

Improving Letter Recognition Ability In Children Aged 4-5 Years Through the Letter Card Play Method

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Abstract. The urgency of this study lies in the need for an engaging and developmentally appropriate learning method to improve letter recognition skills among children aged 4–5 years through play-based activities. Letter recognition ability is one of the basic elements in early literacy education that should be developed from the age of 4-5 years. Observation results at SPS Dahlia 46 showed that some children still had difficulty recognizing, distinguishing, and naming letters correctly due to unengaging learning. This classroom action research aims to improve letter recognition ability through the letter card play method. Letter recognition ability is defined as children's capability in recognizing the meaning of letters, letter shape identification, naming of letters, and distinguishing vowels and consonants as the foundation for the development of early reading skills. The development of letter recognition ability in early childhood occurs gradually, including recognizing letter names, recognizing letter shapes, distinguishing letters, and connecting letters with their sounds. This ability is influenced by internal and external factors. Internal factors include learning interest, motivation, attention, and the child's developmental readiness, while external factors include parental support, availability of learning media, the teaching methods used, and a conducive learning environment. The letter recognition ability provides great benefits in developing children's early literacy, improving reading and writing readiness, and supporting language development at the next level of education. Children's ability to recognize letters aged 4-5 years old in SPS Dahlia 46 is enhanced by the use of the letter card play technique. In the pre-cycle and Cycle I, results had not met the success indicators. Following improvements made during Cycle II, 75% of children fell under Developing as Expected (BSH) and Developing Very Well (BSB) category, thus making this approach successful in enhancing letter recognition ability



Introduction

Early childhood education is an important stage in a child's development because at this stage children experience very rapid growth and development (Sopiah, 2022; Rand & Morrow, 2021). One of the areas which need to be developed from the early ages is the language abilities, especially the letter recognition abilities as the basis for learning how to read and write (Roberts, 2021). The letter recognition abilities of children aged 4–5 years include the capability to recognize letter symbols, identify the shape of letters, and associate sounds with letter symbols (Chen, 2022). This ability turns into the main basis for the development of children literacy at the next educational level (Christianti et al., 2023; Kholilah et al., 2026).

Education is one of the important components that can influence a child's language development (Rahayu et al., 2024). In the learning process, educators have a role in providing appropriate stimulation through interesting methods, media, and learning approaches so that children's reading and writing abilities can develop well (Yanti et al., 2024). Before a child is able to read fluently, the child first needs to master letter recognition ability as the initial foundation of language development (Anggita et al., 2023). Letter recognition is one stage of a child's language development (Syafudin et al., 2023). At this stage, children begin learning from not knowing to knowing the shapes and relationships between letters (Rani et al., 2024). Through letter recognition, children can understand the shape of letter symbols, distinguish each letter, and interpret them as part of the reading and writing process (Yanti et al., 2024). Therefore, letter recognition ability is very important to develop from an early age as the foundation of a child's literacy ability.

Learning in early childhood should be carried out through enjoyable play activities. Play is an approach to learning that matches the nature of early childhood since it offers tangible and engaging learning opportunities without placing any strain on the child. One method that can be used to improve letter recognition ability is the letter card play method. Letter card media can help children recognize letter shapes visually while also training children's memory and concentration through play activities (Juliani & Ulfah, 2025). Letter recognition is one of the crucial aspects in the development of early childhood literacy. Children aged 4-6 start paying attention to the shape and sound of the letter during their everyday activities, but some children find it difficult to identify letters. Letter recognition is a very integrated unit of reading activities, which consists of many activities, such as recognition of words, linking them to the sounds and so on (Juliani & Ulfah, 2025).

Letter recognition is consistent with the process of physical and psychological mastery of language skills. Physical mastery refers to the process of seeing written words where children will identify and differentiate sound images and their combinations, whereas psychological mastery is an intellectual process that involves processing information. Hence, media that will stimulate both processes are necessary (Rahayu, 2024). Letter card media would be a suitable medium to tackle this issue. Letter card media consists of cards which have illustrations, questions, concepts, or symbols that introduce or lead children into something about the subjects being taught. These cards normally measure 8×12 cm or can be resized based on the size of the children who are being taught (Rahayu, 2024).

