

***Optimizing Early Childhood Adversity:
The Impact of Play-Based Learning and Counselor Competence in Indonesia***

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Abstract

Early childhood adversity in Indonesia is an intriguing topic for research. Based on initial interviews with teachers and school counselors for early childhood education, it was discovered that many children had decreased adversity ability, as evidenced by their lack of confidence and their fear of trying again after failing while playing. Due to the continued presence of monotonous learning methods and a limited capacity among counselors in recognizing children's emotional states. Efforts by educators to enhance children's capacity to cope with adversity have yielded limited success. This study aims to investigate how early childhood adversity in Indonesia is impacted by play-based learning strategy and school counselor competencies. Case studies are used in this qualitative research, teachers and school counselors are interviewed and observed in order to collect data. The findings indicate a significant reduction in early childhood adversity, attributed to the implementation of play-based learning strategy and the competence of school counselors. Children who participated in play-based learning exhibited notable improvements in their ability to navigate challenges in their daily lives and adapt to changing circumstances. Furthermore, the essential role of school counselors proficient in providing social and emotional support to children becomes evident in aiding the enhancement of their adversity coping abilities. The findings have significant implications for early childhood education in Indonesia. Improving play-based learning, enhancing counselor qualifications, and clarifying their roles in the classroom can better prepare children to face life's challenges through a collaborative effort among educators, counselors, and parents.

Keywords: Adversity, Early Childhood, Play-Based Learning Strategy, School Counselor, Education

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Introduction

The development of early childhood adversity in Indonesia is an interesting thing to study. Early childhood in Indonesia faces various challenges that greatly affect its development and well-being. The number of children under the age of five who are stunted is still high, reaching around 27.7% in 2020, according to data collected by the Indonesian Central Bureau of Statistics. Stunting not only impacts physical growth, but can also affect cognitive development and learning ability. In addition, many factors affect early childhood conditions in Indonesia, including economic inequality, social inequality, and limited access to education and health services. Under these circumstances, it is important to explore innovative and effective approaches to help children overcome the adversity they are currently facing.

Play-based learning is a widely recognized method for supporting early childhood development. Research by Kim (2016) shows that play-based learning can improve young children's motivation to learn, their social skills, and their cognitive abilities. Children have the opportunity to research, cooperate, and develop their creativity through fun and interactive learning experiences. In addition, early childhood counselors and educators are also key to helping children deal with and overcome their various problems. In this case, families and children can get emotional support, guidance, and problem-solving strategies from experienced counselors and educators. The study by Arlianty and Kurniawan (2020) emphasizes that improving the ability of counselors in Indonesia is essential to providing better assistance to children who are experiencing difficulties.

In addition, as indicated by research conducted by Hardiningsih (2018), the lack of public understanding of the importance of play-based learning approaches and the role that early childhood counselors and educators play in supporting young children in Indonesia is another obstacle to implementing both approaches well. According to another study conducted by Nugraha et al. (2019), play-based learning, particularly in formal education institutions in Indonesia, still faces some significant challenges to implementation. These include limited resources and a lack of training for educators.

To gain a better understanding of the benefits of play-based learning and the role of counselors and educators in addressing early childhood adversity, further research is needed. This is especially true for the Indonesian environment, which has special challenges. Therefore, the purpose of this qualitative research is to find out how play-based learning and the abilities of counselors and early childhood educators are influential in optimizing early childhood challenges in Indonesia. Using an in-depth qualitative approach, this research aims to gain a better understanding of children's experiences, counselors' perspectives, and the contextual elements that influence the implementation of both strategies. It is hoped that this research will provide valuable insights for early childhood education and health practitioners and contribute greatly to the future development of Indonesian children.

Methods

This research is qualitative and uses a type of case study research. The case study approach allows researchers to conduct in-depth analysis of complex and specific situations in a real context. The subjects of this study were 3 educators with a background in early childhood teacher education and 2 early childhood counselors with a background in guidance and counseling education. Research data were obtained through a series of direct observations in

the school environment, observing interactions between educators, counselors, and early childhood children. In addition, in-depth interviews were also conducted with educators and school counselors to gain a deeper understanding of their experiences in managing and supporting early childhood adversity. This approach allows researchers to explore diverse perspectives and experiences and better understand the context surrounding the phenomenon under study.

The data analysis technique includes three stages (Idrus, 2009), as follows:

- Data reduction is the process of selecting or focusing on simplifying, abstracting, and transforming rough data that emerges from written notes taken in the field.
- Presentation of Data (Display Data): This is done by first arranging the data in such a way as to provide the possibility of drawing conclusions and making decisions. The presentation of data commonly used in qualitative data is in the form of narrative text.
- Conclusion Drawing (Verification): The last data analysis is drawing conclusions and verification.

