

Exploring Books as a Means of Strengthening Early Literacy Through a Play Approach in Early Childhood

Ayudya Rachmalia Putri^{1*}, Salza Chusnul Khotimah²

¹Universitas Negeri Surabaya, Indonesia

²Universitas Negeri Malang, Indonesia

Corresponding author: ayudyarachmalia.23245@mhs.unesa.ac.id

ABSTRACT

This study examines the use of *Eksplora Book*, a play-based learning medium designed to strengthen early childhood literacy skills through interactive activities such as guessing words, arranging letters, and recognizing objects. This research is motivated by the need for literacy media that is interesting, according to children's development, and easy to implement in the PAUD environment. Using a qualitative descriptive approach, this study observed the response of a five-year-old child during a directed learning session with *Eksplora Book*. Data were collected through direct observation and documentation of verbal expressions, written results, and children's involvement in activities. The results showed that children experienced improvements in letter recognition, word formation, and verbal expression, as well as showed high motivation and fun during the learning process. These activities not only support cognitive and fine motor development, but also encourage intrinsic motivation and spontaneous narrative abilities. These findings support the theory of early literacy and play-based learning, and demonstrate the effectiveness of media that combines exploratory and educational elements. In conclusion, *the Eksplora Book* is an effective and applicable medium in strengthening early literacy and has the potential to be applied more widely in the early childhood education environment.

Keywords: *Exploratory Book*, Early Childhood, Literacy

INTRODUCTION

Early literacy development in children is essential for developing language, cognitive, and emotional skills because at this age, children begin to understand words, grammar, and language structure through interaction with books and their environment (Cheruiyot, 2024). The concept of game-based learning, particularly in the form of guided play, has been shown to be effective in improving children's language skills, phonological awareness, and emotional intelligence through engaging and professionally conducted play activities. In addition, structured peer learning interventions can also significantly improve students' vocabulary knowledge (Cipolletti et al., 2025). However, most of the available research is quantitative and focuses on overall outcomes without thoroughly examining how children respond to educational media that combines multisensory elements—such as letters, images, and game elements—into a single package.

In response to these constraints, several recent studies have attempted to bridge the gap between theory and practice, particularly in the qualitative analysis of children's literary experiences through the medium of games and narratives (Kasumayanti & Elina, 2018). Nevertheless, research in Indonesia still mostly focuses on exploratory literary media such as "*Explore Book*", which supports the learning of letters, vocabulary, and narrative through active learning, especially in the context of daily classes in PAUD. In addition, there has been no research examining how children aged 4-5 years respond to learning activities based on cognitive, affective, or motor abilities. In fact, this age is a crucial stage in the development of early literacy. Educational games are one of the effective approaches in developing children's thinking skills in a fun way (Maulana & Wahyudi, 2025).

In connection with this need, the purpose of this study is to qualitatively describe the responses of children aged 4-5 years about the use of *Eksplora Books* in early literacy assessment (DESY, 2021). This study aims to analyze cognitive aspects such as letters and vocabulary, affective aspects such as motivation and enthusiasm, and motor aspects through long-term interaction with exploratory media (Syahrial, 2019).

The urgency of this research is practical and academic: practically, this research offers an interactive and simple educational media model that can be immediately implemented by PAUD teachers to improve students' literacy skills; Academically, this research discusses the use of game-based exploration media that is integrated into formal school activities, not only in the laboratory environment (S.Ifadah, 2020). Thus, it is believed that the media such as *Explore Book* not only improves literacy outcomes, but also provides new insights into how children learn in a comprehensive way (Sumaryanti, 2018).

Finally, by using a qualitative descriptive design, this research will add new insights in the field of children's education by examining how exploratory media can support children's literacy, cognitive, affective, and motor development (Scott, 2019). The results of this research are expected to be the basis for the development of exploratory media in the field of literacy, both in digital and physical formats, as well as provide practical recommendations for local governments and early childhood education practices to improve the quality of early literacy education in Indonesia (Vitianingsih, 2017).

