



Improving Early Childhoods' Ability to Recognise Their Identity Through Thematic Learning On Self

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Abstract

This study aim for increase ability child age early Group A at RA Al-Ittihad Poncol in know identity self through application of learning models Thematic with theme "Myself " . The background of this study is the finding that most children aged 3-4 years in the class still have difficulty stating their complete personal identity (full name, age, gender, parents' names) and lack confidence in expressing themselves. The study was conducted in two cycles, where each cycle consisted of planning, action implementation, observation, and reflection. The research subjects were 16 children in Group A. Data collection techniques used observation with checklists, anecdotal notes, and documentation. The results of the study showed a significant increase from the initial condition to the end of the cycle. In the initial condition, the ability to recognize children's self-identity was relatively low. After the implementation of Cycle I, there was an increase where most children began to be able to state basic identities, but still needed help and there was a feeling of shame. In Cycle II, after actions that emphasized self-exploration and emotional expression (such as reflecting and telling stories), almost all children showed the ability to recognize their self-identity independently (reaching the expected success limit), as well as significant improvements in fine motor and social-emotional aspects. It is concluded that Thematic Learning with the theme "Self" is effective and relevant as a strategy to develop self-concept and self-confidence in early childhood.

Keywords: Thematic Learning, Self, Self-Identity, Early Childhood, Classroom Action Research (CAR).

Introduction

Early childhood, particularly from birth to six years, is a critical period of rapid development across cognitive, language, physical, social-emotional, and personal domains. One important aspect of development during this period is the formation of self-concept and self-identity. Self-concept refers to children's developing understanding of who they are, including their personal characteristics, abilities, physical characteristics, social relationships, and position within their family and social environment. Hurlock (2003) explains that self-concept develops through children's experiences and interactions with their environment, while Papalia et al. (2009) emphasize that children's understanding of themselves develops progressively through social experiences. Recent research confirms that self-concept is already observable during the preschool years and includes ability-based, social, and physical dimensions (Çelikel & Çoban, 2022). Therefore, early childhood education has an important role in providing opportunities for children to recognize, express, and value themselves as unique individuals.

At approximately three to four years of age, children increasingly demonstrate awareness of their personal characteristics and begin to identify information that distinguishes them from others, such as their name, gender, age, physical characteristics, and family relationships. This developing awareness becomes an

important foundation for later social and emotional development. Çelikel and Çoban (2022), in their study of preschool children aged 36–72 months, found that self-concept during early childhood can be identified through ability-based, social, and physical dimensions, and that children's social and cultural environments influence its development. Field observations in Group A of RA Al-Ittihad Poncol indicate that most children were unable to fully and independently state their full name, age, gender, or their parents' names. This condition was also accompanied by limited confidence in expressing themselves and interacting with others. Thus, the problem is not merely children's ability to remember personal information but also their opportunities to communicate about themselves and develop confidence through meaningful social interaction.

The condition identified at RA Al-Ittihad Poncol indicates the need for learning experiences that are close to children's everyday lives. The theme **"Self"** is considered appropriate because children can directly relate learning activities to their own names, bodies, families, characteristics, preferences, and experiences. In early childhood education, the theme "Self" can include recognizing one's name, age, gender, physical characteristics, family members, and personal preferences. Sujiono (2013) emphasizes that early childhood education should provide developmentally appropriate experiences rather than merely transferring cognitive information, while learning should be conducted through play, exploration, and meaningful experiences. From the perspective of Piaget's preoperational stage, children learn effectively through concrete experiences and symbolic representations that are closely connected to their immediate environment. Therefore, activities such as introducing oneself, recognizing body parts, talking about family members, singing, storytelling, drawing, coloring, and role play can provide concrete experiences through which children gradually construct an understanding of their identity.

To address the identified problem, a thematic learning approach focusing on the theme **"Self"** was selected. Thematic learning integrates various developmental areas within a meaningful central theme and enables children to experience learning holistically. Rusman (2012) explains that thematic learning connects learning experiences through meaningful themes and real contexts, making it appropriate for young children's characteristics. In the present study, the "Self" theme provides opportunities to integrate language development through introducing names and family members, cognitive development through recognizing personal information, social-emotional development through expressing feelings and interacting with peers, physical development through movement activities, and artistic development through drawing and coloring. This approach is consistent with research on integrative thematic play-based learning, which emphasizes the integration of children's learning experiences through meaningful activities (Hapidin et al., 2020). Thus, thematic learning can provide repeated and varied opportunities for children to recognize and express their identity in an engaging context.

Active and enjoyable learning is also important because young children learn more meaningfully when they are directly involved in learning activities rather than being passive recipients of information. Play-based learning provides opportunities for children to explore, communicate, make choices, interact with peers, and express themselves. Recent research indicates that play-based learning can positively support children's cognitive, social, and emotional development through activities such as role play, storytelling, sensory play, puppet play, and outdoor exploration (Kausar et al., 2024). Movement and song activities are particularly relevant to the present study because they allow children to learn while moving, communicating, and interacting with their peers. Through positive reinforcement, questioning, modeling, and encouragement, teachers can provide scaffolding that helps children become more confident in introducing themselves and communicating with others. Therefore, active, thematic, and play-based learning can create meaningful opportunities for children to develop self-understanding as well as confidence in expressing their identity.