Results and Discussion

Interview Data

- Indications of early childhood problems at 4–7 years old

It was mentioned that young children, especially those aged five to seven, often have difficulties dealing with problems and finding solutions. Things like domestic violence, a lack of emotional support from family and peers, and overprotection from parents are some of the causes. In addition, children's ability to cope with difficulties can be affected by a lack of social support from their teachers and peers.

In addition, there are also issues such as fear of failure, which may be caused by overprotection from parents and a lack of experience facing risks. Children may also experience a lack of self-confidence and difficulty regulating their emotions, which can hinder their ability to face challenges. However, the hope of the participants is that young children can learn to overcome adversity and be resilient through adequate support from their environment, which includes opportunities to face challenges and emotional support from family and peers.

- Support provided by teachers and educators

Based on the results presented, early childhood educators and counselors have tried hard to implement play-based learning approaches in an effort to develop children's adversity skills and increase their interest, creativity, and motivation to learn. However, they face a number of challenges in the implementation process.

The absence of family support and cooperation to support play-based learning in schools is a major problem. In addition, overprotection from parents can hinder children from getting the most effective stimulation. However, teachers continue to strive to make learning fun and stimulate children's creativity through open-ended questions.

In addition, overcoming children's limited social and emotional skills is another challenge for educators. Nevertheless, they can help by offering learning experiences that match children's interests and talents. Although there are shortcomings in previous experiences that make

children difficult to motivate, educators continue to provide motivation in child-centered learning.

Children show an enthusiastic response to the educators' constant efforts. This encourages them to keep trying new play activities. This suggests that play-based learning and the support provided by early childhood educators and counselors can successfully help young children learn to deal with difficulties.

Observation Data

Based on observation, it was found that with the support of PAUD teachers or counselors, children stimulated through play-based learning are able to control themselves and think positively, can find problems and take responsibility for solving them, are able to respond positively to what PAUD educators or counselors give them, are able to find solutions to the problems they face. They also have a strong spirit so that they do not give up easily when facing challenges. This is illustrated in table.1 below:

Table 1. Observation Result Analysis

Dimensions of Adversity	Observation Results
Control	With support from early childhood education teachers or counselors, children stimulated through play-based learning are able to control themselves and think positively.
Origin and Ownership	With support from early childhood education teachers or counselors, children stimulated through play-based learning can discover problems and take responsibility for solving them.
Reach	Children who are stimulated through play-based learning, with the support of early childhood education educators or counselors, are able to respond positively to what early childhood education educators or counselors give them.
Endurance	With the support of early childhood education teachers or counselors, children who are encouraged by play-based learning are able to find solutions to the problems they face. They also have a strong spirit, so they don't give up easily when facing challenges.

According to Stoltz (2000), adversity intelligence is a person's ability to remain positive and productive in difficult or challenging situations. It is a person's ability to deal with challenges in life, which is also known as the science of human resilience.

In in-depth interviews with early childhood education educators and counselors, it was found that children in kindergarten (4–7 years old) generally have poor development in dealing with difficulties. In addition, participants explained the efforts and support they had made, the factors that caused children to have low levels of difficulties, and the challenges they faced in improving the difficulties of the young children they worked with. The efforts and support provided include facilitating play-based learning with a wide selection of open and more varied play tools and media, then sparking children's ideas and creativity by asking open-

ended questions when children play with their explorations, until children are able to respond well to efforts and support in the application of play-based learning.

According to Stoltz (2000), there are four dimensions of adversity intelligence, including: (1) Control (self-control), which indicates that the higher a person's adversity intelligence, the stronger his self-control, and vice versa. (2) Origin Ownership (origin and recognition): If this aspect is focused on the lower the adversity intelligence, children tend to place unnecessary guilt on the bad events that occur in their lives. They can also hold themselves responsible for what happens in their lives. (3) Reach: this emphasizes the child's ability to limit the scope of the problem at hand; the wider the scope of the problem the child has, the more likely the child is to allow the bad event to expand and grow, and vice versa. (4) Endurance: this dimension emphasizes more the fact that the lower the child's endurance or resilience, the more likely the child believes that the problem will last.

Observations of the learners and the children they support in class also show that with the support provided, learners are able to have good self-control over the challenges they face and are able to think positively. They are also able to identify problems and take responsibility for solving them. They are also able to respond positively to what the early childhood education educator or counselor stimulates them with.

Conclusion

The results show that play-based learning approaches and school counselor competencies significantly develop early childhood adversity. Children who engaged in play-based learning showed development in their ability to cope with daily challenges and adapt to change. In addition, school counselors who are competent at providing emotional and social support also play an important role in developing children's adversity abilities. These findings have major implications for early childhood education in Indonesia. Improving play-based learning approaches and the qualifications and roles of school counselors can prepare children for life's challenges. Collaboration between educators, counselors, and parents is essential to strengthening early childhood adversity skills.

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