METHOD

This study uses a qualitative approach with a descriptive method to show in detail how children respond to the use of *Eksplora Book media* in writing and reading assessment exercises. This method was chosen because it is in accordance with the research objectives, which are to focus on the process, materials, and learning materials contextually while interacting with exploration-based learning media and games. The planning of the *Eksplora Book media design* which consists of two levels of difficulty, namely the arrangement of letters for two-syllable words and trisyllable words is the starting point of the research. Furthermore, media is used

in classroom learning in a calm manner through observation of the child's learning process, including image analysis, letter composing, word reading, and oral summaries of their learning outcomes.

The subject of this study is a five-year-old boy named Arsyia who is in the early stages of cognitive development and has demonstrated his ability to recognize and analyze letters. The selection of subjects was carried out purposively with the understanding that Arsyia already has the necessary cognitive and motor skills to participate in literacy exploration activities through *Eksplora Books*. *Learning activities are carried out in one session every day with a duration of approximately one hour for the main activity. In the process, researchers provide introductory instructions for media use, icebreakers, and ways to keep children engaged during the exploration process. The child is asked to cross out the inappropriate letters, turn the corresponding letters into a word, and then adjust them according to the illustrations provided.*

Data collection was carried out through participatory observation that focused on children's vocal and nonverbal behaviors when using media. The researcher recorded the child's expressions, responses, thought processes, and emotional states during the activity. In addition to observation, documentation such as photos and children's writings was also used as research data. The main instrument in this study is an open observation sheet that shows three main indicators: image comprehension, letter pronunciation accuracy, text reading ability, and grammatical rewriting accuracy. The data analysis technique was carried out in a descriptive-qualitative manner using data reduction, data analysis, and conclusions based on children's silence during the activity.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Welcomes, explanations of activities, literacy play sessions, and reflection are the stages of activities in the morning. The implementation of educational activities using *the Eksplora Book* media takes place in a structured time. Arsyia, a five-year-old child who has reached the beginning of literacy development and is in the naming phase, became the subject of observation. Data were obtained from direct observation and documentation of verbal expressions, written results, and children's involvement in activities. Based on the observations, it can be concluded that Arsyia fosters active learning, high curiosity, and a slow but progressive understanding of the instructions and task structures used.

Results

At first, when the researcher explained how to use *the Eksplora Book*, Arsyia had begun to understand, although occasionally he still needed instructions. The first step is to analyze the pictures in the book, which is then followed by marking the letters that do not match the random list of letters. In this process, Arsyia is always faced with letters that have similar shapes, such as the letters "b" and "d", but she can make adjustments after being encouraged to return to following the illustrations.

After the cow and letters were randomly shown, such as [P, I, S, A], Arsyia managed to identify the unnecessary letters, then the letters were labeled "SAPI" and displayed in the available columns. This task is carried out with a high degree of precision, regardless of whether the letters are proportional or uniform.

Table 1. Test Results

Capability Indicators	Test Results
Recognize and mention images	Able to name all the images correctly
Organize letters into words	Able to compose 4 out of 5 words correctly
Rewrite words in alphabetical order	Able to copy with medium neatness
Say the word that has been composed	Able to pronounce all words clearly
Emotional response to activities	Show enthusiasm and high interest

At the end of the activity, Arsyia explicitly stated that she wanted to stop the activity and asked for a new word to use. This shows that *Eksplor Book media* can significantly increase children's learning motivation, especially because of its game-based design. In the process of rewriting words, although Arsyia has not been consistent enough in using spaces and letters, the researcher observed a strenuous effort to write independently and make corrections to writing errors that the researcher was aware of.

Arsyia's verbal response is an important indicator of the success of an activity. Researchers not only summarized the words spoken, they also made spontaneous image comments, such as when the researcher mentioned the word "horse," the researcher added the sentence, "this horse can run fast." This shows that these activities not only support technical skills such as writing and editing, but also improve written language expression, vocabulary enrichment, and object description skills.

In summary, this study shows that the media *Explore Book* offers a learning experience that is not only exciting but also entertaining. In addition to teaching basic literacy skills such as lettering, spelling, and writing, this media also stimulates fine motor development and positive affective responses (Mustari et al., 2020). Through a single session, the child can demonstrate consistent and improved performance, especially in the areas of active participation and understanding of the structure of written language. This data provides a strong indication that the use of *Explore Book* broader and applied in a broader context to early childhood teaching.

