

Original Research Article

Story Telling and Playing Stacking Blocks Effective in Reducing Children Anxiety in Early Childhood Education

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Abstract: Childhood is period of life full of joy and energy. However, at this time there are times when children face events that make them feel fear or anxiety. One of the main causes of anxiety in children is when they entering Early Childhood Education (ECE). Anxiety that occurs in children has impact on body as emergence of psychosomatic reactions or symptoms of physical disorders due to psychological problems. In some children, this psychosomatic responses in the form of bed wetting, sleep disturbances, headaches, stomachaches and it can be worse like vomiting to fainting. There are several methods that can be done to reduce anxiety, namely the story telling method. This study aims to determine the effectiveness of story telling in reducing anxiety levels in early childhood. This study is a randomised control trial (RCT) conducted for 1 week on pre-school children in a playgroup consisting of 18 students in RA Qurrota'Ayun Keanjen Malang Regency East Java by measuring their anxiety. The results of the analysis showed that there was a significant difference in anxiety between the two groups, but the story telling group had a greater effect in reducing children's anxiety levels. The value of the story telling group was 1.60 (1.838) and the p value in both groups was 0.000. The conclusion of this study is that Story Telling is more effective in reducing pre-school children's anxiety when entering Early Childhood Education.

Keywords: Story telling, playing stacking blocks, pre-school, anxiety.

INTRODUCTION

Childhood is a period of life full of joy and energy. However, at this time, there are times when children face events or situations that make them feel afraid or anxious. One of the main reasons they experience anxiety is when they enter Early Childhood Education (ECE). Even though ECE aims to develop children's potential and abilities from an early age, there are several individual circumstances experienced by children that cause anxiety. At this time, their fears and anxieties are more than any other childhood. Several studies explain that at this age, children have the potential to experience problems and become more stressed. The response of children's anxiety at the beginning of attending ECE varies greatly, including protest, despair, and regression. Anxiety in children impacts the body through the emergence of psychosomatic reactions or symptoms of physical disorders due to psychological problems. In some children, this psychosomatic response is in the form of bed wetting, sleep disturbances, headaches, and stomach aches. It can even get worse, like vomiting or fainting (Mierrina, 2017). The causes of anxiety experienced by children when they enter ECE vary widely, including separation from their parents or caregivers (Separation Anxiety Disorder), fear of teachers and other people they did not know before, fear of not being able to do what the teacher tells them/fear of not able to do the task, negative suggestions from parents/caregivers (parenting style) or bullying (Susilawati, 2020, Susanti, 2009). Of the several factors that cause anxiety in children, the most common cause is separation from parents (Susanti, 2009). The condition of children with this anxiety, if it drags on and is not handled correctly, can cause them to be reluctant to go to school. Children become too lazy to study, interfering with their learning process, even dropping out of school and experiencing ADHD

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(attention deficit hyperactivity disorder) (Rahmadanti, 2021). If, in childhood, the child shows withdrawal behavior from the environment as early anti-social behavior, then the child will have a high risk of persistently experiencing behavioral disorders in the following periods (Foot *et al.*, 2004).

Several methods can be used to reduce anxiety in ECE children: the storytelling method and the method of playing with stacking blocks. These two ways are done as exciting and fun as possible to reduce the level of anxiety experienced. Both of these methods have advantages in reducing the child's level of tension and anxiety. The stacking block playing method functions to train fine motor skills, cognitive-affective, and emotional. This method can help children express thoughts to become more creative, critical, innovative, and solutive and practice controlling themselves and their emotions (Izartin, 2018). Apart from playing stacking blocks, storytelling can be used to reduce children's anxiety levels. This method can improve children's social behavior (Fitria, 2014) stimulate and develop children's speaking skills (Intan *et.al*, 2014). In addition, the storytelling method helps increase children's concentration, increasing imagination, fantasy, increasing self-awareness, and children's enthusiasm (Maharani, 2021). The research aims to determine the effectiveness of storytelling in reducing children's anxiety levels in Early Childhood Education.

METHODS

This study included a one-week randomized control trial (RCT) of pre-intervention, intervention, and post-intervention. The types of interventions carried out are building blocks and storytelling. The participants in this study were preschool-aged children in a group playing with stacking blocks consisting of 18 students and 18 parents at RA Qurrota'Ayun Kepanjen Malang Regency. The sampling technique used was a random sampling technique with several criteria set by the researcher: (1) children in early childhood education in the building block play group, (2) children who have never attended a class or repeated their education at a different level. The same. Sampling is done by taking colored balls in a closed basket. The child who gets the red ball is put into the intervention group. Demographic data was collected using a questionnaire, which included data on the sex and age of the child, educational background, and parents' occupation for anxiety data using the Preschool Pediatric Symptom Checklist (PPSC) measuring instrument. Questionnaires were given to parents to measure the child's anxiety scale before and after the intervention was delivered. The intervention was carried out on a scheduled basis every day for six consecutive days between 45 minutes - 1 hour after the teacher opened the learning activities at 07.30. This research uses comparative analysis. A normality test was performed on anxiety with Shapiro-Wilk ($n \leq 50$). The data is normally distributed with a p-value > 0.05 and is presented with the mean and standard deviation for categorical data presented with frequency and percentage. The data homogeneity test used the Levene Test to ensure that the treatment and control groups were homogeneous. We used paired t-tests and independent t-tests to determine differences in anxiety within and between groups. To determine the differences in children's anxiety in the two groups, the analytical technique used in this study used One Way ANOVA.

