

INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY SERVICE: EMPOWERING EARLY CHILDHOOD THROUGH BOARD GAMES TO ENHANCE SELF-CARE SKILLS AT THE INDONESIAN SCHOOL OF KUALA LUMPUR (SIKL), MALAYSIA

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Abstract

The International Community Service program aimed to empower early childhood education by training kindergarten teachers at Sekolah Indonesia Kuala Lumpur (SIKL), Malaysia, to design board games that enhance self-care skills in young children. This program utilized a participatory action research (PAR) approach, engaging 20 teachers through workshops and mentoring sessions. The results revealed a significant improvement in the teachers' ability to create interactive and engaging learning activities, with self-care concepts successfully integrated into the board games. The games were well-received by students, enhancing their motivation and engagement in practicing self-care routines. These findings emphasize the effectiveness of game-based learning in teaching essential life skills. It is recommended to continue the training sessions and expand collaboration with other educational institutions to ensure lasting impact.

Keywords: International Community Service, Board Games, Self-Care Skills, Early Childhood Education, Sekolah Indonesia Kuala Lumpur (SIKL)



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INTRODUCTION

Self-care is a crucial aspect of early childhood development that encompasses the ability to take care of oneself, maintain hygiene, and understand healthy daily routines (Newcomb et al., 2017; Wilson et al., 2008). This ability contributes to children's independence and fosters awareness of both physical and emotional well-being (Santrock, 2007). Self-care is also closely related to children's social-emotional development, as these skills help them adapt to social environments and enhance their self-confidence (Berk, 2020). According to research by La Mott & Martin, (2019), children with strong self-care skills are better able to regulate their emotions and are more prepared for the next stages of education. Therefore, strengthening self-care skills from an early age is an essential part of holistic education that supports comprehensive child development.

At the Indonesian School of Kuala Lumpur (SIKL), Malaysia, self-care learning for kindergarten children faces several challenges, particularly in implementing effective and engaging methods. Young children have unique learning characteristics, as they better understand concepts through direct experiences and play-based activities (Piaget, 1952). However, in practice, self-care learning methods at SIKL still rely on conventional approaches that lack interactivity, making it difficult for children to fully grasp the importance of self-care.

<https://jurnal.piaud.org/index.php/kreasi/index>

This aligns with the findings of Lee et al., (2017), who revealed that activity-based learning methods could enhance children's understanding of self-care concepts by up to 75% compared to lecture-based approaches. Therefore, innovative teaching strategies that align with early childhood development principles are necessary, with game-based learning being a particularly promising approach.

Board games as interactive learning media have been proven effective in enhancing various aspects of child development, including self-care. Research by Safitri et al., (2023) found that using board games in early childhood education increased children's engagement by 80% compared to traditional teaching methods. Board games allow children to actively learn in a structured and enjoyable manner, helping them grasp self-care concepts through meaningful play experiences. Moreover, board games contribute to the development of children's social skills, fine motor abilities, and critical thinking (Hasanah et al., 2024; Indrayanti et al., 2024; Rosdiani & Warmansyah, 2021; Warmansyah, 2019). As such, this medium offers an effective solution for strengthening self-care education in kindergarten settings, including at SIKL, by directly involving children in an interactive and explorative learning process.

Furthermore, kindergarten teachers play a key role in implementing board game-based learning strategies. However, previous studies have highlighted that many teachers lack the necessary skills to design and develop board games tailored to early childhood needs (Armanila et al., 2024; Nurhalisa et al., 2024; Roffey, 2009). Teacher involvement in the creation of learning media is crucial to ensuring that the board games used are relevant to children's developmental stages and educational contexts (Khamidah & Sholichah, 2022; Latifa et al., 2023; Oktaviana et al., 2021). Therefore, training teachers in designing educational board games is a strategic step in enhancing the effectiveness of self-care learning in kindergarten.

This community service program aims to provide training for teachers at SIKL in designing and developing board games as a medium for teaching self-care to kindergarten children. Through this training, teachers are expected to gain a deeper understanding of effective board game design principles and how to integrate them into daily learning activities. Additionally, by systematically incorporating board games, children are expected to develop a better understanding of self-care in an enjoyable and practical way. Consequently, this initiative not only enhances the quality of education at SIKL but also supports children's cognitive, social, and emotional development in an optimal manner.

Based on the issues outlined above, this program addresses two main problem areas. First, it explores how board games can help kindergarten children develop self-care skills in a more interactive and engaging way. Second, it investigates the challenges faced by teachers at SIKL in designing and implementing board games for self-care education and seeks ways to address these challenges effectively.