Discussion

The first part of this discussion highlights the positive response that Arsyia observed when using the media *Explore Book*, such as increased motivation, thoroughness, and proficiency in language and writing. This is in line with literacy theory that multisensory experiences, such as visual, writing, and game interactions, can help children understand language, grammar, and structure. This interaction also

demonstrates the principle of directed play in a principal-based learning environment, where teacher guidance allows children to build meaning independently through play activities (Rand & Morrow, 2021). As shown by the research findings, which show that guided play improves literacy outcomes such as narrative, vocabulary, and print awareness, *Arsya* is not only a tool for symbol recognition, but also a tool for representing concepts through the use of illustrations and letters. Through the letter fishing game, children are actively involved in the process of recognizing letters and words contextually.

The second finding indicates that although the writing and punctuality of letters are not yet fully clear, *Arsya*'s efforts and self-reflection highlight two important aspects in early development: self-regulation and metacognition in the context of literacy. This is in line with the concept of cognitive development, where a child experiences difficulties or confusion which then encourages reflection to improve themselves, this can be a catalyst for growth if handled well by the teacher (Volden & Burelli, 2024). An analysis of the initial connections, such as the letters "b" and "d", as well as *Arsya*'s attempts to explain themselves, show that *Explore Book* can support literacy and cognitive development characterized by strong curiosity, make learning more enjoyable and inspire children to continue learning.

In addition to cognitive growth, affective and motivational aspects are also clearly visible from *Arsya*'s enthusiasm and desire to learn and remember new words during the reflection session. This shows that the media *Explore Book* successfully create intrinsic motivation. According to the results of the meta-analysis, play-based activities can improve children's motivation, self-control, and satisfaction levels. Figures such as Hirsh-Pasek and Golinkoff have also stated that directional play creates a learning context that lacks excitement and curiosity, especially when the medium is designed to provide freedom while being discussed in detail in the instructions. This stems from *Arsya*'s spontaneous enthusiasm without outside guidance, which indicates that *Explore Book* can provide more stable intrinsic motivation than traditional classroom learning (Basyiroh, 2017).

According to the theories of Smilansky, Froebel, and Montessori, which call motor skills an important component in the development of early literacy and the development of infants' cognitive abilities through play, the use of pencils and correction of letters involve ongoing sensorimotor activity. Although the resulting writing is not perfect, this process shows the persistence and control of the developing fine motor – an important indicator that exploratory media such as *Explore Book* not only teaches literacy but also encourages physical development, which is essential for learning to read and write formally (Yulia et al., 2021).

Regarding the more detailed implications, the results of this study make a significant contribution to the development of educational media in PAUD. *Explore Book* highlight the importance of game-based learning in classroom media—including studies by (Cheruiyot, 2024), which states that implementation in a real-

world context is rather difficult due to the lack of appropriate infrastructure and relevant materials. Using simple print-based media, this study shows that innovation does not always require cutting-edge technology, resulting in appropriate, precise, relevant, and targeted media design. (Fitriani & Adawiyah, 2018). This media can be used and modified by teachers in various early childhood contexts by using a guided play approach, where the teacher acts as a facilitator who provides a little help and helps children develop self-awareness through light problem-solving (Gusti, 2020).

Despite the positive results, the study also has some limitations that should be considered in future research. A single subject in the study influenced generalization; Effective research uses a design that includes experimental groups and control subjects as well as variables such as gender, children's learning patterns, and sociodemographic backgrounds (Koderi et al., 2021). Similarly, with the duration of the test limited to one session, it should be divided into several sessions to comprehensively observe long-term progress in literacy and effective impact.

Overall, the results of this discussion support the position *Explore Book* as an educational medium that combines emerging literacy theory, directed play, motor development, and intrinsic motivation in a very positive way (Mansoer et al., 2024). These qualitative observations successfully illustrate how children not only perform tasks, but also develop their own abilities, overcome obstacles, and explore their own strengths—all of which are critical for long-term learning. In addition, Research can explore digital adaptation or hybridization—combining interactive applications and digital media—as well as teacher training to maximize directed play in formal educational settings (Thanh-Huong, 2022).

