

Fostering Creativity Through Play: Innovative Learning Development at Sunshine Daycare UNESA

Eka Cahya Maulidiyah^{1✉}, Rachma Hasibuan², Sri Setyowati³,
Muhammad Reza⁴, Afifah Rahmaningrum⁵, Fatiha Khoirotunnisa
Elfahmi⁶, Melia Dwi Widayanti⁷, Dhian Gowinda Luh Safitri⁸

^{1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8} Pendidikan Guru Pendidikan Anak Usia Dini, Universitas Negeri Surabaya

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.28926/pej.v6i1.2736>

Abstrak

Seiring meningkatnya jumlah orang tua yang bekerja penuh waktu, permintaan terhadap layanan penitipan anak berkualitas tinggi pun semakin bertumbuh. Namun, banyak pusat penitipan anak yang masih belum memiliki program pembelajaran terstruktur yang mendukung perkembangan holistik anak usia dini. Penelitian ini hadir untuk menjawab kesenjangan tersebut dengan mengembangkan model pembelajaran kreatif yang berlandaskan pada pembelajaran berbasis bermain (*play-based learning*), yang dirancang khusus untuk para pengasuh di Sunshine Daycare, sebuah lembaga pendidikan anak usia dini di bawah pengelolaan Program Studi Pendidikan Guru Pendidikan Anak Usia Dini (PG-PAUD), UNESA. Dengan menggunakan model ADDIE dalam kerangka Penelitian dan Pengembangan (R&D), data dikumpulkan melalui observasi dan wawancara bersama para pengasuh dan orang tua. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa penerapan pembelajaran kreatif berbasis bermain memberdayakan para pengasuh untuk merancang kegiatan harian yang menarik serta program unggulan yang mendorong perkembangan anak di berbagai aspek: bahasa, kognitif, motorik, moral-agama, dan sosial-emosional. Temuan ini menegaskan urgensi pengintegrasian pendekatan terstruktur yang berpusat pada anak dalam lingkungan penitipan anak, guna memastikan pengalaman belajar yang bermakna dan sesuai dengan tahapan perkembangan.

Kata Kunci: *penitipan anak, pembelajaran kreatif, pembelajaran berbasis bermain, pendidikan anak usia dini*

Abstract

As the number of full-time working parents continues to rise, so does the demand for high-quality daycare services. However, many daycare centers still lack structured learning programs that support the holistic development of young children. This study responds to that gap by developing a creative learning model grounded in play-based learning, specifically designed for caregivers at Sunshine Daycare, an early childhood center under the management of the Early Childhood Education Department (PG-PAUD), UNESA. Using the ADDIE model within a Research and Development (R&D) framework, data were collected through observations and interviews with caregivers and parents. The results reveal that implementing play-based creative learning empowers caregivers to plan engaging daily activities and signature programs that foster children's development across multiple domains: language, cognitive, motor, moral-religious, and socio-emotional. These findings underscore the urgency of integrating structured, child-centered approaches in daycare settings to ensure purposeful and developmentally appropriate learning experiences.

Keywords: *daycare, learning, creative, play-based learning, early childhood*

INTRODUCTION

Early Childhood Education (PAUD) plays a crucial role in laying the foundation for children's holistic and optimal development. Key aspects that must be continuously stimulated include language, cognitive abilities, physical-motor skills, moral and religious values, as well as social-emotional development, all of which serve as essential building blocks for their future growth. (Hasanah, 2018). Parents play a vital role in creating a conducive environment where children can remain continuously stimulated and engaged in learning to develop their full potential. Naturally, learning methods for early childhood differ significantly from those used for adults. Among various activities that support children's learning, play is considered the most effective medium. Through play, children are encouraged to explore, be creative, and actively engage – aligned with their developmental stage. (Danniels & Pyle, 2023; Glauser-Abou Ismail et al., 2022). The more learning opportunities provided to children, the greater their chances of gaining meaningful experiences through appropriate methods. One such approach is creative learning tailored to the unique characteristics of early childhood.