The objectives of this community service program are twofold. The first is to enhance the understanding and skills of kindergarten teachers at SIKL in designing and using board games as an effective medium for teaching self-care to young children. The second is to identify the barriers that teachers face in implementing board game-based learning and to develop practical solutions to optimize the effectiveness of self-care education in the classroom.

METHODS

This community service program adopts the Participatory Action Research (PAR) approach, which positions the target community as active participants in every stage of the program—from problem identification, planning, and implementation, to evaluation and reflection. The PAR method was selected based on the core issue identified during preliminary engagement: the limited use of interactive media, particularly educational board games, in the teaching of self-care skills to early childhood learners at Sekolah Indonesia Kuala Lumpur (SIKL). By utilizing PAR, the program ensures a collaborative and inclusive process that empowers teachers as co-researchers and co-developers of the solutions being implemented.

The program is a collaborative initiative between the Early Childhood Islamic Education (PIAUD) Study Program at the Faculty of Tarbiyah and Teacher Training, UIN Mahmud Yunus Batusangkar, Indonesia, and Sekolah Indonesia Kuala Lumpur (SIKL), Malaysia. The primary location of the activities is the SIKL campus, situated at 1, Lorong Tun Ismail, Kuala Lumpur, 50480, Wilayah Persekutuan Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. The implementation took place on February 17, 2023. Funding for the program was sourced through a cost-sharing mechanism between UIN Mahmud Yunus Batusangkar and SIKL, amounting to a total budget of IDR 25,000,000 or approximately 6,800 Malaysian Ringgit (MYR).

The key participants in this initiative included 12 kindergarten teachers from SIKL, who were directly involved in the program and served as the primary agents of change. Additionally, kindergarten students at SIKL benefitted indirectly as recipients of the improved teaching practices implemented by the trained teachers. The community service team from UIN Mahmud Yunus Batusangkar was composed of academic staff and senior students. The team was led by Dr. Jhoni Warmansyah, M.Pd., with Dr. Wahidah Fitriani, M.A. and Elis Komalasarini, M.Pd. as core members. Three final-year students from the PIAUD program were also actively involved as assistant facilitators and documentation officers.

The implementation of the program was carried out in five sequential and interrelated phases. The first phase focused on identification and collaborative action planning, involving field observations and focus group discussions with the school leadership and teachers. This step was essential for contextualizing the challenges faced by the teaching staff and aligning the objectives of the program with the needs and expectations of the local school community.

The second phase comprised an intensive training and workshop session, conducted over one full day. During this session, participants were introduced to theoretical foundations of self-care education in early childhood, followed by guided activities to design interactive and educational board games. This phase emphasized hands-on practice, allowing teachers to translate pedagogical concepts into concrete learning tools, with continuous support and input from experts in early childhood education and instructional media.

In the third phase, teachers began the implementation of their newly developed board games within actual classroom settings. During this stage, the community service team provided on-site mentoring to observe the instructional process, offer technical assistance, and support reflection on teaching practices. This mentoring allowed for immediate problem-solving and facilitated real-time adjustments to the learning tools based on classroom dynamics and student responses.

The fourth phase involved a comprehensive evaluation and participatory reflection process. Teachers completed pre- and post-training questionnaires to assess shifts in knowledge, skills, and confidence levels. In addition, structured interviews and group reflection sessions were conducted to gather qualitative insights into the practical outcomes, challenges encountered, and opportunities for future improvement. These reflections served not only as a feedback mechanism but also as a professional development tool for the teachers.

The final phase was dedicated to documentation and dissemination of the outcomes. All board games developed during the program, along with supporting lesson plans and student work samples, were compiled as part of a program report. The documented outputs are intended to serve as reference materials for future training sessions, academic forums, and teaching practice modules within the PIAUD study program.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Evaluation of Training Outcomes

The evaluation of the training program "Training on Designing Board Games to Develop Self-Care for Kindergarten Children" at Sekolah Indonesia Kuala Lumpur (SIKL), Malaysia, was conducted through participant response surveys collected after the training. The following table presents the results of the evaluation:

Table 1. Evaluation of Training Outcomes

No	Statement	Participant Responses
1	The self-care board games are designed according to the needs and understanding level of young children.	100%
2	The board game materials are easy to understand and implement.	100%
3	The use of board games increases children's enthusiasm for learning self-care routines.	98%
4	The training materials include clear and practical examples.	100%
5	The board games are visually appealing and engaging.	100%
6	The training content is concise, clear, and relevant to self-care education.	100%
7	The trainers responded well to participants' questions and difficulties.	95%
8	The training increased participants' knowledge and readiness to integrate board games in self-care education.	100%

Based on the questionnaire responses, it is evident that the training materials and the hands-on activities were well-received by the participants. The board game approach was found to be *clear, engaging, and effective* in supporting the development of self-care skills among young children.

