



Nature Fun Learning in Early Childhood Education based on Nature (Case Study In KB Alam Bulukerto)



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Abstrak

Pendidikan anak usia dini (PAUD) berbasis alam telah menjadi fokus lembaga pendidikan. PAUD berbasis alam adalah pendidikan anak usia dini yang memanfaatkan alam sebagai sumber belajar, media pendidikan, dan tempat bermain di luar ruangan. KB Alam Bulukerto yang terletak di Kabupaten Wonogiri menonjol sebagai salah satu PAUD berbasis alam di wilayah tersebut. Terkenal dengan program Nature Fun Learning, KB Alam Bulukerto menjadi pilihan favorit para orang tua dan wali. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengeksplorasi praktik terbaik Nature Fun Learning di KB Alam Bulukerto melalui penelitian deskriptif kualitatif yang melibatkan kepala sekolah, guru, siswa, dan wali. Temuan penelitian ini menyoroti praktik-praktik teladan dalam kegiatan Pembelajaran Alam Menyenangkan, yang mencakup (1) Jalan-Jalan di Alam, (2) Berkebun, dan (3) Berternak. Kegiatan-kegiatan ini berkontribusi pada pendekatan pendidikan KB Alam Bulukerto yang khas dan efektif, memberikan wawasan berharga untuk menyebarkan praktik baik dalam pendidikan anak usia dini berbasis alam

Abstract

Nature-based early childhood education (ECE) has become a focal point for educational institutions. Nature-based ECE refers to early childhood education that utilizes nature as a learning resource, educational medium, and outdoor play area. KB Alam Bulukerto, situated in Wonogiri Regency, stands out as one of the nature-based ECEs in the region. Renowned for its Nature Fun Learning program, KB Alam Bulukerto is a favored choice among parents and guardians. This research aims to explore the best practices of Nature Fun Learning at KB Alam Bulukerto through qualitative descriptive research involving principals, teachers, students, and guardians. The research findings highlight exemplary practices in Nature Fun Learning activities, encompassing (1) Nature Walks, (2) Gardening, and (3) Raising. These activities contribute to the distinctive and effective educational approach of KB Alam Bulukerto, providing valuable insights for spreading good practices in nature-based early childhood education.



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INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, parents are becoming increasingly aware of the importance of Early Childhood Education (ECE) to stimulate various aspects of their children's development during their formative years. In essence, children learn best through play, being free to learn and play. However, there is a disparity between expectations and reality, as children are often pressured to acquire academic skills such as reading, writing, and counting. Consequently, children may become bored, as the freedom to learn and play in ECE is compromised. ECE, originally intended as a space for children to play and learn, loses its function, and the optimal stimulation of children's development becomes challenging. Issues like student assessment problems, imposition of teachers' will, learning chaos, and bullying suggest that the current learning practices struggle to recognize students as individuals with diverse potentials that need nurturing (Sanusi, 2013:125).

In this context, the role of both teachers and parents becomes crucial in creating a fun, interesting, and child-friendly learning process, both at home and at school. This involves being creative in providing various learning media (Rahmawati, 2016:12). Amid this reality, parents are urged to make wise choices when selecting alternative educational institutions, such as those that follow a nature-based learning approach, where the freedom to learn and play can be found, as seen in ECE Alam. In these environments, children are not only allowed but encouraged to experiment and think freely without unnecessary interference (Doddington & Hilton, 2010:8). Bobbi DePorter (2008) emphasizes the importance of fun learning strategies, which are designed to create an effective learning environment, implement the curriculum, deliver material, and facilitate the learning process, ultimately improving students' learning achievements.

Wulansari (2016:8) introduces the Nature-Based Learning Model (PBA), emphasizing learning about nature, using nature as a learning material, and learning with nature. Nature-based ECE, as an innovative learning model, is directed at helping educators design learning experiences that align with children's developmental needs and characteristics. It encourages free-to-learn and free-to-play activities, offering meaningful experiences through real activity processes with nature-provided media. Planning learning takes into consideration children's interests and moods, with themes linked directly to the child and the learning environment (Moeslichatoen, 2014:13). However, challenges may arise in optimal motor development in

early childhood, leading to problems like poor balance, reaction time, and hand-eye coordination (Hildayani et al., 2008).