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study is to describe the response of early childhood to the use of *Eksplor Book* as a medium for developing literacy through game-based exercises. Observational findings suggest that *Eksplor Book* can support children's active learning by helping them read, write, and illustrate words that match the illustrations available. Children's positive responses to these media come not only from their ability to articulate basic literacy tasks, but also from effective expressions that convey a sense of pleasure, admiration, and a desire to slow down learning. As stated in the introduction and *guided play approach*, *Eksplor Book* has been shown to support the development of cognitive aspects (recognizing letters, arranging words), affective (interest and motivation for learning), and subtle psychomotor (writing and doodling).

The practical implications of this study are particularly important in the context of children's teaching. *Eksplor Book* media is a medium to replace good, straightforward, and entertaining reading books, so that it can be used by PAUD teachers in various educational institutions. A fundamental advantage of this medium is its ability to integrate play and learning in a relaxed way, which encourages children to learn in an active, independent and engaging way. In addition, these media also have the potential to stimulate critical thinking and narrative skills throughout

the early stages of development through activities that involve writing and reciting words. For this reason, *Eksplora Book* can be one of the innovative solutions to improve the quality of literacy learning at the early level in children's educational institutions.

Although the results showed effectiveness, the study had some limitations. Because this study only looked at one topic (case), the results could not be applied to the entire child population. In addition, observation activities are only carried out once, so it is not enough to observe skill development longitudinally. Based on this, it is recommended that further research be conducted with a wider range of subjects and with a more efficient time to reduce the medium to long-term burden. In addition, the long-term plan can be based on the development of a digital or hybrid version of *the Eksplora Book* and teachers' efforts to implement guided games in a more systematic and effective way in early childhood education classes.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

As a lecturer in Early Childhood Literacy and Language Development at the State University of Surabaya, the author would like to thank Mrs. Kartika Rinakit Adhe, S.Pd., M.Pd. and Mrs. Afifah Rahmaningrum, S.Pd., M.Pd., for their valuable advice, criticism and support during this research. We would also like to thank the early childhood education institutions in Surabaya for providing access and allowing the implementation of this research, especially to the parents of the participating children, for their assistance and cooperation. The child participant, Arsyia, was especially appreciated by the author for her participation and excitement during the *Eksplora Book trial session*, which was very helpful in improving the research results. Finally, we would like to express our sincere thanks to the students and academic colleagues who have assisted in the preparation of this study by participating in discussions and providing moral support.

REFERENCES

- Basyiroh, I. (2017). Early Childhood Literacy Skills Development Program. *Tunas Siliwangi*, 3(2), 120–134.
- Cheruiyot, B. (2024). Effectiveness of Play-Based Learning Method in Promotion of Early Literacy Skills Among Early Childhood Development Education Children. *East African Journal of Education Studies*, 7(3), 479–488. <https://doi.org/10.37284/eajes.7.3.2178>
- Cipolletti, L. B., Murdoch, A., & Keelor, J. (2025). Impact of a Structured Shared Book Reading Intervention on the Vocabulary Knowledge of Preschool-Age Children: An Exploratory Study. *Early Childhood Education Journal*. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10643-025-01920-z>
- DESY, H. (2021). Developing an interest in early childhood reading through library literacy activities at Paud Hasanuddin Majedi Banjarmasin. *Jambura Journal of Linguistics and Literature*, 1(2), 37–44. <https://doi.org/10.37905/jjll.v1i2.9227>