Letter cards are one of the instruments that can be used as an educational tool. The tool or media known as "card media" is an educational instrument specifically designed to help young children in the process of letter recognition (Lumbin et al., 2023). In

reality, observations at SPS Dahlia 46 school show that many young children still experience difficulty recognizing letters. Children are often still unable to distinguish letter shapes that are nearly identical, such as the letters b and d or p and q. In addition, monotonous and unengaging learning processes cause children to quickly get bored, resulting in low learning interest. This condition was also found at SPS Dahlia 46, where some children aged 4–5 years still had difficulty naming, pointing out, and recognizing letter shapes correctly. This was evident when teachers provided letter recognition learning activities, where some children were less focused, less active, and not yet able to remember letters optimally.

The letter card play method is a learning method that uses play activities to introduce letter symbols, letter sounds, and early reading ability in young children. The media that is utilized comprises cards carrying letters, pictures, and simple words so that the learning process becomes active, interesting, and entertaining approach. Through letter card play, children can develop language, cognitive, and motor abilities optimally in accordance with the developmental stage of early childhood. The use of the letter card game method ensures that children learn about the shapes of letters, vowels, and consonants; and associate letters with specific sounds and pictures. Learning becomes more interesting because children are directly involved through activities of matching, naming, arranging, and guessing letters. According to research findings, the letter card game method has been proven to be effective in enhancing the letter recognition skills of young children (Rizati et al., 2025).

Several experts state that play is the primary learning method for young children because through play, children gain concrete and enjoyable learning experiences. Letter card media are also a type of visual media that can help children's memory of letter symbols. The use of letter cards can also be a way of increasing children's interest in learning, attention, and the ability of symbolic thinking. According to the information presented above, the researcher intends to carry out a study entitled "Efforts to Improve Letter Recognition Ability in Children Aged 4–5 Years Through the Letter Card Play Method at SPS Dahlia 46".

In this study, the novelty is about the use of the letter card game method as a way of learning which is realistic, fun, and developmentally appropriate for helping the students learn about letters, which are 4-5 years old at the SPS Dahlia 46 Sumber Ketimpa, Kalisat. Unlike conventional letter-learning activities that may rely primarily on repetition, worksheets, or teacher-directed instruction, this study emphasizes learning through play by allowing children to actively identify, match, distinguish, and name letters using visual letter cards. The method is expected to provide children with direct and repeated opportunities to recognize the shape and identity of letters while maintaining their attention and motivation through an interactive learning experience. Furthermore, the novelty of this research is strengthened by its specific implementation in SPS Dahlia 46 Sumber Ketimpa, Kalisat, where the letter card play method is adapted to the characteristics, learning needs, and classroom conditions of children aged 4–5 years. Thus, this study contributes a practical and contextualized approach to early literacy instruction by integrating play-based learning with systematic letter recognition activities

Method

Research Approach

The qualitative method with descriptive quantitative data is adopted in conducting this study. Qualitative method is adopted in describing the implementation of the read aloud technique using story books that are rooted in local culture in the learning process, while quantitative data is used in determining the level of improvement in the children's listening ability from the assessment results. This method has been adopted because it helps in giving a complete picture of the process and outcomes of the actions taken in learning.

Research Design

This research uses a Classroom Action Research (CAR) design or *Classroom Action Research* which aims to improve the learning process of learning and improving the letter recognition skill among children at the age of 4-5 years using the letter card games approach. Classroom action research can be defined as the research conducted by teachers in the classroom setting through certain systematic actions with the objective of improving the quality of learning. This research design uses the Kemmis and McTaggart model, which consists of four stages in each cycle, namely: planning, action implementation, observation, reflection.

