

The Role of Teachers in Enhancing Early Childhood Self-Confidence Through Project-Based Learning: A Study at Gaussian Kamil School Semarang.

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Abstract: This study examines the role of teachers in enhancing self-confidence among early childhood learners through project-based learning at Gaussian Kamil School Semarang. A qualitative descriptive method was used in this study. The participants of this study were teachers, the school principal and students from Kindergarten B at Gaussian Kamil School Semarang. Data were collected by means of observation, interviews and analysis of documents. The data were analyzed by using an interactive data analysis model, namely reduction, display, and conclusion drawing. The results of this study revealed that teachers played crucial roles of facilitators, motivators, and guides of students in their learning processes. How teachers organized students collaborative learning, assigned each child with roles in the project, encouraged students to present their work, and allowed students to explore their ideas by using loose parts, helped students to recognize their strengths and to be confident in their learning processes. Students who were involved in project-based learning also developed their communication skills, critical thinking, and independence. Therefore, project-based learning provided students with meaningful opportunities to develop their self-confidence through their active involvement in learning processes and authentic learning experiences. Teachers played important roles in constructing learning environments where students felt valued, heard, and supported, and in which students self-confidence could be developed alongside other aspects of child development.

Keywords: *Teacher's role, self-confidence, project-based learning, early childhood education.*

INTRODUCTION

Early childhood education plays an important role in supporting students growth and development. During this period, students experience rapid development in physical, cognitive, language, social, and emotional aspects. Early childhood is often referred to as the golden age because students are highly responsive to stimulation and learning experiences. Therefore, educational experiences provided during this stage can have a significant impact on students future development (Mutiah, 2010). Early childhood education is not only concerned with academic learning but also plays an important role in supporting students social and emotional growth, particularly their self-confidence.

An important foundation for students success in learning and social interaction is Self-confidence. Students who possess self-confidence are more willing to express their ideas, participate in classroom activities, communicate with others, and take on new challenges. Self-confidence refers to an individual's belief in their abilities and strengths, which enables them to achieve various goals in life, according to Hakim (2002). Similarly, Miskell (as cited in Butolo, 2013) defines self-confidence as a belief in one's abilities and an awareness of how those abilities can be used effectively. Students who have confidence in themselves tend to enjoy learning experiences and actively engage in their environment. In contrast, students with low self-confidence may hesitate to participate, avoid challenges, and doubt their own abilities.

Erikson's psychosocial development theory says that the importance of self-confidence in early childhood can also be explained with it. Erikson argued that students develop confidence gradually through opportunities to explore, make decisions, and take responsibility for their actions. The stage of initiative versus guilt, where they begin to develop initiative and independence, starts in children aged four to five years. At this stage, students need opportunities to make choices, express ideas, and participate actively in meaningful activities. If students are frequently restricted or discouraged, they may develop feelings of doubt, guilt, and low self-confidence (Santrock, 2002). Therefore, learning environments should provide students with opportunities to demonstrate their abilities and experience success.

Teachers play a significant role in fostering students' self-confidence. In early childhood classrooms, teachers are not only responsible for delivering learning materials but also for creating supportive learning environments that encourage participation, exploration, and communication. Teachers can help students recognize their strengths and develop a positive self-image through appropriate guidance and encouragement. Opportunities to lead activities, share opinions, solve problems, and collaborate with peers can contribute to the development of self-confidence. As a result, the teacher's role becomes essential in ensuring that students gain meaningful experiences that support their personal growth.

One learning approach that supports the development of self-confidence is Project-Based Learning. Project-Based Learning is rooted in John Dewey's concept of learning by doing, which emphasizes learning through direct experience and active participation (Moeslichatoen, 2004). Through project activities, students investigate real-life topics, discuss ideas, solve problems, and work collaboratively to achieve shared goals. Katz and Chard (1989) explain that project work allows students to explore topics that interest them in greater depth, either individually or in groups. This approach differs from traditional teacher-centered learning because students actively participate in planning, decision-making, and problem-solving processes. Jacobs (2013) further states that project work not only develops academic skills but also helps students build positive self-concepts and positive attitudes toward learning.

The researcher became interested in this topic because Gaussian Kamil School Semarang implements Project-Based Learning as its primary learning approach. Compared to many early childhood education institutions in Gunungpati District that still predominantly use center-based, area-based, or classical approaches, Gaussian Kamil School has become one of the pioneers in implementing Project-Based Learning. The school also integrates life skills into daily learning activities, allowing students to engage with authentic experiences and real-world situations.

Preliminary observations conducted at Gaussian Kamil School revealed several practices that may contribute to the development of students' self-confidence. Teachers provide opportunities for students to take leadership roles by leading classroom activities and daily prayers through a rotating schedule. In daily classroom activities, discussions are frequently used to give students opportunities to share their thoughts, ideas, and experiences with their peers. When students appear hesitant to speak, teachers provide guiding questions to support their participation. Students are also involved in planning projects, discussing materials and tools, determining individual contributions, and solving problems collaboratively.