- Fitriani, R., & Adawiyah, R. (2018). Early Childhood Motor Physical Development.
- Golden Age Journal, 2(01), 25. <https://doi.org/10.29408/goldenage.v2i01.742> Gusti, Y. (2020). Development of Literacy Model through Fairy Tales in Motivating Indonesian-Based Reading and Writing. *Studi Komunika: Journal of Communication Sciences*, 3(2), 34–43. <https://doi.org/10.47995/jik.v1i1.8>
- Kasumayanti, E., & Elina, Y. (2018). Cognitive Development of Children Aged 5-6 Years Reviewed from the Level of Maternal Education in Early Childhood Education, Kasih Ibu, Rumbai District. *PAUD Lectura: Journal of Early Childhood Education*, 1(2), 186–197. <https://doi.org/10.31849/paudlectura.v1i2.1179>
- Koderi, K., Kuswanto, C. W., & Nuryati, S. (2021). Improving Early Childhood Cognitive through the Development of Cube Learning Media. *Journal of Obsession: Journal of Early Childhood Education*, 6(3), 1834–1845. <https://doi.org/10.31004/obsesi.v6i3.1824>
- Mansoer, Z., Pawitrib, A., & Herminastiti, R. (2024). *Nature Exploration : A Creative Method to Enhance AUD Science Understanding 2 . Method The action research*
- conducted in this study is classroom action research . Classroom action research is a research that aims to improve and enhance the quality of learning in the classroom*
- . The procedure for conducting classroom action research is through several stages*
- , including a) planning , b) action , c) observation , d) reflection . The model used in this study is the Kemmis and Mc Taggart model . Figure 1 Action Research Spiral Model According to Kemmis and Mc . Taggart. 324–330.*
- Maulana, M. R., & Wahyudi, M. (2025). Exploration of Learning Experience Through Flashcard Media in Developing Early Childhood Literacy. In *Journal of Early Childhood Education Studies* (Vol. 4, Issue 2). <https://doi.org/10.54180/joeces.2024.4.2.423-465>
- Mustari, L., Indihadi, D., & Elan, E. (2020). Writing skills for children 4-5 years old. *Journal of Early Childhood Agapedia*, 4(1), 39–49. <https://doi.org/10.17509/jpa.v4i1.27195>
- Novitasari, K. (2019). The Use of Multimedia Technology in Early Childhood Literacy Learning. *Golden Age Journal*, 3(01), 50. <https://doi.org/10.29408/goldenage.v3i01.1435>
- Rand, M. K., & Morrow, L. M. (2021). The Contribution of Play Experiences in Early Literacy: Expanding the Science of Reading. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 56(S1), S239–S248. <https://doi.org/10.1002/rrq.383>

- S.Ifadah, A. (2020). Literacy: Understanding Early Childhood Reading - Writing Literacy in PIAUD Students Semester 4 of the University of Muhammadiyah Gresik. *Journal of the Golden Age*, 4(02), 290–296. <https://doi.org/10.29408/jga.v4i02.2419>
- Sumaryanti, L. (2018). Cultivating Literacy in Early Childhood with the Storytelling Method. *AL-ASASIYYA: Journal Of Basic Education*, 3(1), 117. <https://doi.org/10.24269/ajbe.v3i1.1332>
- Syahrial, I. (2019). Fostering Early Childhood Reading Interest through the Implementation of Family Literacy. *Fascho Educational and Social Studies*, 1(1), 15–34. <http://journal.stkipm-bogor.ac.id/index.php/pascho/article/view/29>
- Thanh-Huong, N. (2022). European Journal of Educational Research. *European Journal of Educational Research*, 11(2), 859–872. https://pdf.eu-jer.com/EU-JER_9_1_395.pdf
- Vitianingsih, A. V. (2017). Educational Games as a Learning Media for Early Childhood Education. *Inform: Scientific Journal of Information and Communication Technology*, 1(1). <https://doi.org/10.25139/inform.v1i1.220>
- Volden, T. V. S., & Burelli, P. (2024). Children's Expressed Emotions During Playful Learning Games. *Proceedings of the European Conference on Games-Based Learning*, 18(1), 981–988. <https://doi.org/10.34190/ecgbl.18.1.2635>
- Yulia, R., Eliza, D., Key, K., Literacy, :, Development, :, Language, L., Children, :, & Dini, U. (2021). Development of Early Childhood Language Literacy. *Golden Age: Journal of Early Childhood Education*, 5(1), 53–60. <https://doi.org/10.29313/ga>