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THE EFFECT OF THE BUSY BOX EDUCATIONAL PLAY TOOL ON PROBLEM-SOLVING ABILITY IN EARLY CHILDHOOD AT TK QUR'AN ARINA MUNZALAN MUBAROKAN PALU CITY

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ABSTRACT
Despite generally optimal learning conditions, children's problem-solving abilities at TK Qur'an Arina Munzalan Mubarokan, Palu City, remain low, indicating a need for a learning medium capable of stimulating this cognitive skill. This study therefore examines the effect of the Busy Box educational play tool on early childhood students' problem-solving abilities. A quantitative approach with a quasi-experimental, two-group pretest-posttest design was employed, involving 30 children divided into an experimental and a control group (15 children each). Data were collected using an objective test measuring children's problem-solving ability in relation to the Busy Box, and analyzed using an independent t-test with df = 28 at a significance level of 0.05 (t-table = 2.048). The results showed that the experimental group's mean score increased from 62.36 at pretest to 79.33 at posttest. The independent t-test yielded a calculated t-value of 4.49, exceeding the t-table value of 2.048, indicating a statistically significant difference between the experimental and control groups. These findings suggest that the use of Busy Box has a positive effect on young children's problem-solving ability and may serve as an alternative learning medium to support cognitive development in early childhood education. Given the relatively small sample size and the use of purposive sampling, further studies with larger and more representative samples are recommended to confirm and generalize these findings.

INTRODUCTION

Learning in early childhood is a process oriented toward providing optimal stimulation to support all aspects of development, including cognitive development. One important cognitive ability to develop from an early age is problem-solving ability, namely the child's ability to recognize problems, seek alternative solutions, make decisions, and understand cause-and-effect relationships. This ability serves as a foundation for the development of critical thinking, creativity, and independence in children when facing various life situations (Ruhiyat, 2024; Umiyati & Isnaningsih, 2024). Problem-solving ability does not develop automatically; it requires repeated opportunities for children to encounter obstacles, generate possible solutions, test those solutions, and evaluate the outcomes within a supportive learning environment.

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Based on initial observations at TK Qur'an Arina Munzalan Mubarokan, Palu City, the learning process has been running well. Teachers implement various types of play activities, supported by adequate learning facilities and positive interaction between teachers and students. Nevertheless, children's problem-solving ability has not yet developed optimally. Some children still experience difficulty when facing simple problems, tend to depend on the teacher's guidance, give up easily when encountering obstacles, and are not yet accustomed to trying various solutions independently. This condition indicates a gap between the quality of the learning process and the achievement of children's problem-solving ability development, suggesting that conducive learning conditions alone are insufficient without a medium specifically designed to train problem solving skills.

Educational play tools are one type of media that can facilitate children to explore, think logically, and find solutions through meaningful play experiences (Annisa et al., 2023; Siti et al., 2024). Busy Box is an educational play tool consisting of a set of interactive compartments, latches, and manipulative components such as locks, buttons, sliding parts, and puzzle-like fasteners that children must operate through trial and error to achieve a specific outcome. Each component is designed to present children with a small, self-contained obstacle that cannot be resolved through a single, obvious action, thereby requiring them to identify the nature of the obstacle, generate and test alternative strategies, and observe the result of each attempt. Through this structure, the Busy Box theoretically supports the development of problem-solving ability through several interrelated mechanisms: children must first recognize that a component presents a problem (problem identification), consider more than one possible way to manipulate it (generating alternatives), select and execute one strategy over another (decision making), and observe whether their action produces the intended effect (understanding cause and effect). Repeated engagement with these mechanisms during play is expected to gradually strengthen children's capacity to approach unfamiliar problems independently, rather than relying on adult guidance. With these characteristics, the Busy Box is considered to have potential as an effective learning medium for stimulating early childhood problem solving ability.

