

Research Article

The Use of Role-Play Methods to Improve Assertiveness Skills in Early Childhood Education at Al-Hidayah Kindergarten

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to improve the assertiveness skills of early childhood children through the application of role-playing methods in the Al-Hidayah Playgroup (KB). Through role-playing activities designed with themes close to the children's experiences, it is hoped that children can be more confident in communicating and demonstrating assertive behavior appropriate to their developmental stages. The research method used in this study is Classroom Action Research (CAR). This research was conducted in two cycles, where each cycle consists of four stages, namely planning, acting, observing, and reflecting. Based on the results of the research in the two learning cycles, there was a significant increase in the development of children's assertiveness skills in KB Al-Hidayah. In the first cycle, although the role-playing activity with the theme "My Choice Today" had been implemented with careful planning, most children still had difficulty in expressing their opinions, feelings, and desires openly and politely. Only 26.67% of children were in the Developing According to Expectations (BSH) category, while the majority were still in the Starting to Develop and Not Yet Developing categories. In the second cycle, children demonstrated better assertiveness development through an improved approach using the theme "I Like, I Don't Like" which places more emphasis on expressing personal feelings. Observations showed that 93.3% of children had reached the minimum BSH category, and 40% of them were in the Very Well Developed (BSB) category. Thus, learning using the role-playing method has proven effective in improving assertiveness skills in early childhood at KB Al-Hidayah, and indicators of learning success have been achieved in the second cycle.

Keywords: Early Childhood; Role Play; Assertiveness Skills

1. INTRODUCTION

Early Childhood Education (PAUD) is a crucial foundation for developing children's character and intelligence from an early age (Ainnin & Ismail, 2024; Apriyansyah et al., 2024; Giyanah, 2024; Rakhmawati et al., 2024). PAUD's primary goal is to help lay the foundation for the growth and development of physical motor skills (fine and gross motor skills), intellectual, emotional, spiritual, and social skills, as well as language and communication skills, in accordance with their developmental stage (Rachmawati & Kurniati, 2020). This education is crucial because early childhood is the golden age of human development, where appropriate stimulation significantly impacts the formation of a child's personality and future abilities (Hidayati & Khusniyah, 2022).

One form of formal PAUD is Kindergarten (TK), which is intended for children aged 4–6. TK is not only a place for academic learning but also a fun and comfortable place for children to experience the world of formal education for the first time (ZR & Eliza, 2021). Kindergarten is a crucial platform for building children's self-confidence, independence, and social interaction skills. Through structured and educational play activities, children are encouraged to explore their surroundings and develop various aspects of their development optimally. Beyond serving as the starting point for formal education, kindergartens also play a crucial role in fostering children's courage and creativity. A safe and enjoyable environment will spark children's curiosity and enthusiasm for learning, which will carry over to subsequent levels of education (Wulandari & Safitri, 2023). Positive early experiences in kindergarten provide a crucial foundation for developing children's readiness to learn and develop further. Therefore, kindergarten management must consider the principles of child development and effectively integrate a play-based learning approach.

Childhood is a crucial period in children's social and emotional development. During kindergarten, children begin to learn about themselves and interact with their surroundings. One crucial aspect of social development is assertiveness, which is the ability to express their opinions, feelings, and desires honestly and openly while respecting others. Assertiveness needs to be developed early on, as it will impact children's self-confidence, independence, and social skills

later in life. Children who possess assertive skills tend to be able to resolve conflicts positively, build healthy social relationships, and resist peer pressure (Hidayati & Sari, 2021). However, in practice, many young children still do not demonstrate assertive behavior. Some children tend to be passive, afraid to express their opinions, or, conversely, act aggressively when interacting with friends. This highlights the need for learning strategies that can stimulate the development of children's social skills, particularly in the context of interpersonal communication. One effective approach in early childhood education is role-playing. Role-playing allows children to explore various social situations safely and enjoyably, while also training them in expressing emotions, understanding social roles, and practicing decision-making (Wahyuni & Fitria, 2020). This activity aligns with the principle of assertiveness. Assertiveness skills are an important aspect of healthy interpersonal communication. Alberti and Emmons (2017) explain that these skills encompass an individual's ability to convey their desires, feelings, and thoughts to others while respecting the personal rights and feelings of the other person. This means that an assertive person is able to express themselves honestly without belittling or hurting others. This approach emphasizes a balance between personal needs and respect for others, resulting in more open, effective, and respectful communication.