Table 1: Characteristics Respondent

Variable	Total <i>n</i> (%)	Intervention	Control
		<i>n</i> (%)	<i>n</i> (%)
Age	3,7 (<i>mean</i>)	3,6 (<i>mean</i>)	3,8 (<i>mean</i>)
Gender			
Male	6 (33)	2 (22)	4 (44)
Female	12 (67)	7 (78)	5 (56)
Parent's Last Education			
Senior High School	11 (61)	3 (33)	8 (89)
University	7 (39)	6 (67)	1 (11)
Parents' Job			
Housewife	13 (72)	5 (56)	8 (89)
Private sector employee	4 (22)	3 (33)	1 (11)
Civil servant	1 (5)	1 (11)	0 (0)

The average age of the children was 3.7 years, with the gender distribution of more than half of the participants being female (66%). More than half of the participants' parents (61%) had a high school education and 39% had a university education. Meanwhile, data on parents' employment shows that 72% are housewives.

Table 2: Differences in Anxiety Levels Before and After Given Intervention Playing Stacking Blocks and Story Telling

Group	Variable	Mean (SD)	The difference (SD)	P
Playing Stacking Blocks	Anxiety levels Pretest	3.50 (1,581)	1,30 (1,57)	0.028
	Posttest	4.80 (1,033)		
Storytelling	Anxiety levels Pretest	3.80 (0.919)	1,60 (1,838)	0,022
	Posttest	5.40 (2.119)		

The value of the difference in anxiety levels before and after being given an intervention in the storytelling group was higher than playing stacking blocks with a value of 1.60 (1.838) and a p-value of 0.022

Table 3: Comparison of Stress Levels in the Story Telling and Block Stacking Blocks Groups

Group	Mean (SD)	P
Playing Stacking Blocks	-1.30 (1.567)	0,000
Story telling	-1.60 (1.838)	

The value of the difference in anxiety levels in the playing stacking blocks and storytelling group where the difference in the storytelling group is higher than playing the stacking blocks with a value of 1.60 (1.838) and the p-value in the two groups is 0.000, which means that there is a significant difference in the levels anxiety between the two groups, namely the storytelling group had a more significant influence in reducing the child's anxiety level.

DISCUSSION

Before the intervention was given to the group playing stacking blocks and the storytelling group, it was shown that there was a significant difference where the average anxiety level before being given treatment in the storytelling group was higher than playing stacking blocks with an average value of 3.8. After intervention for six days for 45 minutes -1 hour the average anxiety value of the story telling group was also higher than playing the building blocks with an average value of 5.4. From the analysis tests of the two groups before and after treatment, it showed that the value of the difference in anxiety before being given treatment and after being given treatment in the story telling group was higher than playing stacking blocks with a value of 1.60 (1.838) and a p value of 0.022. And the comparison test of the two groups showed that the difference in anxiety levels in the group playing stacking blocks and storytelling where the value of the difference in the storytelling group was higher than playing stacking blocks with a value of 1.60 (1.838) and the p value in both groups was 0.000 which means that there is a significant difference in the level of anxiety between the two groups, namely the story telling group has a more significant influence on the child's anxiety level.

Several previous studies by Cahyaningtyas (2019) and Kaluas et al (2015) on hand puppet storytelling media to reduce SAD in kindergarten students showed that the storytelling method had a good effect on reducing children's anxiety levels when they first entered ECE. In addition, storytelling therapy can reduce the anxiety level of preschool children during invasive procedures at Kindergarten III R.W Mongsidi Manado. Unicef Indonesia (2023) explains that anxiety in preschool-age children is caused by several things, including children feeling anxious when they enter a new school or before taking exams. Some children feel embarrassed when they are in the midst of other people. However, this anxiety can be reduced by telling stories. According to Greenstein et.al (2016), this method can increase sensory responses both hearing and sight. This condition is passed on to the sensory and motor nervous systems. The brain responds through a neurotransmitter, namely a neurotransmitter called dopamine which then comes out of the vascular system, namely in the form of a nerve cell that can process a happy response which is then sent to the peripheral nerve cells again in the form of a happy response.

The method of story telling carried out by researchers is by giving children stories or fairy tales about a specific topic to divert feelings of anxiety or fear into feelings of joy or happiness caused by several factors encountered at school. The story presented by the researcher is given on a different topic every day and delivered with movement according to the situation in the story so that students don't feel bored, even whenever the children ask to tell a story. In addition, the moral message through fairy tales is not conveyed dogmatically, so children do not get bored. This storytelling method helps increase the concentration and imagination of children. When the child listens to the story and observes the movements and expressions of the storyteller, the child fantasizes and imagines the characters/characters and the situation in the story being told to reduce his anxiety.

Data on the average age of children is 3.6 years. At this age, the child has passed the toddler period and entered the pre-school period. This helps make it easier for students to follow each storyline/fairy tale conveyed because at this age, children's language skills are developing well and mastering 90% of the phonemes and syntax of the language they use (Susanto, 2014). In carrying out this method the researcher begins by observing the child's condition whether the child is in a good mood, not good, sick etc. Optimal child conditions are beneficial in increasing children's concentration in listening to stories (fairy tales). Kawides, et.al (2015) explains that children's attention is one of the main things that must be considered before carrying out and during storytelling because children's understanding of stories is strongly influenced by concentration power. A good child's concentration power can increase imagination and fantasy, develop emotions, and activate children's cognitive abilities so that through these stories/fairy tales, the anxiety and tension experienced by children can slowly decrease. The frequency distribution of the sex of girls was greater than that of boys, namely 7:2 (33%:67%) in the intervention group. Gender affects the child's ability to receive information and speak. The verbal (language) ability of girls is higher.

CONCLUSION

There is the influence of the storytelling method and playing with stacking blocks in reducing the anxiety of preschool-aged children at the start of early childhood education. However, the storytelling method is more effective in reducing anxiety in preschool-aged children than the stacking blocks method.

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