

## Enhancing Artistic and Creative Development in Early Childhood through Loose Parts Play

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Doi: <https://doi.org/00.00000/jecet.0000.000-00>

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### ABSTRACT

**Purpose** – This study aims to explore the use of loose parts play as a medium to enhance creativity and artistic expression in early childhood. It focuses on how age-appropriate arrangement of loose part materials can foster children's imagination, engagement, and enjoyment in learning activities.

**Design/methods/approach** – This research adopts a qualitative descriptive method involving observations and documentation of early childhood learning activities that integrate loose part media. The study was conducted on a group of early childhood learners to observe how their responses and creative outputs were influenced by the use of open-ended, non-structured materials during play.

**Findings** – The results indicate that learning through loose parts significantly increases children's enthusiasm and curiosity, transforming learning experiences from monotonous routines into engaging and imaginative explorations. The children showed improved creative thinking, imagination, and ease in understanding concepts through interactive and free-form learning activities.

**Research implications/Limitations** – The study was limited to observation-based analysis without extended experimental measurement of long-term creative development. Further research is recommended to examine the impact of loose part media on specific domains of creativity and cognitive skills in early learners using more systematic assessments.

**Originality/value** – This study contributes to the field of early childhood education by presenting loose part play as an innovative, flexible, and child-centered learning medium that enhances creativity and engagement. It offers practical insights for educators seeking to replace conventional, less stimulating materials with more dynamic and exploratory tools.

 OPEN ACCESS

### ARTICLE HISTORY

Received : 11-04-2025

Revised : 16-05-2025

Accepted : 30-06-2025

### KEYWORDS

Art; games; loose parts

## Introduction

In early childhood education, play remains a fundamental component of the learning process. Play, whether structured or unstructured, with or without media, serves as a powerful means to facilitate understanding, instill enjoyment, and foster the development of creativity in children (Suryana, 2016). As children at this stage learn best through direct experiences, schools are expected to develop learning models that not only accommodate their developmental characteristics but also support the holistic growth of their cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains. A well-designed learning model should be grounded in educational theory, incorporate systematic instructional strategies, and be supported by appropriate learning facilities and assessment methods to monitor progress.

One medium that aligns with the developmental needs of young learners is the use of loose parts media. Loose parts refer to everyday materials that are open-ended, manipulatable, and can be used in various ways to encourage creativity, exploration, and problem-solving. According to Ridwan et al. (2022), loose parts play contributes to the stimulation of children's intelligence, supports the development of critical thinking skills, and enhances their artistic capabilities. These materials often derived from the surrounding environment require no additional cost and offer children freedom to explore and create without limitations (Safitri & Lestarinigrum, 2021). This aligns with child-centered pedagogies that advocate for discovery-based and experiential learning.

However, despite the recognized potential of loose parts in fostering creativity, in practice, many early childhood education settings still rely on traditional methods such as drawing and coloring as primary means of developing artistic skills. While drawing does support fine motor development and creativity to some extent, it remains limited in engaging children holistically across domains. Farida (2020) emphasized that early childhood education should provide not only opportunities for cognitive development but also life skills that help children cope with daily challenges through affective engagement and adaptive behavior. Teachers, therefore, have a crucial role in selecting media and managing learning processes so that instructional content is appropriately delivered and received by children, ultimately leading to improvements in knowledge, attitudes, and skills (Siskawati & Herawati, 2021).

Although previous studies have explored the use of loose parts in early childhood learning, research focusing specifically on their role in developing artistic and creative aspects remains limited (Akkas & Suryawati, 2021; Annisa & Febriastuti, 2021; Farida, 2020; Haryanti et al., 2022; Kemdikbudristek, 2021; Ridwan et al., 2022; Rohmatun et al., 2021; Sabrina, 2021; Safitri & Lestarinigrum, 2021; Setianingsih & Handayani, 2022; Siskawati & Herawati, 2021; Susanti, 2016; Susetyo et al., 2015; Wahyuningsih, 2020; Zahra & Harmawati, 2019). This gap indicates the need for further investigation into how loose parts can serve not just as a medium for cognitive stimulation but as a strategic approach to developing early childhood art and creativity.