Creative learning is a pedagogical approach designed to stimulate children's holistic development through enjoyable and meaningful play-based activities, encompassing religious and moral values, physical-motor, cognitive, language, and socio-emotional domains. The principles of relevance, adaptation, continuity, and flexibility underpin learning that is responsive to each child's individual needs. (Lestarinigrum, A., 2022). Children not only acquire academic knowledge but also develop essential life skills. Careful planning is key to successful learning implementation, with educators acting as facilitators who can design varied themes, methods, and media. Creative learning provides educators with the flexibility to adapt instruction to children's interests, making the learning process more contextual and enjoyable. This approach also integrates elements of local wisdom and STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Art, and Mathematics) to nurture children's curiosity and critical thinking. In this study, creative learning is implemented through a play-based learning approach. (Dewi & Yufiarti, 2021; Suwastini et al., 2022).

Play-based learning has been recognized as an effective approach in early childhood education. This approach is rooted in the philosophies of prominent figures such as Rousseau, Froebel, and Dewey. According to Rousseau, a child should be treated as a child, emphasizing that play and enjoyment are natural characteristics of childhood. Froebel believed that children learn best when learning is integrated with play, as it creates a comfortable and supportive environment. Dewey emphasized the importance of an environment that provides rich experiences for children to play and learn simultaneously. Play-based learning focuses on fun, active, and voluntary engagement, allowing children to explore and construct knowledge in meaningful ways. (Wahjusaputri et al., 2024). The play-based learning approach is designed to allow children to enjoy play, feel happy, and simultaneously learn and discover new things. Therefore, the games provided to children must be purposeful and oriented toward the learning process rather than merely toward outcomes. (Amin, 2018). This is supported by Piaget's theory (Habsy et al., 2023). Individuals aged 2 to 7 years are in the pre-operational stage of development. At this stage, children learn best through concrete experiences, which means that learning must involve their active participation. This theoretical perspective supports the idea that play-based learning is not merely about playing for fun, but rather a structured and purposeful approach that can effectively optimize early childhood development.

The play-based learning approach is highly suitable for application at the Early Childhood Education (PAUD) level, as it aligns with children's natural and enjoyable ways of learning. According to Hirsh-Pasek et al. (2009), play-based learning supports cognitive, social, and emotional development by allowing children to engage actively with their environment. However, in practice at Sunshine Daycare UNESA, several challenges were identified – particularly caregivers' ongoing difficulties in designing structured and creative play

activities. A lack of innovation in learning design has hindered the optimal implementation of this approach. This condition reveals a gap between theoretical ideals and practical realities, highlighting the need to develop a creative learning model based on play-based learning that not only adheres to the principles of child development but is also practical and applicable within the daycare context. As noted by Bodrova and Leong (2007), planning and adult support are crucial to make play-based learning both meaningful and developmentally appropriate. The principles of child development are integrated into learning activities, both in daily routines and in specifically designed programs that offer meaningful play experiences for children. Creative learning based on play-based learning ensures that play is not only enjoyable but also contributes significantly to children's holistic development. This is in line with Piaget's theory, which emphasizes that children learn best through active experiences that match their developmental stage (Piaget, 1962).

Research conducted by (Limbong et al., 2024) Research explains that creative learning in Early Childhood Education (PAUD) aims to increase children's engagement, stimulate their imagination, and strengthen their conceptual understanding. In this study, several creative learning strategies were implemented: first, game-based learning; second, project-based learning; third, arts and crafts activities; and fourth, role-playing. These strategies demonstrate the crucial role educators play in designing engaging activities that align with children's needs, thereby creating a joyful and meaningful learning environment.

The development of creative learning based on play-based learning is carried out as a strategic solution to address the existing challenges. This includes the structured design of creative learning plans that allow caregivers to adjust activities according to children's individual needs. According to NAEYC (2020), high-quality early childhood programs require intentional planning that supports child-initiated and teacher-guided experiences. The aim is for this creative learning framework to serve as a practical reference for caregivers in providing optimal play experiences aligned with each child's developmental stage. This study offers a play-based creative learning design integrated into both daily activities and special programs, linked directly to child development indicators, ensuring that every activity carried out by children can be systematically measured and evaluated. As stated by Siraj-Blatchford and Sylva (2004), structured yet flexible frameworks that connect curriculum goals to children's developmental progress can significantly enhance learning outcomes in early childhood settings.