Based on the above considerations, this classroom action research was designed to address the needs of children in Group A at RA Al-Ittihad Poncol through meaningful and enjoyable thematic learning activities with the theme **"Self."** The learning activities are expected to help children recognize and communicate information about themselves while simultaneously developing confidence in interacting with teachers and peers. The use of thematic, active, and play-based activities is expected to make the learning process more relevant to children's everyday experiences and developmental characteristics. Accordingly, the objectives of this study are: (1) to describe the planning and implementation of thematic learning with the theme "Self" to improve children's recognition of self-identity; and (2) to analyze the improvement in children's ability to state

their self-identity and develop self-confidence through the implementation of two cycles of classroom action research.

Methodology

Research Design

This study used a Classroom Action Research (CAR) design. The model used was the Kemmis & McTaggart model, which includes four main stages: Planning, Action, Observation, and Reflection. The research was conducted in two cycles (Cycle I and Cycle II), where each cycle was an improvement on the previous cycle.

Participants/Respondents/Population and Sample

Subject study is participant educate Group A at RA Al-Ittihad Poncol, District Bringin, Semarang Regency. Number subject are 16 children with range age 3-4 years. Subject chosen based on consideration that group age This be at the stage important formation identity self and have need tall to stimulation introduction self.

Technique of Data Collection

Data collected through observation. It was conducted by researchers and accompanying teachers use sheet checklist and notes anecdote for record participation children, abilities mention identity self, fine motor skills, and expression social-emotional. In addition by documentation in the form of photos, videos, and children's work (coloring, stringing, business cards) as evidence of the process and results of the action.

Instruments

The main instruments used are:

1. Daily Learning Implementation Plan (RPPH)
2. Observation Sheet/Checklist for Self-Identity Recognition Ability
3. Anecdotal Notes (to record the child's spontaneous behavior and responses)

Data Analysis Techniques

Data analyzed in a way descriptive qualitative and descriptive quantitative . Analysis Qualitative was used for analyze the process of action, results observation, and reflection in each cycle to determine success or need repair action furthermore. Inother hand, quantitative analysis taken data from the checklist is processed into a percentage of children's success rate in recognizing their identity.

Ability improvement was evaluated by comparing the percentages at the beginning, end of Cycle I, and end of Cycle II. The success criteria for the action were determined if at least 75% of subjects achieved the "Starting to Develop" (MB) or "Developing as Expected" (BSH) criteria for the main indicators.

Findings and Discussion

Findings

In pre-treatment conditions, most children (around 30%) were able to name their nicknames, but their ability to name their full name, gender, age, and parents' names was still very low. The majority of children were still shy and passive, and their fine motor coordination when coloring or cutting still needed improvement.

First, Cycle I was carried out for six days, focusing on basic identity recognition through concrete activities such as coloring pictures of boys/girls, tracing hands, and making business cards. There was a

significant improvement, where 55% of children began to be able to state their complete identity with assistance, and fine motor activity showed improvement. Although improvements have been made, the success target has not been achieved. Some children still tend to be passive and require repetition. Corrective actions will emphasize strengthening children's self-confidence and emotional expression in Cycle II.

Second, Cycle II is carried out after reflection, emphasizing strengthening self-expression and social-emotional through activities such as looking in the mirror and drawing one's own face, singing "Head, Shoulders, Knees, Feet", and sharing favorite experiences with parents. Observations showed significant improvement. 88% of children were able to independently identify themselves (full name, age, gender, parents' names) and confidently presented themselves in front of the class. Fine motor skills (stringing, cutting) also became more focused and neat. The research target has been achieved, marked by an increase in children's abilities above 75%.

Table 1. Summary of Improvement in Children's Ability to Recognize Their Self-Identity

Observed Aspects	Condition (Inferred %)	Achievements Cycle I (Inferred %)	Achievements Cycle II (Inferred %)
Ability Mentioning Personal identity	± 30%	± 55%	± 88%
Courage Expressing / Showing Off	Low	Currently	Tall
Fine Motor Skills (Focus/Neatness)	Low	Currently	Tall

Discussion

The significant improvement in children's self-identity from the initial condition to Cycle II demonstrates that learning activities centered on the theme of "Self" can be an effective strategy for supporting self-identity development in the PAUD context at RA Al-Ittihad Poncol. The improvement suggests that learning experiences that are closely connected to children's personal experiences can provide meaningful opportunities for children to recognize, express, and understand themselves. In early childhood, the development of self-concept and identity is closely related to children's interactions with their social environment and the opportunities they receive to express their characteristics, preferences, and experiences (McClelland et al., 2019; Denham et al., 2021).