The present study seeks to fill this research gap by developing and implementing a learning approach that utilizes loose parts play as a medium to nurture artistic expression and creative development in early childhood. The study proposes that through guided but open-ended play with loose parts, children are able to express ideas, make aesthetic choices, and engage in imaginative creation, thus enriching their overall developmental outcomes. The main objective of this study is to describe and analyze how loose parts media can be effectively used to foster early childhood creativity and art in a fun and meaningful manner.

This research contributes to the field of early childhood education by offering a developmentally appropriate, low-cost, and culturally relevant solution for improving children's artistic and creative potential. By integrating loose parts media into learning, teachers are equipped with a practical tool to create engaging environments that stimulate imagination and artistic growth. The novelty of this study lies in its specific focus on the development of artistic aspects, a dimension that is often overlooked in prior studies on loose parts play. It is hoped that the findings of this research will provide theoretical insights and pedagogical implications for educators and curriculum developers in early childhood education.

## Methods

### Research Design

This study employed a qualitative descriptive research design, which aims to provide an in-depth and contextual understanding of children's learning experiences through loose parts play. This design was chosen to allow researchers to explore and describe naturally occurring phenomena in the learning environment without manipulation of variables. The qualitative approach is particularly suitable for early childhood research where children's expressions, behaviors, and creativity are best captured through direct observation and interpretation rather than through standardized tests.

### Research Setting and Participants

The research was conducted at RA Al-Hikmah Serang, focusing on Group B learners aged 5–6 years. A total of 20 children participated in the study, comprising 10 boys and 10 girls. The selection of participants was based on purposive sampling, targeting children who were actively involved in learning activities involving loose part media. The school setting was chosen due to its openness to exploratory play-based learning and its representative nature of early childhood education practices in the region.

### Data Collection Techniques

Data collection was conducted through a combination of three main techniques:

#### Interviews

Structured interviews were conducted with the classroom teacher to gather qualitative insights regarding the planning, implementation, and observed outcomes of using loose part media in learning activities. The interview questions focused on teacher perceptions of children's engagement, creativity, and artistic responses during play.

#### Observations

Observational data were collected using a checklist-based instrument designed to track children's behaviors, expressions of creativity, interaction with materials, and responses during loose part play. Observations were carried out during scheduled classroom activities, and researchers recorded detailed field notes to supplement checklist findings.

#### Documentation

Visual documentation in the form of photographs and short videos was collected to capture the actual learning moments. These documented materials served to provide evidence of the children's engagement with the media and to triangulate the data obtained from interviews and observations.

## Data Sources

The primary data sources consisted of the children themselves as main informants, specifically focusing on their responses and behaviors during loose part play. Complementary data were obtained from teachers' narratives and researcher observations. All data were gathered during actual learning activities, ensuring authenticity and contextual relevance.

## Data Analysis Procedures

The data analysis was conducted through qualitative thematic analysis, involving several systematic steps: data reduction, categorization, interpretation, and conclusion drawing. First, raw data from interviews, observations, and documentation were organized and coded to identify recurring patterns and themes. These themes were then interpreted in relation to the research objectives. The researchers ensured the credibility and validity of the data through triangulation across sources and member checking with the teacher. The final conclusions were drawn based on the convergence of findings across the three data collection methods, providing a comprehensive understanding of the role of loose part media in developing early childhood art and creativity.

## Result

From the research in Ra Al-Hikmah, researchers got the results from the data collection obtained, where previously in Ra Al-Hikmah had implemented a learning system using loose part media. The use of loose part media, either from nature or used materials for Class B children who are already 5-6 years old, can already make good use of learning. Children are given the freedom to make the work they want, this hones aspects of the child's art and skills in expressing their ideas, ideas and creativity.