The text also underscores the importance of environmental education to address global environmental challenges. Protecting and preserving the natural environment is crucial for biodiversity and maintaining a balanced ecosystem. Cultivating environmental knowledge and responsible character in children can contribute to long-term solutions. Instilling love for the environment in Indonesian society from an early age is essential for shaping children's characters in terms of their relationships with themselves, their social and natural environment, and their relationship with God Almighty (Kristiana).

As a result of initial interviews with parents, it became evident that they chose to enroll their children in KB Alam Bulukerto due to the institution's Nature Fun Learning program. This program, involving real and meaningful activities for young children, aims to instill a love for the natural environment, shaping their characters positively. Parents are increasingly recognizing the significance of Early Childhood Education (ECE) in fostering various aspects of their children's development during this crucial stage, often referred to as the golden age. This period plays a pivotal role in determining a child's subsequent developmental stages. While the essence of learning for children lies in play, with the freedom to learn and play, there is a noticeable mismatch between these expectations and the reality, as children are often pressured to reading, writing, and counting at an early age.

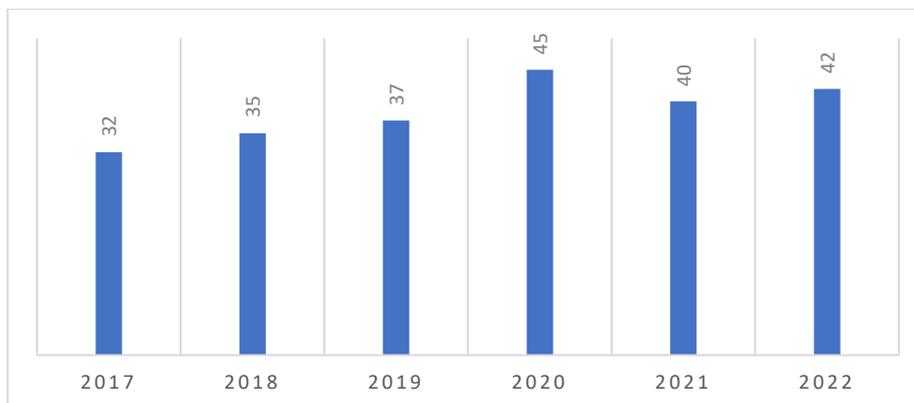


Figure 1. Number of KB Alam Bulukerto Students in the Last 6 Years

The increasing awareness of the significance of Early Childhood Education (ECE) and the growing preference for holistic, nature-based learning experiences have driven parents to select KB Alam Bulukerto for their children's education. In response to this emerging trend, researchers have actively delved into the intricacies of the Nature Fun Learning program at KB Alam Bulukerto. This research is purposefully crafted to delve into

the program's nuances, aiming to unravel the effective practices associated with Nature Fun Learning. The primary objective is to gain a comprehensive understanding of how this program contributes to children's development and cultivates a strong connection between them and the natural environment. The findings are expected to provide valuable insights into the educational practices at KB Alam Bulukerto, contributing to the ongoing discourse on nature-based early childhood education.

The Nature Fun Learning program at KB Alam Bulukerto stands as a response to the growing awareness among parents about the critical role of early education in shaping a child's character and overall development. By delving into the practical aspects of this program, researchers seek to contribute valuable insights that may inform and improve nature-based early childhood education practices in a broader context.

METHODE

This research employs a field research method utilizing a qualitative descriptive approach and was conducted at KB Alam Bulukerto. The data collection process involves observation, interviews, and documentation techniques. In this case, the author not only observes activities or research objects but is also actively involved at certain times, utilizing in-depth interview techniques. The data collection process incorporates participatory observation techniques, which entail data collection through observation and sensory perception as a method for gathering information (Bungin, 2015: 18).

Researchers utilized source triangulation techniques in this study. Data triangulation is employed as a process to enhance the level of trust (credibility/validity) as it is deemed capable of serving as a tool for data analysis in the field (Gunawan, 2017: 218). The primary data source in this research is the KB Educator at Alam Bulukerto. Following Ghony and Amansur's approach, the researchers processed the obtained data using data checking techniques, ensuring that the data derived from the author's analysis were genuinely valid. Concerning source triangulation, the data obtained is cross-verified from the same source at different times.