Research Procedure

The process involved in this study is related to the classroom action research methodology introduced by previous studied (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988). This research process involved the following steps:

Planning (Planning)

During the planning phase, the researcher developed a plan of action for the implementation of the learning activities. The activities carried out included: 1). Preparing the Daily Lesson Plan (RPPH). 2). Preparing the letter card media to be used in learning. 3). Preparing an observation sheet for teacher and child activities. 4). Preparing an assessment instrument for letter recognition ability. 5). Determining the research success indicators.

Action Implementation (Acting)

During this time, the researcher conducted learning activities according to the plans that were made previously. The teacher applied the letter card play method in learning activities to help children recognize the shape, name, and sound of letters. Children were given the opportunity to play, name, point out, match, and group letter cards according to the instructions given.

Observation (Observing)

The observation stage was carried out simultaneously with the implementation of the action. The researcher and collaborator observed teacher and child activities during the learning process. Observation was carried out using a prepared observation sheet to obtain data on child involvement, child response, and the development of letter recognition ability.

Reflection (Reflecting)

At the reflection stage, the researcher analyzed and evaluated the results of the actions that had been carried out. The data collected from observation and assessment

were evaluated in order to measure the effectiveness of the action. The outcomes of reflection were used as the basis for the refinement of the action in the next cycle when the effectiveness criteria had not been achieved.

Population and Research Subjects

The population for this research involved all 4–5-year-old children at SPS Dahlia 46 Sumber Ketimpa, Kalisat District, Jember Regency in the 2025/2026 academic year. A population is the entire research subject with certain characteristics to be studied and from which conclusions are then drawn (Sugiyono, 2022). The subjects for this study were children aged 4-5 years old from SPS Dahlia 46 Sumber Ketimpa, Kalisat District, Jember, who totaled 12 students. The research subjects were chosen due to issues in the recognition ability of letters, where an action through letter cards activity was conducted to enhance their recognition of letter shapes and sounds. The data collection techniques used included observation, documentation, and assessment of children's learning outcomes.

Observation

Observation was carried out to observe teacher and child activities during the learning process. Observation was carried out using a previously prepared observation sheet. The observation aimed to determine the implementation of learning using the letter card play method, children's participation in activities, and the development of children's letter recognition ability during the action (Suhardjono, & Supardi, 2019).

Documentation

Documentation was used to complete research data obtained through observation and assessment. Documentation could take the form of photos of learning activities, children's attendance lists, Daily Lesson Plans (RPPH), records of children's development, and other documents supporting the implementation of the research. Documentation data serves as evidence of the implementation of the action and strengthens the research results (Sugiyono, 2022).

Data Analysis Technique

Data analysis in this research was carried out on qualitative and quantitative data obtained during the implementation of the classroom action research. Data analysis aimed to determine the improvement in letter recognition ability in children aged 4–5 years after the letter card play method was applied. Quantitative data were analyzed using a percentage calculation of listening ability achievement with the formula:

$$P = \frac{F}{N} \times 100\%$$

Description:

P = Percentage of listening ability achievement.

F = Total score obtained.

N = Maximum total score.

The percentage results were then categorized to determine the level of achievement of children's letter recognition ability. Improvement in letter recognition ability was determined by comparing the results of the pre-cycle, Cycle I, and Cycle II. The research was declared successful if the completion percentage reached the predetermined success indicator, namely a minimum of 75% of children reaching the criteria of developing as expected (BSH) or developing very well (BSB).

Results and Discussion

Results

This classroom action research was carried out at SPS Dahlia 46 Sumber Ketimpa, Kalisat District, Jember Regency. The research subjects were 12 children in the 4–5 year age group. The research was carried out in two cycles, where each cycle consisted of the stages of planning, action implementation, observation, and reflection. This research aims to improve children's letter recognition ability through the application of the letter card play method. The indicators observed included the ability to recognize letter shapes, name letters, distinguish letter shapes, and match letters with pictures.