Through classroom discussions, students explored the importance of maintaining clean vehicles and decided to conduct a motorcycle-cleaning project. They discussed the materials needed, they bring supplies from home, and participated in finding a motorcycle owner who was willing to support

the project. studentss were encouraged to communicate with people in school area and the teacher ask for students seek permission independently. Such an experiences provided opportunities for students to practice communication, responsibility, decision-making, and leadership skills, all of which are closely related to self-confidence development.

Despite these opportunities, teachers continue to face several challenges in fostering students self-confidence. Some students are reluctant to speak during discussions, hesitate to lead classroom activities, or fear giving incorrect answers. Differences in family backgrounds, home environments, and parental support also influence students' levels of confidence. Furthermore, some students have an additional time to adapt to project-based learning because they are not accustomed to taking active roles in the learning process.

Several previous studies have examined Project-Based Learning and child development. Murni (2020) found that Project-Based Learning can enhance students' sense of responsibility. Oktavianingsih (2017) reported that Project-Based Learning improves young students verbal communication skills. Taher (2019) highlighted the important role of teachers in developing students' creativity. However, limited research has specifically explored how teachers foster self-confidence through Project-Based Learning in early childhood settings and the challenges they encounter during the process. This gap highlights the need for further investigation, particularly within the context of Gaussian Kamil School Semarang.

Therefore, this study aims to examine the role of teachers in fostering self-confidence among early childhood learners through Project-Based Learning at Gaussian Kamil School Semarang and to identify the challenges faced by teachers in supporting students' self-confidence. The study aims is guided by the following research questions: (1) What roles do teachers play in fostering self-confidence among early childhood learners through Project-Based Learning at Gaussian Kamil School Semarang? and (2) What challenges do teachers face in fostering self-confidence among early childhood learners through Project-Based Learning at Gaussian Kamil School Semarang?

METHODS

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative descriptive research design. This approach was selected because it enables the researcher to explore and describe social phenomena in their natural setting. The study focused on understanding the role of teachers in fostering self-confidence among early childhood learners through Project-Based Learning and identifying the challenges encountered during the implementation of the approach at Gaussian Kamil School Semarang.

Research Setting and Participants

The research was conducted at Gaussian Kamil School Semarang, an early childhood education institution that implements Project-Based Learning as its primary learning approach. The participants consisted of two kindergarten teachers and one school principal who were directly involved in planning, implementing, and supervising Project-Based Learning activities. In addition, students in Kindergarten B, aged 4–6 years, were observed during classroom learning activities. The observation was conducted over a period of one month to obtain a comprehensive understanding of teacher practices and students participation in project-based activities.

Data Collection Techniques

Data were collected through observation, interviews, and documentation. Classroom

observations were conducted to examine how teachers facilitated Project-Based Learning activities and supported the development of students self-confidence. Particular attention was given to students participation in discussions, leadership opportunities, communication skills, and involvement in project activities.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with two teachers and the school principal to gain deeper insights into their roles, strategies, and experiences in fostering students self-confidence. The interviews also explored challenges encountered during the implementation of Project-Based Learning.

Documentation was used to support the data collected through observations and interviews. The documents included photographs of learning activities, project records, lesson plans, and other school documents relevant to the study.

Data Analysis

The collected data were analyzed using the interactive model developed by Miles and Huberman (1994), which consists of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. During the data reduction stage, the researcher selected and organized information relevant to the research objectives. The data were then categorized and presented in a systematic manner to facilitate interpretation. Finally, conclusions were drawn based on recurring themes and patterns that emerged from the findings.

Trustworthiness of the Data

To ensure the credibility of the findings, triangulation was employed. Data obtained from observations, interviews, and documentation were compared and cross-checked to verify consistency and accuracy. The use of multiple data sources helped strengthen the validity and trustworthiness of the research findings.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The findings revealed that teachers played an important role in fostering students self-confidence through Project-Based Learning at Gaussian Kamil School Semarang. Based on classroom observations and interviews, teachers acted as facilitators, motivators, guides, and providers of opportunities for students to participate actively in the learning process.

Providing Leadership Opportunities

One strategy implemented by teachers was providing students with opportunities to lead classroom activities. Teachers prepared a rotating schedule that allowed different students to lead daily prayers and classroom routines. Through this activity, students were encouraged to speak in front of their peers and gradually develop confidence in their abilities.

According to one teacher:

“Every child has the opportunity to become a class leader and lead the prayer. We want them to get used to speaking in front of others and feel confident about themselves.”

(Teacher A, 2021)

The observation showed that some students initially appeared hesitant when leading the class. However, after receiving repeated opportunities and encouragement from teachers, they became more willing to participate. This finding supports Erikson’s theory that students in the initiative versus guilt stage need opportunities to take initiative and responsibility in order to develop a positive sense

of self (Santrock, 2002).

Encouraging Participation Through Discussion

Discussion was observed as an essential component of Project-Based Learning at Gaussian Kamil School. Teachers consistently invited students to share ideas, opinions, and experiences during project planning and implementation.