A number of previous studies have examined the use of the Busy Box and similar media on early childhood development, though most have concentrated on developmental domains other than problem solving. Studies by Pratiwi et al. (2021), Nazi and Jamil (2023), and Lisnawati et al. (2025) showed that the Busy Box is effective in improving children's fine motor skills, focusing primarily on manual dexterity rather than cognitive problem solving processes. A study by Anggraini et al. (2023) revealed the benefits of this medium for social emotional development, while studies by Ruhiyat (2024), Frinski and Hasibuan (2022), and Utami et al. (2017) discussed the development of problem-solving ability through various play activities not specifically centered on the Busy Box. Other studies have also examined the Busy Book and Busy Jar media in improving early childhood problem-solving ability (Anjani et al., 2023; Suwatra et al., 2019; Umiyati & Isnaningsih, 2024), indicating that book and jar based variants of manipulative play media have received more empirical attention than the Busy Box itself in relation to this specific cognitive ability.

Taken together, this body of literature shows that empirical evidence on the Busy Box has been concentrated on fine motor and social emotional outcomes, while its effect on problem solving ability specifically has rarely been tested directly; where problem solving has been studied, it has generally involved media other than the Busy Box. This gap is important to address because, as outlined above, the manipulative and obstacle based nature of the Busy Box differs structurally from the media used in prior problem solving studies, and this structural difference may correspond to a different pattern of cognitive engagement. In addition, research on the use of the Busy Box at Qur'an based early childhood education institutions, particularly in Palu City, remains very limited. The present study addresses this gap by providing empirical evidence on the effect of the Busy Box specifically on early childhood problem-solving ability, within a learning context that has not been previously examined.

Based on the above description, this study aims to analyze the effect of the Busy Box educational play tool on early childhood problem-solving ability at TK Qur'an Arina Munzalan Mubarokan, Palu City. The results of this study are expected to contribute to the development of learning media in early childhood education, as well as serve as a reference for educators in selecting effective learning strategies to improve children's problem-solving ability.

METHODS

This study used a quantitative approach with an experimental method (quasi-experimental design) aimed at determining the effect of using the Busy Box educational play tool on early childhood Problem-Solving ability. The research design applied was a Two Group Pretest Posttest Design, involving two groups: an experimental group that received treatment using the Busy Box, and a control group that followed learning activities without using this medium.

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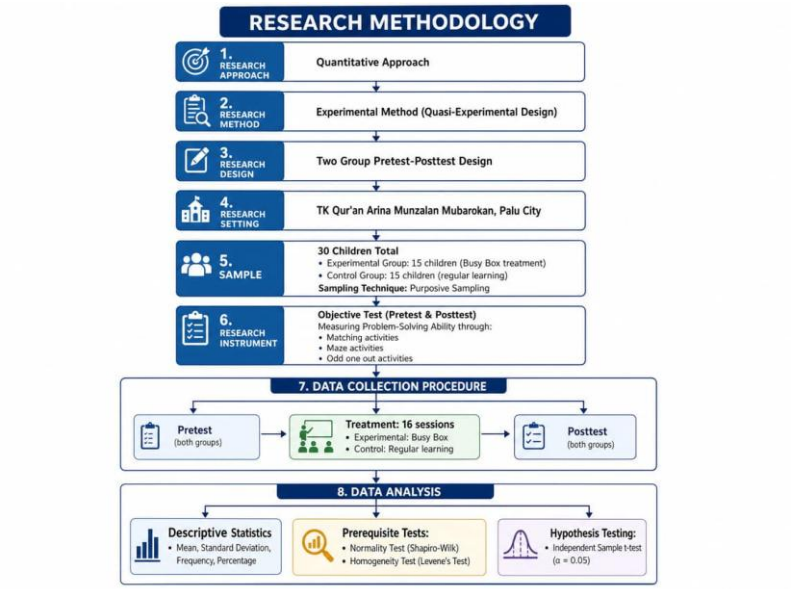
Figure 1. *Research Methodology Framework*

The study was conducted at TK Qur'an Arina Munzalan Mubarokan, Palu City, involving all students who met the research criteria. The sample consisted of 30 children divided into two groups, each consisting of 15 children in the experimental group and 15 children in the control group. The sample was determined using a purposive sampling technique, taking into account student characteristics appropriate to the research objectives.



The research instrument was an objective test used at the pretest and posttest stages to measure children's Problem-Solving ability. Measurement was carried out through three types of activities, namely matching, maze, and odd one out, which were designed based on indicators of the ability to recognize problems, choose alternative solutions, and understand cause-and-effect relationships. In addition, observation was carried out during the learning process to support the data on the development of children's abilities during the implementation of the treatment.