Based on observation results before the action was given, children's letter recognition ability was still low. Most children were not yet able to name letters correctly, still had difficulty distinguishing letters with similar shapes, and were not yet able to independently match letters with pictures. The learning carried out previously still used lecture and assignment methods, so children were less active in participating in learning activities. Based on observation results carried out before the action was given, children's letter recognition ability at SPS Dahlia 46 was still low. Of the 12 children who were the research subjects, 5 children (41.67%) were in the Not Yet Developing (BB) category, 4 children (33.33%) were in the Beginning to Develop (MB) category, 2 children (16.67%) were in the Developing as Expected (BSH) category, and only 1 child (8.33%) reached the Developing Very Well (BSB) category.

At the planning stage of Cycle I, the researcher together with the classroom teacher prepared a Daily Lesson Plan (RPPH) with the theme "Myself" and the subtheme "Recognizing Letters". Based on observation results in Cycle I with the theme Myself and subtheme Recognizing Letters, learning activities through the letter card play method proceeded well and in accordance with the plan. However, there were still some children who had difficulty distinguishing nearly identical letter shapes, such as b with d or p with q. In addition, there were some children who still needed guidance and motivation to be more active in participating in learning activities. Based on these observation results, the action in Cycle I had not yet reached the research success indicator because only 3 children (25%) had reached the Developing as Expected (BSH) and Developing Very Well (BSB) categories. Therefore, improvements needed to be made in Cycle II by providing more varied and interesting letter card games, increasing guidance for children still in the Not Yet Developing (BB) and Beginning to Develop (MB) categories. Based on the observation and assessment results in Cycle II, learning through the letter card play method with more varied game variations and grouping children into small groups proved able to significantly improve children's letter recognition ability. The observation results obtained showed that as many as 9 children (75%) had reached the Developing as Expected (BSH) and Developing Very Well (BSB) categories, so the action in Cycle II had met the research success indicator previously set.

Table 1. *Letter Recognition Ability Data*

NO	Development Category	Number of Children	Percentage (%)
1.	Not Yet Developing (BB)	5	41,67
2.	Beginning to Develop (MB)	4	33,33
3.	Developing as Expected (BSH)	2	16,67
4.	Developing Very Well (BSB)	1	8,33
Total		12	100

Table 1 presents the children's letter recognition ability before the implementation of the letter card play method. The results show that the majority of children were still

in the early stages of letter recognition development. Of the 12 children, 5 children (41.67%) were categorized as Not Yet Developing (BB), while 4 children (33.33%) were in the Beginning to Develop (MB) category. Meanwhile, 2 children (16.67%) had reached the Developing as Expected (BSH) category, and only 1 child (8.33%) was categorized as Developing Very Well (BSB). These findings indicate that children's letter recognition ability before the intervention was relatively low, particularly in recognizing, naming, distinguishing, and matching letters with pictures.

Table 2. Letter Recognition Ability Data Cycle I

NO	Development category	Number of children	Percentage (%)
1.	Not yet developing (BB)	5	41,67
2.	Beginning to develop (MB)	4	33,33
3.	Developing as expected (BSH)	2	16,67
4.	Developing very well (BSB)	1	8,33
Total		12	100

Table 2 shows the results of children's letter recognition ability in Cycle I after the implementation of the letter card play method. The results indicate that there was no significant change in the distribution of children's development categories compared with the pre-cycle condition. A total of 5 children (41.67%) remained in the Not Yet Developing (BB) category, 4 children (33.33%) were in the Beginning to Develop (MB) category, 2 children (16.67%) reached the Developing as Expected (BSH) category, and 1 child (8.33%) reached the Developing Very Well (BSB) category. Thus, only 3 children (25%) had reached the BSH and BSB categories. These results indicate that although the letter card play method had been implemented, the improvement in children's letter recognition ability in Cycle I had not yet reached the predetermined success indicator. Therefore, further improvements were needed in Cycle II, particularly through more varied activities, small-group learning, and increased guidance and motivation.

