUD teachers in providing innovative play tools and materials and supporting children's holistic development. This makes an important contribution to learning in PAUD, which does not only focus on academic aspects but also on children's creative, social, emotional and physical development.

CONCLUSION

This activity highlights the importance of increasing the creativity of PAUD teachers by using the 'Loose Parts' concept. This workshop aims to change teachers' views of play materials and tools in their environment, which are often considered less interesting or educational, into creative and interactive learning resources.

Through the 'Loose Parts' approach, first introduced by Simon Nicholson in 1971, children are given the freedom to be creative with everyday or natural objects without special instruction, so they

can develop their imagination, problem-solving and motor skills. . This approach also supports children's social and emotional development.

This workshop provides theory and hands-on practice, as well as evaluation of 'Loose Parts'-based play activities, and emphasizes the importance of creating an interactive learning environment. The results of the workshop showed an increase in PAUD teachers' understanding and skills in using 'Loose Parts', as well as their ability to design play environments that are attractive and encourage children to play. This activity also succeeded in increasing the presentation of various games and evaluating children's activities.

The conclusion of this workshop was its success in increasing the understanding and skills of PAUD teachers in using surrounding resources to create fun and meaningful learning experiences for children. Suggestions for the future include ongoing training and the creation of a 'Loose Parts' warehouse for the exchange of materials between teachers, which will make an important contribution to the development of learning in PAUD that is not only focused on academic aspects, but also children's creative, social, emotional and physical aspects.

REFERENCES

- Hasanah, N. *et al.* (2022) 'Smart Parenting to Improve Children's Intrapersonal Intelligence', *Edukasi*, 16(2), pp. 166-172.
- Ismaniar, I., Deona, S. and Landa, K.S. (2023) 'STEAM Approach With Loose Parts Learning Materials In The Early Childhood Education', *Pedagogi: Jurnal Ilmu Pendidikan*, 23(1), pp. 11-17.
- Lawlor, L.A. *et al.* (2015) 'Empowering teachers and engaging students', *The Education Digest*, 80(6), p. 4.
- Muntomimah, S. and Wijayanti, R. (2021) 'The importance of STEAM loose part learning effectiveness in early childhood cognitive learning', in *2nd Annual Conference on Social Science and Humanities (ANCOSH 2020)*, pp. 47-52.
- Rahma, R.A., Sucipto, S. and Raharjo, K.M. (2023) 'Increasing the Creativity of Early Childhood Education (Paud) Educators Through Steam and Loose Part Learning Training in Malang City', *International Journal of Multicultural and Multireligious Understanding*, 10(6), pp. 83-92.
- Siraj, I., Kingston, D. and Neilsen-Hewett, C. (2019) 'The role of professional development in improving quality and supporting child outcomes in early education and care', *Asia-Pacific Journal of Research in Early Childhood Education*, 13(2), pp. 49-68.