Based on the previously described background and identified problems, this study aims to develop a structured and applicable creative learning model based on play-based learning. The model is intended to support caregivers at Sunshine Daycare UNESA in designing learning activities that are fun, meaningful, and developmentally appropriate for early childhood.

METHOD

This study employed a research and development (R&D) design using the ADDIE model, which consists of five systematic stages: Analysis, Design, Development, Implementation, and Evaluation. The ADDIE model was selected because of its flexible yet structured approach, widely used in instructional design to improve educational interventions (Branch, 2009; Molenda, 2003). The research was conducted at Sunshine Daycare UNESA, involving 6 caregivers and 20 children aged 1–6 years, selected through purposive sampling to ensure the involvement of participants directly engaged in early childhood learning processes (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In the analysis stage, researchers conducted observations and interviews with caregivers and parents to identify current learning practices, challenges, and children's developmental needs. These findings became the foundation for designing creative learning based on play-based learning (PBL). The design stage involved formulating learning objectives aligned with child development domains, selecting age-appropriate materials, mapping developmental indicators, and planning engaging, meaningful, and structured activities. The design emphasized principles of developmentally appropriate

practice (DAP), which calls for learning tailored to children's age, individual differences, and social context (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009).

In the development stage, the research team created several outputs: a creative learning module, daily and thematic activity plans, and evaluation instruments (including observation rubrics) to monitor child engagement and learning outcomes. These products were reviewed and validated by early childhood education experts using a content validity framework, and revisions were made accordingly. During the implementation stage, the validated materials were applied in real classroom settings at Sunshine Daycare, and caregivers were first trained to use the module effectively. Children were then engaged in structured play activities designed to support their holistic development. The evaluation stage was carried out in both formative and summative forms. Formative evaluation was done during implementation to gather immediate feedback for improvement, while summative evaluation assessed learning outcomes descriptively and qualitatively through child behavior, caregiver reflections, and documentation analysis. Data analysis followed the model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014), which includes data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing, allowing researchers to interpret findings systematically and reflectively. (Mesra et al., 2023).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The creative learning model based on play-based learning developed in this study is structured into daily activities and featured programs, both of which are designed to stimulate children's holistic development. Daily activities are arranged as consistent learning routines that support physical, cognitive, and socio-emotional development. These include circle time, where children engage in movement and singing to support body coordination and language skills, and learning centers, where children explore thematic activities aligned with their developmental domains (Epstein, 2007). Such routines are vital in shaping secure, predictable environments that enhance early learning experiences (Bredekamp, 2014).

The featured programs are designed to enrich children's learning experiences through more targeted and varied activities. For example, the cooking class promotes creativity, independence, and fine motor skills as children learn simple food preparation techniques (Berk & Meyers, 2013). The project class encourages collaborative exploration and problem-solving by engaging children in hands-on craft-making, supporting both cognitive and motor development (Helm & Katz, 2011). The literacy program introduces storytelling to enhance vocabulary and comprehension, which has been shown to be effective in developing early language skills (Whitehurst & Lonigan, 2001). Programs like field trips and outing classes offer opportunities for physical activity and socialization, helping children understand their social and environmental contexts through direct experiences (Waite, 2011). The Little Science program introduces children to basic scientific concepts through simple, inquiry-based experiments, fostering curiosity and early scientific reasoning (Eshach & Fried, 2005). Meanwhile, screen time education involves curated educational videos to stimulate children's language and cognitive development, when used in moderation and with adult guidance (American Academy of Pediatrics, 2016).

In addition to cognitive and motor development, the program also emphasizes soft skills and character education. Activities such as Happy Song and Educational Games promote affective, psychomotor, and cognitive growth simultaneously. Basic Life Skills and Good Behavior sessions teach everyday routines like politeness, hygiene, and independence, which are essential in shaping children's character and social adaptability (Lickona, 1991). Outdoor Activities train children in environmental awareness and social interaction, while Special Events and Cultural Celebrations introduce them to traditions and values, fostering cultural literacy. Sensory activities such as touch-and-feel games develop tactile exploration and sensory integration. Creative art and DIY sessions encourage fine motor skills, creativity, and appreciation for environmental materials. Regular medical check-ups, in collaboration with

the Faculty of Medicine at UNESA and local health centers, ensure children's physical well-being and early detection of health issues.