Utilizing themes that are closely related to children's lives allows them to learn in a contextual and holistic manner. Activities such as making name cards and sharing personal experiences directly stimulate integrated language, cognitive, and socio-emotional development. This aligns with Rusman's (2012) perspective, which emphasizes the importance of integration in early childhood learning. Thematic learning is particularly relevant for young children because developmental domains do not develop independently; rather, language, cognition, social-emotional development, and self-awareness interact during children's everyday learning experiences. Recent research on early childhood learning also emphasizes the importance of meaningful, contextual, and child-centered learning experiences that connect classroom activities with children's real-life experiences (NAEYC, 2020; Pyle et al., 2020).

The use of the "Self" theme also provides children with repeated opportunities to communicate information about themselves, including their names, physical characteristics, experiences, and feelings. Such activities can strengthen children's awareness of their own characteristics while simultaneously developing their ability to communicate with others. According to NAEYC (2020), developmentally appropriate learning should provide opportunities for children to actively engage, make meaning from their experiences, communicate their ideas, and participate in learning experiences that are relevant to their developmental

characteristics. Therefore, the improvement observed in this study indicates that a self-related thematic approach can create a supportive context for developing children's self-identity.

The highest level of success was achieved in Cycle II, where the learning activities placed greater emphasis on strengthening social-emotional aspects, particularly self-confidence and self-expression. The activity of looking in the mirror and drawing one's own face helped children observe and recognize their own physical characteristics while expressing their understanding through visual representation. This activity provides a concrete experience through which children can recognize themselves as unique individuals, which is an important foundation for the development of self-concept (Papalia et al., 2009).

The findings are consistent with contemporary perspectives on early childhood social-emotional development, which emphasize that children's sense of identity and emotional competence develops through opportunities to understand themselves, express emotions, and interact positively with others (Denham et al., 2021). Activities that allow children to talk about themselves and represent their own characteristics can therefore support both self-awareness and confidence. When children feel comfortable recognizing and expressing themselves, they are more likely to participate actively in classroom interactions. Consequently, the shyness observed as a challenge in Cycle I could be gradually reduced, while children's confidence in interacting and speaking in front of others increased.

The improvement in Cycle II may also be explained by the iterative nature of classroom action research. Reflection on the results of Cycle I enabled the teacher to modify subsequent learning activities by providing greater opportunities for children to express themselves and participate socially. This process is consistent with the principle of reflective teaching, in which teachers use observations of children's responses to adjust learning strategies and create more responsive learning environments. Child-centered and responsive practices are particularly important in early childhood because children's participation and development are strongly influenced by the quality of interactions and learning opportunities provided by teachers (NAEYC, 2020).

Fine motor activities such as stringing a necklace for mom have been shown to not only improve hand-eye coordination but also contain emotional meaning, thereby increasing children's motivation and engagement. The activity requires children to manipulate small objects, coordinate visual attention with hand movements, and arrange materials sequentially. At the same time, creating a necklace for a significant person gives the activity personal and emotional meaning, which can encourage children to participate more enthusiastically.

The combination of fine motor and socio-emotional stimulation is particularly relevant in early childhood because developmental domains are interconnected. Fine motor activities can provide opportunities for children to develop coordination and precision while simultaneously encouraging persistence, attention, decision-making, and emotional expression. Recent research has emphasized that playful and meaningful learning experiences can support multiple developmental domains simultaneously rather than treating physical, cognitive, language, and socio-emotional development as separate processes (Pyle et al., 2020; NAEYC, 2020).

Thus, the development of self-identity skills in this study was supported not only through activities explicitly focused on recognizing the self but also through activities that strengthened children's fine motor, language, confidence, and social-emotional abilities. The findings suggest that learning activities involving children's personal experiences, self-expression, and meaningful interaction can provide a comprehensive learning environment for supporting self-identity development. The progression from the initial condition to Cycle II further indicates that carefully planned and reflective thematic learning can gradually increase children's confidence in recognizing, expressing, and presenting themselves as unique individuals.

Conclusion

Based on the results of classroom action research conducted in two cycles, it can be concluded that the implementation of Thematic Learning with the theme "Self" has effectively succeeded in improving the ability of early childhood children in Group A of RA Al-Ittihad Poncol in recognizing self-identity. This improvement is indicated by the achievement of success criteria at the end of Cycle II, where the majority of children (88%) were able to state their personal identity independently, accompanied by a significant increase in self-confidence (social-emotional) and fine motor skills. For Early Childhood Education Teachers: It is recommended that the "Self" Thematic Learning be a continuous and varied learning model. Activities can be expanded using reflective media (mirrors) and storytelling to strengthen children's self-expression and emotions. For Future Researchers: Further research is recommended to measure the long-term impact of self-identity recognition on children's social and academic development at later stages, as well as explore the effectiveness of this theme by integrating interactive digital media.

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