RESULT AND DISCCUSION

KB Alam Bulukerto stands out as a distinguished nature-based Early Childhood Education (ECE) institution, acclaimed for its flagship program, Nature Fun Learning. Seamlessly integrated into the nature-based ECE curriculum, this program serves as a

catalyst for innovative services, intending to instill a profound love for the natural environment in young children. The cornerstone of this initiative is character development, as elucidated by Bamawi and Arifin (2016:55), emphasizing the cultivation of values inherently associated with goodness—comprehending the value of goodness, harboring a genuine desire to perform virtuous deeds, embodying a morally upright life, and making positive contributions to the environment. Character, once nurtured, transforms into an enduring habit engraved in the soul of each individual, echoing the sentiments of M. Fadlillah (2016).

The implementation of Nature Fun Learning at KB Alam Bulukerto seamlessly aligns with the institution's overarching vision and mission, placing a distinct emphasis on character nurturing in early childhood through nature-based play activities. This strategic approach aims to make meaningful contributions to the realization of the institution's broader educational objectives, particularly in shaping the outcomes of early childhood education at KB Alam Bulukerto. The comprehensive components of Nature Fun Learning—Nature Walk, Gardening, and Raising—offer a dynamic and engaging platform for children to intimately connect with nature, facilitating not only an appreciation for the natural world but also the holistic development of their character.

Nature Walks at KB Alam Bulukerto immerse children in the outdoor environment, fostering a firsthand connection with the natural world. Gardening activities allow them to engage in hands-on experiences, learning about the lifecycle of plants and the importance of caring for them. Raising activities involving animals contribute to character development by instilling a sense of responsibility and empathy towards living beings. Together, these components forge a unique and enriching learning experience that transcends traditional classroom settings, encapsulating the essence of Nature Fun Learning at KB Alam Bulukerto.

Nature Walk

The introduction to the environment constitutes a crucial component within the Early Childhood Education (ECE) learning materials. One of the primary objectives of ECE is to acquaint children with their surroundings. This introduction is designed to ensure that children not only become familiar with but also comprehend and adapt to both their home environment and the world outside (Septiana, 2016). The early years of a child's

development, often referred to as the "explorer age" by psychologists, are centered around mastering and controlling the environment (Sujiono, 2007:2.4). The surrounding environment plays a key role in fostering socialization and communication among children, enabling direct interaction with nature and the broader environment. This active involvement allows children to gain profound learning experiences and life skills (Heryanto, 2017).

In nature-based schools, activities to introduce early childhood to the surrounding environment are particularly significant. Such activities are essential in helping children understand, appreciate, and develop awareness of nature. This understanding contributes to the recognition of the vital role plants play in maintaining balance within the ecosystem. Starting with morning exercises and providing information about planned activities, including establishing rules agreed upon by the students, sets the stage for creating a learning environment that incorporates and respects the surrounding natural world.

Engaging children in activities that familiarize them with the environment in nature-based schools can instill a sense of responsibility for nature and nurture them into becoming agents of positive change who care about the environment from a young age. Furthermore, observing the natural environment is crucial for the development of environmental intelligence, particularly in areas such as kinesthetic, naturalistic, spatial, and logical intelligences, which flourish as children become more aware of their surroundings.

At KB Alam Bulukerto, the natural environment comprises rice fields that serve as an outdoor space for various school activities. Conducting activities in such surroundings allows children to build knowledge and understanding of nature. KB Alam Bulukerto pioneers Nature Fun Learning, with the initial activity being a Nature Walk. This includes visits to rice fields during farming activities, acquainting children with the natural environment, strolling through rice fields, and enjoying walks along rivers, forests, and fields. Such activities exemplify the immersive experiences that nature-based education at KB Alam Bulukerto provides.

Figure 1 depicts a child's activity involving a visit to the agricultural land of local residents during the fertilization process for sweet potato plants. Through this activity, children actively participate in the fertilization process. In Picture 2, children are introduced to rice plants during the flowering stage. Figure 3 illustrates land processing activities, specifically land plowing.