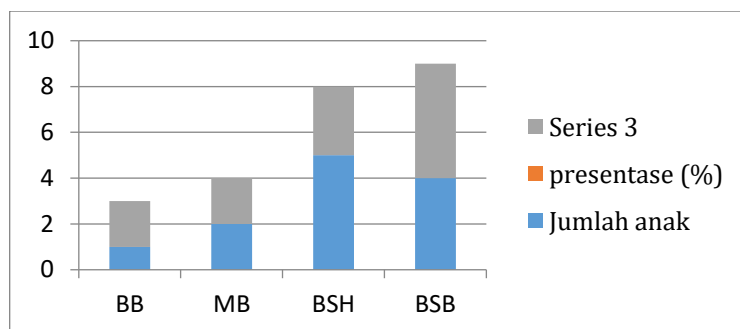


Figure 1. Observation Results of Letter Recognition Ability In Cycle II

Figure 1 presents the observation results of children's letter recognition ability in Cycle II after improvements were made to the learning activities. The implementation of more varied letter card games and the division of children into small groups contributed to an improvement in children's ability to recognize letters. Based on the observation results, 9 out of 12 children (75%) had reached the Developing as Expected (BSH) and Developing Very Well (BSB) categories. Meanwhile, the number of children who remained in the lower development categories decreased. These findings demonstrate that the improvements implemented in Cycle II were effective in increasing children's participation and letter recognition ability. Therefore, the results of Cycle II had met the predetermined research success indicator.

Table 3. Recap Comparison of Pre-Cycle, Cycle I, and Cycle II Results

Category	Pre-cycle (%)	Cycle I (%)	Cycle II (%)
Not yet developing (BB)	41,67	41,67	8,33
Beginning to develop (MB)	33,33	33,33	16,67
Developing as expected (BSH)	16,67	16,67	41,67
Developing very well (BSB)	8,33	8,33	33,33
Total	25,00	25,00	75,00

Based on the observation and assessment results in Cycle II, the implementation of the letter card play method with more varied game activities and small-group learning showed an improvement in children's letter recognition ability. The children became more actively involved in the learning activities and demonstrated better ability to recognize, name, distinguish, and match letters with pictures. The observation results showed that 9 out of 12 children (75%) had reached the Developing as Expected (BSH) and Developing Very Well (BSB) categories, while 3 children (25%) were still in the Not Yet Developing (BB) and Beginning to Develop (MB) categories. Compared with the results of Cycle I, the number of children achieving the BSH and BSB categories increased from 3 children (25%) to 9 children (75%). These results indicate that the improvements implemented in Cycle II were effective in enhancing children's letter recognition ability. Therefore, the achievement of 75% in Cycle II met the predetermined research success indicator.

Discussion

The data in the table above shows that in the Pre-Cycle and Cycle I stages, the percentage of children reaching the Developing as Expected (BSH) and Developing Very Well (BSB) categories had not changed significantly, remaining at 25%. Nevertheless, qualitatively, the observation results in Cycle I showed that children's participation, interest, and involvement in letter card play activities began to increase, although this increase was not yet sufficient to change children's individual achievement category. This condition became the basis for the researcher to make more thorough improvements to the action in Cycle II.

The improvements made in Cycle II, namely adding variations to the letter card games, grouping children into small groups, and providing consistent motivation and reinforcement, proved able to significantly improve children's letter recognition achievement, namely from 25% to 75% of children reaching the BSH and BSB categories. This significant improvement in Cycle, who states that the use of concrete and interesting learning media can improve children's understanding of the material taught. Letter cards as visual media help children recognize the shape, name, and sound of letters more easily compared to learning that only relies on oral explanation and written assignments.

This finding is in line with recent research showing that the use of letter cards can improve children's ability to recognize letters at an early age, particularly when the learning activities are presented through attractive and interactive play-based experiences (Setyaningrum & Zulkarnaen, 2023). This is also supported by research demonstrating that playing with letter cards can help children identify, distinguish, and recognize letter forms more effectively because children are directly involved in learning activities that make the introduction of letters more meaningful and enjoyable (Jenahat et al., 2023). In addition, research on letter card media for children aged 4–5 years indicates that the use of visually attractive cards can increase children's interest

and motivation while helping them recognize letters more easily through repeated and enjoyable learning experiences (Setyaningrum & Zulkarnaen, 2023). These findings indicate that letter card activities are not only useful as learning media but can also function as a play-based strategy that provides children with opportunities to actively interact with letters, thereby supporting the development of their early literacy skills (Afifah et al., 2023).