Data collection began with administering a pretest to both groups to determine students' initial abilities. Subsequently, the experimental group received learning using the Busy Box educational play tool over 16 sessions, while the control group followed learning as usual without using this medium. After the entire series of treatments had been completed, both groups were given a posttest using the same instrument to determine changes in Problem-Solving ability.

Data analysis was carried out in stages with the assistance of IBM SPSS software. The initial stage involved descriptive statistical analysis to describe children's Problem-Solving ability before and after the treatment. This was followed by prerequisite tests, consisting of a normality test using Shapiro–Wilk and a homogeneity test using Levene's Test. Once the data were confirmed to meet the assumptions, hypothesis testing was carried out using an Independent Sample t-test at a significance level of 5% ($\alpha = 0.05$) to determine the difference in Problem-Solving ability between the experimental group and the control group after the treatment was administered.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Description of Early Childhood Problem-Solving Ability Before and After the Use of the Busy Box Educational Play Tool at TK Qur'an Arina Munzalan Mubarokan, Palu City

Children's Problem-Solving ability was measured in two stages, namely pretest and posttest, in both the experimental and control groups. The initial measurement results showed that the Problem-Solving ability of both groups was still in the low to fair category. Children were generally not yet able to identify problems independently, still depended on the teacher's guidance, and were not yet accustomed to trying various solutions when facing challenges in learning activities.

After the experimental group received treatment in the form of using the Busy Box educational play tool over 16 sessions, there was a higher increase in Problem-Solving ability compared to the control group. The average score of the experimental group increased from 62.36 at the pretest stage to 79.33 at the posttest stage. Meanwhile, the control group

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also experienced an increase, but with a lower average than the experimental group, namely from 64.04 at the pretest stage to 70.89 at the posttest stage.

This improvement was not only evident from the scores obtained by the students but also from behavioral changes during the learning process. Children began to be able to recognize problems that arose during play, took the initiative to try more than one alternative solution, and showed courage in making decisions without always depending on the teacher's help. These findings indicate that the Busy Box was able to provide a learning experience that encouraged children to think actively through exploratory activities.

To determine the classification of student ability, the author used a value classification based on student achievement after the test, intended to assess the ability of each student. The following is the value classification based on Sudijono (2011:6).

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Before hypothesis testing was carried out, the data were first analyzed using prerequisite tests.

Normality Test Table

Tests of Normality

		Kolmogorov-Smirnov[a]			Shapiro-Wilk		
	VAR00003	Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
VAR00001	1.00	.173	15	.200*	.963	15	.748
	2.00	.184	15	.184	.897	15	.085
VAR00002	1.00	.210	15	.073	.882	15	.051
	2.00	.123	15	.200*	.935	15	.329

*. This is a lower bound of the true significance.

a. Lilliefors Significance Correction

The normality test results using the Shapiro Wilk method showed that all data had a significance value greater than 0.05, indicating a normal distribution. Furthermore, the homogeneity test using Levene's Test produced a significance value above 0.05, indicating that the variances of both groups were homogeneous. With both assumptions met, the analysis proceeded using the Independent Sample t-test.

Hypothesis testing was carried out using an independent sample t-test to compare the average pretest and posttest scores of the experimental and control groups. Manual calculation results showed a calculated t-value of 4.4945 with degrees of freedom (df) = 28. At a significance level of 5% ($\alpha = 0.05$) with df = 28, the t-table value obtained was 2.048, based on the Critical Values of Student's Distribution table. Since the calculated t-value (4.4945) was much greater than the t-table value (2.048), the decision taken was that H_0 was rejected and H_1 was accepted. This result was reinforced by the significance value (2-tailed) obtained of 0.05, so it can be concluded that there is a significant difference in children's problem-solving ability before and after the use of the Busy Box educational play tool.

These findings can be understood through the lens of cognitive development theory, particularly the constructivist view that children build understanding through direct interaction with their environment (Piaget, 1952) and through play activities that allow them to test ideas, encounter obstacles, and revise their strategies. Rather than being told how to solve a problem, children using the Busy Box were required to manipulate its compartments, latches, and fasteners independently an experience that necessitated active hypothesis-testing: trying one strategy, observing whether it produced the intended effect, and adjusting the approach when it did not. This trial and error structure corresponds closely to the core components of problem-solving ability measured in this study recognizing the problem, generating and selecting among alternative actions, and evaluating outcomes based on cause and effect feedback. In other words, the improvement observed from pretest to posttest is not merely a result of children being exposed to a novel toy, but reflects repeated practice in the specific cognitive sub-processes that constitute problem-solving, made possible by the manipulative and self-correcting nature of the Busy Box's design. This mechanism explains why engagement with the medium, rather than passive observation or teacher-guided instruction alone, was associated with measurable gains in children's problem-solving performance.