Figure 2. Nature Walk in KB Alam Bulukerto

Nature Walks in early childhood at nature-based schools can exhibit significant variation depending on factors such as the chosen approach, the duration of the activity, and the level of children's participation. Potential outcomes of these activities include: (1) fostering a deeper understanding of nature and the surrounding environment, (2) learning about various plant types, animals, and ecosystems, (3) comprehending the interconnectedness between humans, animals, and the natural environment, (4) raising awareness about the importance of environmental protection, and (5) becoming acquainted with environmental issues like recycling, water conservation, and biodiversity preservation. These experiences have the potential to inspire children to develop a caring and responsible attitude towards the environment.

Participating in environmental recognition activities during Nature Walks provides children with a unique opportunity to develop essential observation and research skills. This hands-on experience encourages them to closely observe and identify various plants and animals, immersing them in the intricacies of nature. Through these activities, children not only gain knowledge about the natural world but also cultivate critical thinking abilities that will serve them well in the future. The practical application of observation skills during Nature Walks enhances their ability to analyze and understand the complexities of the environment.

Furthermore, engagement in nature-based activities fosters a deep connection between children and the natural world. As they explore the outdoors, children begin to appreciate

the inherent beauty of nature and understand their role as integral components of the environment. This sense of connectedness instills in them a profound respect for the ecosystem and a realization that their actions can have a positive impact on preserving the delicate balance of nature. Nature-based experiences not only contribute to intellectual development but also nurture a holistic understanding of the interconnectedness between humans and the environment.

Gardening

Arranging the schoolyard to create a functional garden area enables children to explore the surrounding environment through gardening activities with natural elements. Beetlestone (2012) emphasizes that gardening activities offer opportunities for children to engage in physical activities, release energy, and focus on various physical movements. Gardening not only contributes to physical development but also influences creative development. Children, while gardening, have ample space to perform large-scale movements such as digging, scratching, running, and bending. Another perspective supports this, suggesting that engaging in school gardens can enhance children's physical activity levels (Wells & Nancy, 2014). Gardening activities not only allow children to explore and observe the environment but also grant them the freedom to cultivate their imagination, serving as a means of learning through play (Sutrisno & Harjono, 2005). Research further supports the idea that gardening activities serve as a playful means to develop naturalistic intelligence while fostering a sense of responsibility and cultivating children's patience (Herdianing, 2014).

This activity provides children with direct experiential learning opportunities. The garden area at ECE KB Alam Bulukerto features a vegetable garden with long beans, cucumbers, chilies, tomatoes, and mustard greens. In addition to vegetables, there are fruit plants such as watermelon, grapes, apples, and durian.



Figure 3. Gardening in Bulukerto Nature Play School

Children actively participate in various gardening activities, starting from soil preparation, planting, fertilizing, and maintenance. They also engage in turning on the water wheel when watering the plants and participate in the harvest period, picking vegetables or fruits. Throughout these activities, children learn essential skills, such as picking, peeling fruits, experiencing the taste of the fruit they eat, and processing vegetables. This instills in them a liking for vegetables and fruits from an early age. Children also share their experiences related to gardening, as depicted in pictures 5, and 6.



Figure 4. Gardening in Bulukerto Nature Play School

Gardening activities for early childhood at the nature-based school KB Alam Bulukerto can yield numerous benefits and positive outcomes. The following are some of the results achieved from these gardening activities: (1) understanding the life cycle of plants, (2) development of children's understanding of planting processes from seeds to growth, pollination, and flowering, (3) comprehension of plant needs, including water, sunlight, and nutrition, (4) acquisition of knowledge on how to care for plants, (5) instillation of a liking for vegetables and fruits, and (6) recognition of the interdependence between plants and environmental factors.

Engaging in gardening activities at an early age allows children to acquire a range of practical skills that extend beyond traditional academic learning. First and foremost, children develop hands-on skills by participating in activities like planting seeds or seedlings. This process not only exposes them to the basics of horticulture but also instills a sense of responsibility and patience as they witness the growth of plants over time. Furthermore, caring for plants becomes a holistic learning experience for children, encompassing essential tasks such as watering, fertilizing, and maintaining cleanliness in the gardening area. These activities contribute to their understanding of the symbiotic relationship between plants and their environment, emphasizing the significance of proper care in preserving plant health.