For infants, age-appropriate activities are also included. Tummy time, touch and texture exploration, soft music listening, gentle body movement, and visual storytelling are incorporated to stimulate sensory, motor, auditory, and visual development in a developmentally appropriate manner (Sheridan, 2011). These baby-specific interventions are aligned with developmental milestones and support early brain development through consistent, gentle stimulation.

Table 1. Daily Activity Schedule

Name of activity	Time	Information
<i>Morning activities</i>	07.30 - 08.00	Reception child come
	08.00 - 08.15	Outdoor Gymnastics and Songs room (2x a week)/ play bubble (1x a week)
	08.15 - 08.30	Play free in the indoor playroom.
<i>Routine activities and education</i>	08.30 - 09.00	Circle Time (singing, movement, and songs), reading prayer, reading hadith, daily life, and letters short
	09.00 - 09.30	Preparation activities and snack time
<i>Learning time</i>	09.30 - 11.00	Core activities according to with lesson plan
<i>Rest and lunch</i>	11.00 - 11.45	Wash hands and eating Afternoon
	11.45 - 12.00	Preparation Sleep afternoon (change diapers and toilet training)
<i>Time off</i>	12.00 - 14.00	Sleep Afternoon
<i>Afternoon activities</i>	14.00 - 15.00	Afternoon meal
	15.00 - 16.00	Afternoon bath
<i>End of Day</i>	4:00 PM - 4:30 PM	Afternoon snack time while wait picked up

The full-day program is carried out from morning to afternoon and is followed by children aged 0–3 years, while the after-school or half-day program runs from afternoon to late afternoon and is intended for children aged 4–6 years. Morning activities begin with a welcoming session, aimed at building emotional bonds between caregivers and children—a practice known to support emotional security and smoother transitions in early childhood settings (Gordon & Browne, 2016). These are followed by exercise, songs, and games, designed to stimulate visual perception, motor coordination, and auditory attention. Afterwards, children are allowed to engage in free play indoors as a natural transition from the outdoor environment. This strategy helps children adapt more comfortably and feel secure in the indoor learning environment (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009).

Daily routines continue with circle time and prayer, which serve to instill early spiritual values and support the development of social-emotional routines (Lickona, 1991). Before engaging in core learning, children participate in snack time to meet their nutritional needs, ensuring they are physically prepared and emotionally regulated for the day's main activities (Kudewitz & Bjorklund, 2017). The core activities are implemented based on a play-based learning design adapted to the developmental stages of each age group (Epstein, 2007). Structured and guided creative learning sessions are carried out over 90 minutes, allowing children to explore, interact, and construct understanding through meaningful play experiences (Bodrova & Leong, 2015).

Once the main learning session concludes, children are guided to wash their hands in preparation for lunch, reinforcing health and hygiene routines. This is followed by nap time, preceded by toilet training activities that aim to foster independence and self-care skills in young children (Sheridan, 2011). The nap period lasts approximately two hours, essential for

physical recovery and cognitive development, particularly in early years when brain plasticity is at its peak (Spencer et al., 2009). Upon waking, children are provided with a light snack and then take an afternoon bath to refresh themselves after a full day of activities. The day concludes with free play or light activities, as they wait for their parents to pick them up.

Table 2. Monthly Themes and Weekly Subthemes

No	Month Names	Theme	Sunday	Subtheme
1	January	Introduction: Self and Family	I	Get to Know Myself
			II	Member Family
			III	Feelings and Emotions
			IV	My Family Story
2	February	Environment Around	I	My house
			II	My school
			III	Parks and Gardens
			IV	My community
3	March	Animal	I	pet
			II	Wild Animals
			III	Marine Animals
			IV	Animals on the Farm
4	April	Nature and Plants	I	Trees and Leaves
			II	Flowers and Fruits
			III	Plants and Gardens
			IV	Environment
5	May	Vehicles and Transportation	I	Vehicle Land
			II	Vehicle Sea
			III	Air Vehicles
			IV	Transportation General
6	June	Profession and Job	I	Doctors and nurses
			II	Police and Firefighters Fire
			III	Teachers and Office Work
			IV	Profession Other
7	July	Numbers and Letters	I	Know numbers 1-10
			II	Know letter ae
			III	Counting and reading simple
			IV	Play with numbers and letters.
8	August	Color and Shape	I	Primary colors
			II	Color Secondary
			III	Form geometric simple
			IV	Merge color and shape.
9	September	Arts and Crafts	I	Painting and Coloring
			II	Make collage
			III	Craft paper
			IV	Art recycling repeat
10	October	Music and Dance	I	Know tool music
			II	Sing together
			III	Dance Creative
			IV	Mini concert
11	November	Science simple	I	Water experiment
			II	Experiment air
			III	Experiment light
			IV	Experiment land
12	December	Celebrations and Traditions	I	Local celebrations
			II	Tradition family
			III	Cultural festival