When students were reluctant to speak, teachers used guiding questions to encourage participation. Rather than providing direct answers, teachers facilitated conversations that enabled students to express their thoughts independently. This approach helped students gain confidence in communicating their ideas and interacting with peers.

The findings are consistent with Oktavianingsih (2017), who found that Project-Based Learning provides opportunities for students to improve verbal communication skills through discussion and collaborative activities.

Facilitating Decision-Making and Responsibility

Teachers also encouraged students to participate in decision-making processes throughout project activities. During a project on vehicle cleanliness, students discussed the importance of keeping vehicles clean and identified the materials required to conduct a motorcycle-cleaning activity.

The researcher observed that students were encouraged to determine which materials would be needed and how they could contribute to the project. Some students volunteered to bring hoses, brushes, or soap from home. Through these experiences, students developed a sense of responsibility and confidence in their ability to contribute to a shared goal.

This finding aligns with Katz and Chard's (1989) view that Project-Based Learning promotes students active involvement and ownership of the learning process.

Supporting Real-Life Social Interaction

Another important role of teachers was facilitating students interaction with the surrounding community. During the motorcycle-cleaning project, students were encouraged to identify and approach community members who were willing to lend their motorcycles for the activity.

Teachers guided students throughout the process while allowing them to communicate independently. These experiences provided meaningful opportunities for students to practice social interaction, communication, and problem-solving skills.

The findings support Jacobs' (2013) argument that Project-Based Learning helps students develop positive self-concepts and confidence as successful learners through authentic learning experiences.

Challenges Faced by Teachers in Fostering students Self-Confidence

The findings also revealed several challenges encountered by teachers during the implementation of Project-Based Learning.

Differences in students Confidence Levels

One of the most frequently mentioned challenges was the variation in students confidence levels. While some students actively participated in discussions and leadership activities, others were reluctant to speak and preferred to remain silent.

According to the school principal:

“Every child develops differently. Some students are naturally confident, while others

need more time and support before they are willing to speak or participate.” (Principal, 2021)

These differences required teachers to provide individualized support and encouragement according to each child's needs.

Fear of Making Mistakes

Teachers reported that some students hesitated to answer questions because they were afraid of giving incorrect responses. This fear sometimes prevented students from participating fully in classroom discussions.

To address this challenge, teachers emphasized that all ideas were welcome and that mistakes were part of the learning process. Creating a supportive environment helped students become more comfortable sharing their opinions.

Family Background and Parental Support

Interview data indicated that family background and parental involvement significantly influenced students confidence levels. students who were accustomed to expressing their opinions at home generally participated more actively in project activities.

Conversely, some students required additional encouragement from teachers because they were less accustomed to communicating independently. Differences in parental support also affected students participation in project-related activities that required preparation at home.

Adaptation to Project-Based Learning

Teachers explained that some students needed time to adapt to Project-Based Learning because they were not accustomed to making decisions or taking responsibility for learning activities. As a result, teachers continuously provided guidance and scaffolding to help students become more comfortable with active participation.

These findings suggest that although Project-Based Learning provides valuable opportunities for fostering self-confidence, its effectiveness depends on continuous teacher support, collaboration with families, and learning environments that encourage participation without fear of failure.



Fig. 1. students participating in a vehicle-cleaning project as part of Project-Based Learning activities.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the role of teachers in fostering self-confidence among early childhood

learners through Project-Based Learning at Gaussian Kamil School Semarang and explored the challenges encountered during the implementation process. The findings revealed that teachers play a significant role in supporting students self-confidence by acting as facilitators, motivators, guides, and providers of meaningful learning opportunities. Through activities such as leading classroom routines, participating in discussions, making decisions, solving problems, and engaging in real-life project activities, students were encouraged to express their ideas, take responsibility, and develop confidence in their abilities.

The findings also indicate that Project-Based Learning provides a supportive environment for the development of self-confidence because students are actively involved in the learning process. Rather than being passive recipients of information, students become active participants who contribute ideas, collaborate with peers, and engage with their surrounding environment. These experiences help students develop communication skills, leadership skills, responsibility, and positive self-perceptions.

Despite these benefits, teachers face several challenges in fostering students self-confidence. Differences in family background, home environment, parental support, and individual personality characteristics influence students confidence levels. Some students require additional encouragement because they are hesitant to speak during discussions, afraid of making mistakes, or reluctant to take leadership roles. Furthermore, some students need time to adapt to Project-Based Learning due to its emphasis on active participation and independent decision-making.

Based on these findings, it can be concluded that teachers play a crucial role in creating learning experiences that support the development of students self-confidence through Project-Based Learning. Therefore, schools should continue to provide opportunities for students to participate actively in meaningful and authentic learning experiences. Strong collaboration between teachers and parents is also necessary to support students confidence development both at school and at home.

Future studies may explore the long-term impact of Project-Based Learning on students social-emotional development or examine the relationship between parental involvement and students self-confidence in project-based learning environments. Such studies may contribute to a deeper understanding of effective strategies for supporting students holistic development in early childhood education.

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