In addition to hands-on gardening tasks, children learn valuable life skills, such as the importance of cleanliness and proper care. They gain insights into the interconnectedness of cleanliness and overall plant well-being, recognizing that maintaining a clean environment is crucial for plant health. This broader understanding of cleanliness and care extends beyond the gardening context, fostering a sense of responsibility and environmental consciousness that can positively influence various aspects of their lives. Overall, gardening activities serve as a multifaceted platform for children to acquire practical skills while cultivating a deeper connection with the natural world.

Raising

The animal husbandry program is a Nature Fun Learning activity aimed at providing children with insights into animals, teaching them how to care for animals, and fostering a loving attitude towards them. This activity aims to instill empathy for animals in children, creating a lasting impression (Rohmah, 2018: 85-102). Through this program, children are encouraged to develop their cognitive, affective, and psychomotor skills by emphasizing that

animals, too, require love and care (Susmiyati, 2014). Introducing animal husbandry to early childhood in nature-based schools serves as an engaging approach to acquaint children with the world of animal husbandry.



Figure 5. animal husbandry activities at the natural preschool in Bulukerto

The variety of animals involved in this program includes (1) fish, (2) rabbits, (3) chickens, and (4) birds. This diverse range of animals serves as a tangible medium for introducing students to animals that inhabit land, water, and air. Children actively participate in activities such as feeding the animals and assisting in cage cleaning. The example provided below illustrates a Raising activity at KB Alam Bulukerto.

Through introductory farming activities, children can gain an understanding of the responsibilities of caring for livestock, learn to observe animal behavior, and develop connections with the world of farming. This activity can also stimulate children's creativity and curiosity, helping them develop a caring attitude towards animals and the surrounding environment. In addition to that, animals must be cared for through feeding and affection. Through this kind of activity, it is hoped that children will develop a sense of love for God's living creatures.



Figure 6. animal husbandry activities at the natural preschool in Bulukerto

Activities introducing animal husbandry to early childhood in nature-based schools can yield numerous benefits and positive outcomes. The following are some of the potential results that may be achieved from this activity: (1) Understanding animals and their life cycles, (2) through introductory farming activities, children can develop an understanding of various types of livestock and their life cycles, (3) they can learn how animals develop from eggs or babies to adulthood. This understanding helps them recognize the natural processes in animal life and appreciate the wonders of nature. (4) A sense of responsibility towards animals makes children empathetic and fosters a preference or love for animals.

The cultivation of a caring attitude towards animals is a central focus of activities that involve introducing children to animal husbandry. Through these experiences, children develop a profound understanding of the importance of respecting the existence and needs of animals. They learn firsthand the significance of providing protection and good care, recognizing that animals, like humans, have specific requirements for their well-being. This process helps forge a strong emotional connection between children and the animal world, fostering empathy and compassion. Moreover, engaging in activities related to animal welfare enhances children's awareness of the broader importance of safeguarding the well-being of animals, promoting a sense of responsibility towards these living beings.

It is crucial to acknowledge that the outcomes of introductory breeding activities may vary among individual children. Nevertheless, in general, these activities offer valuable experiences that extend beyond the immediate context. They not only build practical skills and a sense of responsibility but also serve as a means to strengthen children's connection with nature and the surrounding environment. The lessons learned through these activities

contribute to the holistic development of children, instilling values of care, responsibility, and a deeper appreciation for the interconnectedness of all living things.

CONCLUSION

The golden age represents a pivotal period in human development, particularly for children aged 0 to 6 years. This stage is crucial as the education provided during these years significantly influences the child's subsequent developmental stages. The collaboration between teachers and parents is imperative to establish a joyful, engaging, and child-friendly learning process for children, both at home and at school. It requires creativity in offering various learning media.

KB Alam Bulukerto stands as a nature-based Early Childhood Education (ECE) institution featuring an outstanding Nature Fun Learning program encompassing activities such as Nature Walk, Gardening, and Raising. These efforts aim to instill a sense of responsibility for the natural environment and ecosystem in early childhood, ensuring that future generations can inherit an environment as good as, if not better than, the present one. Instilling a love for the environment is a character trait that must be nurtured from an early age.

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