Creative learning based on the play-based learning approach is organized thematically and further broken down into sub-themes. This thematic structure is designed to support daily learning planning that is developmentally appropriate, allowing for gradual and meaningful engagement with each topic. Themes are carefully selected from topics closely related to children's everyday experiences – ranging from self and family identity to cultural traditions and celebrations. This strategy aligns with Piaget's cognitive development theory, which emphasizes that children construct knowledge most effectively when learning moves from concrete experiences toward more abstract concepts (Piaget, 1952; Nurhadi, 2020). Each weekly sub-theme serves as the foundation for the design of varied learning activities tailored to the child's age and developmental stage, ensuring consistency and progression across the curriculum.

The study found that the implementation of flagship programs at Sunshine Daycare UNESA positively influenced early childhood engagement and developmental outcomes. For instance, the Fun Cooking Program enhances creativity through hands-on experiences such as mixing ingredients, observing color changes, and preparing simple foods. These activities support sensory exploration, encourage independence, and promote teamwork. Similarly, the Little Science Program, featuring experiments like the classic baking soda and vinegar volcano, helps children build critical thinking and observational skills while nurturing scientific curiosity. Field trips, such as visits to parks or farms, extend learning beyond the classroom, offering real-world experiences that stimulate environmental awareness and broaden social horizons. These programs reflect Bruner's discovery learning theory, which promotes active participation and direct experience as key to meaningful learning (Bruner, 1966; Nurhadi, 2020).

Furthermore, the play-based learning model is designed to address five domains of early childhood development: creative, dramatic, explorative, manipulative, and sensory. In the creative domain, children engage in collage-making from natural materials, fostering fine motor skills, imagination, and aesthetic appreciation. The dramatic domain includes role-play scenarios such as acting as doctors or shopkeepers, which cultivate empathy, verbal expression, and social competence. The explorative domain is developed through activities like gardening, where children observe plant growth, nurturing early scientific literacy and environmental stewardship. In the manipulative domain, puzzle games and building blocks help sharpen problem-solving abilities and logical thinking. Meanwhile, the sensory domain is stimulated through tactile experiences such as playing with sand, supporting sensory integration and self-regulation (Essa, 2019; Wahjusaputri et al., 2024).

The practical implication of this study highlights the need for structured, purposeful learning designs that align with child-centered education principles. The findings serve as a foundation for recommending the development of creative learning modules grounded in the play-based learning approach. These modules are intended to guide caregivers and early childhood educators in planning activities that are not only enjoyable but also developmentally rich and measurable across various domains. The structured thematic planning model presented in this study can be adopted as a framework for other early childhood institutions aiming to implement a holistic and developmentally appropriate curriculum.

CONCLUSION

The implementation of creative learning based on the play-based learning (PBL) approach at Sunshine Daycare UNESA has demonstrated significant potential in fostering holistic early childhood development. By integrating structured daily activities and innovative flagship programs, this model successfully nurtures multiple developmental domains – cognitive, linguistic, physical-motor, social-emotional, and moral-spiritual – through

engaging, age-appropriate, and meaningful experiences. The design of activities grounded in child development theories (Piaget, Bruner) ensures that learning remains centered on the child's needs, interests, and developmental stages, thereby optimizing both engagement and learning outcomes.

This study not only affirms the effectiveness of play-based learning in early childhood education but also highlights the importance of purposeful planning, contextual adaptation, and caregiver competence in implementing such models. The positive outcomes observed suggest that the model is both replicable and scalable for wider application in similar early childhood education settings. Therefore, it is recommended that further studies be conducted to examine its longitudinal impact, cross-contextual effectiveness, and potential for integration into national early childhood education curricula.

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