The results of this study are consistent with Ruhiyat (2024), who found that purposefully designed play activities can develop problem-solving ability in early childhood; the present findings extend this claim by demonstrating that the effect holds specifically for a manipulative, obstacle-based medium such as the Busy Box, rather than play activities in

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general. Similarly, this study reinforces Umiyati and Isnaningsih (2024), who showed that exploration-based play media are effective in improving problem-solving ability here, the Busy Box can be positioned as a concrete example of an exploration-based medium, with its component-level design (locks, sliders, latches) offering a more specific account of what exploratory features actually drive the improvement. In relation to Anjani et al. (2023) and Suwatra et al. (2019), who reported that Busy Box and Busy Book based media can stimulate children's cognitive development, the present study shares the same general medium type but differs in outcome focus: while those studies addressed cognitive development more broadly, this study isolates problem-solving ability as a distinct construct and demonstrates a statistically significant pre post improvement attributable specifically to the Busy Box, rather than to a related but conceptually broader medium such as the Busy Book.

Beyond confirming these prior findings, this study contributes new evidence in several more specific respects. First, it examines the Busy Box's effect on problem-solving ability as an isolated outcome measured through a structured objective test, rather than as part of a broader cognitive or motor development assessment as in earlier Busy Box research. Second, it was conducted within a Qur'an-based early childhood education institution in Palu City, a learning context in which children's daily activities are integrated with religious-based instruction a setting not previously examined in Busy Box research and one that may involve different baseline engagement patterns or teacher-child interaction styles than the general early childhood settings used in prior studies. Third, by explicitly linking the Busy Box's component level design to the four problem-solving indicators assessed in this study (recognizing problems, generating alternatives, decision-making, and understanding cause-and-effect), this research offers a more mechanism-specific account of how and why this particular medium supports problem-solving development, rather than treating the medium as a general stimulus for cognitive growth.

Overall, the research results indicate that the Busy Box is an effective learning medium for stimulating early childhood problem-solving ability. Through its manipulative, obstacle-based activities, the medium engages children in recognizing problems, generating and selecting among alternative solutions, and evaluating outcomes through direct cause and effect feedback a process that, grounded in constructivist learning theory, offers a plausible explanation for the significant improvement observed in this study.

CONCLUSION

This study provides empirical evidence that the Busy Box educational play tool has a significant effect on the problem-solving ability of early childhood children at TK Qur'an Arina Munzalan Mubarokan, Palu City. This is demonstrated by the increase in the average score of the experimental class from 62.36 at the pretest stage to 79.33 at the posttest stage, a mean gain of 16.98, and a calculated t-value of 4.49, which exceeds the t-table value of 2.048 at a significance level of 0.05, resulting in H_1 being accepted. These results indicate a statistically significant difference in children's problem-solving ability following the use of the Busy Box; however, as the magnitude of this effect was not quantified using a standardized effect size measure (e.g., Cohen's d), claims regarding the practical or substantive importance of this improvement should be interpreted with caution, and future research is encouraged to report such measures to more precisely establish the practical significance of the intervention.

These findings offer preliminary support for the relevance of manipulative, exploration-based media such as the Busy Box to the foundational phase learning outcomes outlined in the Decree of the Head of BSKAP, Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology (Kemendikbudristek), Number 032/H/KR/2024, particularly the elements concerning literacy, mathematics, science, technology, engineering, and the arts including children's ability to communicate, engage in exploration and problem-solving, and use simple technology safely. Given that this study involved 30 children from a single institution, these implications should be regarded as context specific rather than generalizable, and further studies involving larger and more diverse samples across multiple early childhood education institutions are needed before broader curricular or policy recommendations can be drawn. Within this scope, the findings suggest that the Busy Box may serve as a promising learning medium worth further investigation as part of efforts to strengthen problem-solving stimulation in early childhood education.

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