Furthermore, recent research specifically examining letter recognition through a letter card box game among children aged 4–5 years found that the activity helped children identify letter shapes, letter names, and corresponding sounds while simultaneously creating a joyful and interactive learning environment (Rahayu et al., 2025). The findings further demonstrate that the use of letter cards can make letter recognition activities more engaging because children learn through direct manipulation, observation, identification, and matching of letters during play (Rahayu et al., 2025). Similarly, research on the use of letter cards with children aged 4–5 years found that children demonstrated better recognition of letters when learning was supported by colorful and attractive visual media, suggesting that concrete and interesting learning materials are appropriate for the developmental characteristics of young children (Setyaningrum & Zulkarnaen, 2023). Therefore, the findings of the present study strengthen previous evidence that the letter card play method can be an effective and developmentally appropriate approach for improving letter recognition ability in children aged 4–5 years, particularly when learning is designed to be active, enjoyable, interactive, and consistent with the principles of play-based early childhood education (Jenahat et al., 2023; Rahayu et al., 2025).

The improvement that occurred from Cycle I to Cycle II is inseparable from the application of the classroom action research principles of the Kemmis and McTaggart model (1988), which emphasizes the importance of continuous reflective cycles, namely planning, action implementation, observation, and reflection, as a systematic effort to improve the quality of both the learning process and outcomes. The reflection carried out at the end of Cycle I became an important basis for the researcher in designing more appropriate improvements to the action in Cycle II. Based on the above description, it can be concluded that the application of the letter card play method, carried out systematically through the stages of planning, action implementation, observation, and reflection, proved effective in improving letter recognition ability in children aged 4–5 years at SPS Dahlia 46 Sumber Ketimpa, Kalisat, as demonstrated by children's increasing ability to identify, distinguish, name, and match letters through enjoyable and interactive play activities.

The systematic implementation of each stage also enables educators to identify children's learning difficulties, evaluate the effectiveness of the activities, and make appropriate improvements in subsequent learning cycles. Through the use of concrete and visually attractive letter cards, children are provided with opportunities to learn letters repeatedly while actively participating in individual and group activities, thereby making the learning process more meaningful and consistent with the characteristics of early childhood learning. Therefore, the letter card play method can become an alternative learning strategy for early childhood educators in stimulating children's early literacy ability, particularly in developing fundamental letter recognition skills as an important foundation for subsequent reading and writing development.

Conclusion

Based on the results of the classroom action research carried out at SPS Dahlia 46 Sumber Ketimpa, Kalisat District, Jember Regency regarding improving letter recognition ability in children aged 4–5 years through the letter card play method, the following conclusions can be drawn: Letter recognition ability in children aged 4–5 years at SPS Dahlia 46 before the action was given (Pre-Cycle) was still low, with only 3 children (25%) reaching the Developing as Expected (BSH) and Developing Very Well (BSB) categories, while most children were still in the Not Yet Developing (BB) and Beginning to Develop (MB) categories. The application of the letter card play method in Cycle I had not yet been able to significantly improve children's letter recognition ability achievement category, although in the learning process children showed better interest and involvement. As many as 3 children (25%) were in the BSH and BSB categories, so the action had not met the success indicator and was continued in Cycle II with various improvements. The application of the letter card play method in Cycle II, with improvements in the form of adding game variations, grouping children into small groups, and providing consistent motivation and reinforcement, was able to significantly improve children's letter recognition ability. As many as 9 children (75%) reached the BSH and BSB categories, so the research was declared successful and stopped at Cycle II. The study implies that letter card play can support early literacy development through engaging activities. However, previous research was limited by small samples and short intervention periods. Future studies should involve larger, diverse participants and longer interventions to examine sustained effects and compare letter card play with other literacy approaches.

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