Loose part learning media has many benefits, one of which is improving inquiry thinking skills. To be able to obtain information, analyze, and children are encouraged to develop their skills, it is necessary to have the ability to think inquiryly. To make children think, have curiosity, and ask questions, open learning is also needed. Because when interacting children will get experience when playing loose parts. The specific purpose of designing loose parts is to develop children's imagination, creativity, knowledge and language (Siskawati & Herawati, 2021).

Usually, teachers have prepared learning materials that will be used by children in school. Because the loose part material used can be found in the surrounding environment, usually children will also be invited to explore directly the material they will use. Loose part media is a natural material-based media, because it comes from the environment and is prepared from the environment around it, it is called natural material and is used deliberately to support loose part learning activities. natural materials that can be used such as rocks, wood, twigs, grains, dry leaves, banana fronds, bamboo that have been thought of as a safety risk (Safitri & Lestarinigrum, 2021).

At the time of the research the children were very enthusiastic. When the teacher had taken them out of the classroom to the place that was used as learning around the school environment. The theme of learning this time is the theme of plants and the sub-theme is banana trees. So that children are introduced to parts of the banana tree, such as leaves, fronds, stems, fruits and banana hearts. After that, the teacher has prepared a pisan frond to make a loose part media with the children. Children have begun to create the media they think of without the restraints of the teacher, so that the artistic and creative aspects can be channeled.

Researchers began to observe children who were engrossed in natural materials, namely the fronds of the pisan that they were going to construct. Here researchers use checklist observation instruments and interviews to find out the extent to which aspects of children's art develop and their creativity in learning to use loose parts.

Tabel1. Observation by checking aspects of children's art and creativity

| No | Activity                                | Assessment Criteria |    |     |     | Total |
|----|---|---------------------|----|-----|-----|-------|
|    |   | BB                  | MB | BSH | BSB |       |
| 1  | Able to think constructivist            | 3                   | 4  | 10  | 3   | 20    |
| 2  | Have a high curiosity                   |                     |    |     | 20  | 20    |
| 3  | Interested in creative activities       |                     |    |     | 20  | 20    |
| 4  | Able to convey ideas                    |                     | 7  |     | 13  | 20    |
| 5  | Able to display the results of the work |                     |    |     | 20  | 20    |
| 6  | Have initiatives                        | 3                   | 4  | 10  | 3   | 20    |

Tabel2. Interview aspects of the child's art and creativity

| No | Question                             | Answer |    |     |     | Allthe |
|----|--------------------------------------|--------|----|-----|-----|--------|
|    |                                      | BB     | MB | BSH | BSB |        |
| 1  | What will be made of banana fronds?  |        | 7  | 5   | 8   | 20     |
| 2  | What is the manufacturing process?   |        | 8  | 9   | 3   | 20     |
| 3  | How do you feel about making a game? |        |    | 13  | 7   | 20     |
| 4  | What does that do you do?            | 2      | 8  | 6   | 4   | 20     |

## DISCUSSION

Loose part media with the use of concrete materials and tools by experimenting to get a direct experience when conducting experiments with tools and materials around and easy to find so as to improve cognitive development so as to provide direct experience of children towards what they learn (Zahra & Harmawati, 2019). The role of children in realizing their creative ideas, both building, choosing, designing and experimenting by using loose part materials to become a communication tool with friends at their schools (Wardhani et al., 2021). All learning themes can use loose part media because this loose part media can be detached, can be adjusted to learning outcomes. With loose part media, children are more enthusiastic in playing and doing learning. Because there are no limits for children in expressing ideas and creating using loose part media. So it is believed to be able to improve the ability of early childhood (Ridwan et al., 2022).