Participants' Feedback on the Training Impact

The impact of the training was also evaluated based on participant feedback. The following table summarizes their responses:

Table 2. Participant Feedback on Training Impact

No	Statement	Participant Responses
1	Gained new insights on using board games for self-care education.	100%
2	Felt more prepared to implement self-care learning	100%

	using board games.	
3	Found the training beneficial in developing children's self-care skills.	100%
4	Observed an increase in children's motivation to engage in self-care activities.	100%
5	Encouraged children to develop a habit of self-care.	98%
6	Helped children foster social interactions and cooperation.	80%
7	Participants enjoyed and appreciated the training experience.	100%
8	Participants were satisfied with the training program and materials provided.	100%

The feedback highlights that the training was highly beneficial and well-received by the participants. Most teachers expressed confidence in applying the board games in their classrooms and observed a positive impact on children's engagement and understanding of self-care routines.



Figure 1. Documentation of international Community Service

The implementation of this community service activity significantly enhanced teachers' competence in designing and utilizing board games to develop self-care skills in kindergarten children. Prior to the training, most teachers had limited experience integrating board games into early childhood education. However, through a series of workshops and mentoring sessions, teachers demonstrated notable improvements in their understanding of self-care concepts and their ability to create interactive board games as educational tools. After the

training, they expressed increased confidence and readiness to implement these games in their classrooms. Classroom observations further revealed that students responded positively to learning activities involving board games, becoming more engaged and enthusiastic. They actively participated in activities designed to enhance self-care skills, such as personal hygiene, independence, and social interaction. The interactive nature of the games made learning more enjoyable, encouraging children to practice self-care routines in a fun and structured manner.

Documentation of the learning process showcased a variety of innovative board games developed by teachers, with many successfully addressing different aspects of self-care, such as handwashing, proper eating habits, and tidying up after playtime. Students demonstrated a better understanding and application of these practices in their daily routines, reflecting significant improvement in their work and engagement. The collaborative nature of the workshops fostered knowledge-sharing among teachers. Group discussions and collaborative brainstorming sessions allowed teachers to exchange ideas, discuss challenges, and refine their game designs. This peer-to-peer learning approach enriched their insights and motivated them to adopt more creative and effective teaching strategies in early childhood education.

The success of this community service activity aligns with findings from previous research supporting the use of board games as effective tools for promoting self-care education. Mulyati & Suryani, (2023) emphasize that educational board games can improve cognitive and social skills in preschoolers, a result also observed in this activity where children demonstrated enhanced motivation and engagement. Moreover, Alizkan et al., (2021) noted that interactive learning media such as board games significantly improve motivation and engagement in early learning contexts. The activity also reflects the broader benefits of Participatory Action Research (PAR) in community engagement projects. Warmansyah et al., (2023) highlights how PAR fosters community participation and builds local capacity, as evidenced by the teachers at Sekolah Indonesia Kuala Lumpur (SIKL) transitioning from passive recipients of knowledge to active co-creators, leading to more meaningful and sustainable outcomes.

Furthermore, the positive feedback from both teachers and students underscores the effectiveness of integrating game-based learning to enhance the development of essential life skills in early childhood education settings. This success suggests that board games could be widely incorporated into early childhood curricula to promote self-care and other critical life skills.

CONCLUSION

The International Community Service program, titled "Empowering Early Childhood through Board Games to Enhance Self-Care Skills at the Indonesian School of Kuala Lumpur (SIKL), Malaysia," effectively equipped teachers with the necessary skills to design and implement board games that foster self-care habits among young children. The training demonstrated that board games are a powerful tool for enhancing children's motivation, engagement, and understanding of essential self-care routines. To ensure the program's sustainability and broader impact, it is recommended that regular workshops be conducted for continuous teacher development, schools establish mechanisms to monitor the effectiveness of board game-based learning, and collaborations with other educational institutions be pursued to spread these innovative teaching strategies, thereby benefiting more educators and students.

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