Materials that are found easily in the surrounding environment so that they are easy to prepare and use in the learning process (Annisa & Febriastuti, 2021). Loose part media consists of 7 diverse components that children can feel for real, including: 1) Natural materials, namely various objects that exist around this area, such as soil, stone, sand, limpur, twigs, water, grains, fruits, leaves, Bungan, pieces of wood, feathers, shellfish, and others; 2) Plastic materials, namely materials available from plastic, such as straws, bottle caps, plastic bottles, hoses, funnels, buckets, pipes, and so on; 3) Metal, that is, all objects made of metal, including cans, dappur utensils made of metal, coins, nails, nuts, bolts, aluminum forks and spoons, keys, car plates, and so on; 4) Wood and bamboo, namely wood and bamboo that are no longer used, such as flutes, sticks, blocks, puzzle pieces and so on; 5) Yarn and fabric, namely objects made of fibers, such as cotton,



patchwork, rubber, ribbons, ropes, and so on; 6) Glass and ceramics, that is, materials made of ceramics and glass, such as glass cups, glass bottles, beads, mirrors, ceramic tiles, marbles, glasses and so on; 7) Used packaging, namely containers / items that are no longer used, such as tissue rolls, cardboard, food wrap, spools of thread, egg containers, cardboard, and so on; (Ridwan et al., 2022)

In its use, loose part media can support learning and development in aspects of children's art and creativity. Skills in children develop When playing using loose part media, such as the ability to imagine, explore indefinitely, think critically, solve problems, and be able to solve problems encountered (Annisa & Febriastuti, 2021). In RA Al-Hikmah attacked the use of loose part media using natural material components. The natural ingredient used is banana fronds. Learning is carried out outdoors where around the area there are several banana trees, before using the medium of banana fronds children are introduced to banana trees, including the structure, function and parts of the banana tree, and children also learn to recognize the shape and color of the banana tree, but previously the teacher had provided materials and tools to be used in learning, where using fresh banana fronds taken from the tree. The child cleans the leaves by tearing them with their hands, the teacher helps to cut the banana fronds according to the pattern that the child imagines. The teacher helps to cut the pattern on the frond because the tool used to cut the frond of the banana is sharp and can be harmful to the child, because of the texture banana fronds are hard enough for early childhood.

After cutting the pattern, continue to string the next patterns, according to the shape that the child wants, the child creates banana fronds of various shapes, such as banana fronds which can elicit sounds that children imagine as musical instruments, and like banana fronds formed by lumping horses. This is where the aspects of children's art and creativity are seen in addition to children constructing lumping horses and musical instruments, children play them with high art and creativity not only played and moved but the child can while singing and and expressing what the child feels.



Figure 1. Playing activities using loose part fronds pisan as a musical instrument



Figure 2. Banana fronds are used as musical instruments



Figure 3. Playing with loose part media



Figure 4 The fronds are made into lumping horses

Children are enthusiastic in using the loose part media they make so that they feel happy. Children turn the objects they make into a game, there is a game that produces sound and is made into a musical instrument, the musical instrument is moved to the child and keiki so that it welcomes the sound, played together and produces a distinctive rhythm created by the child. Then the child also plays the lumping horse game tool, the child also plays the lumping horse accompanied by the singing and dancing of the lumping horse expressively.

From the game above, children have developed art and creativity, children can already hum or sing while doing things, and children can already play objects that are imagined to be musical instruments with their friends. In addition to developing aspects of art in children here, we can also preserve the culture in the surrounding environment.

## Conclusion

Learning is carried out outdoors where around the area there are several banana trees, before using banana frond media, children are introduced to banana trees, including the structure, function and parts of banana trees, and children also learn to recognize the shape and color of banana trees, but previously the teacher has provided materials and tools to be used in learning, which uses fresh banana fronds taken from the tree. After cutting the pattern, continue to string the next patterns, according to the shape that the child wants, the child creates banana fronds of various shapes, such as banana fronds that can cause sounds that children imagine as musical instruments, and like banana fronds formed by lumping horses. This is where the aspects of children's art and creativity are seen in addition to children constructing lumping horses and musical instruments, children play them with high art and creativity not only played and moved but children can while singing and expressing what the child feels.

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