Based on initial observations at Al-Hidayah Kindergarten, it was found that most children had not yet demonstrated the ability to express their opinions, feelings, and desires openly and politely. Children tended to be passive when spoken to by teachers or peers, and some exhibited withdrawn or even aggressive behavior when faced with simple social conflicts in the school environment. This situation indicates that the low assertiveness of children at Al-Hidayah Kindergarten can hinder their learning and socialization. Children's lack of courage to express their opinions or feelings makes it difficult for them to form healthy social relationships. Children who are not accustomed to expressing themselves verbally also tend to have difficulty resolving minor conflicts, such as fighting over toys or refusing unwanted invitations from friends. This indicates the need for a learning approach that can facilitate the optimal development of assertiveness skills. Furthermore, the learning methods currently implemented at Al-Hidayah Kindergarten still focus on developing children's cognitive and motor skills. Learning activities have not been specifically designed to stimulate the development of interpersonal communication and healthy emotional expression in children. Yet, social skills such as assertiveness are crucial for helping children adapt to their environment and develop positive personalities. The limited use of experiential approaches, such as role-playing, is one factor contributing to the low stimulation of children's social skills.

Brief interviews with teachers revealed that most educators still struggle to choose effective learning strategies to train children to express their opinions without fear or anger. Teachers often use storytelling or light-hearted lectures, which don't actively engage children in imaginative social situations. This situation necessitates more interactive and engaging methods that engage children emotionally and socially, such as role-playing. This method is believed to provide a safe space for children to practice assertiveness from an early age. In line with this, Mamahit, Dinoto, Nataniel, and Lewoleba (2021) concluded in their research that assertive behavior reflects a person's ability to communicate honestly, firmly, and clearly. This ability involves not only expressing thoughts and feelings but also expressing personal needs and rights without ignoring or violating the rights and interests of others. In other words, assertive behavior is a form of communication that balances the courage to express oneself and empathy for others, which is crucial to teach from an early age to support healthy social development.

Individuals who exhibit assertive behavior generally demonstrate high levels of emotional intelligence. Assertiveness allows a person to express their feelings and opinions honestly and respect the rights of others, without feeling afraid or intimidated (Lestari, 2021). In the context of social development, assertive behavior is a key indicator of a person's success in building healthy relationships. Conversely, the inability to develop assertive skills can lead to various psychological problems such as anxiety, stress, and even personality disorders (Misnani, 2016). Therefore, assertiveness needs to be developed from an early age as a foundation for healthy social and emotional skills. The development of assertiveness in children should begin in childhood. According to Munir (2019), children who learn to be assertive from an early age tend to carry these behaviors into adulthood. This attitude plays a role in developing a positive personality, including increased happiness, honesty, and good mental health. Children who are accustomed to expressing their opinions openly also tend to avoid manipulative behavior, which generally arises from a lack of healthy communication skills. This reinforces the urgency of assertiveness education in children's environments, both at home and in educational institutions such as kindergartens.

In everyday practice, assertive behavior in children can be seen when they are able to express their desires and feelings without fear. Santoso and Utama (2019) state that children who have entered school age should be able to express their opinions verbally, not through crying or physical actions. Guidance from adults is essential to help children manage negative emotions and channel them in socially appropriate ways. As stated by Sujiono (2013), verbal expressions such as saying "I'm sad" or "I don't like that" are early forms of assertive behavior in children. In other words, assertive education is a habituation process that can form healthy communication patterns in the long term. According to Albert and Emmons (2008), assertiveness consists of three main components: expressive, persistent, and openhearted. The expressive component demonstrates a child's ability to honestly express their thoughts and feelings without hiding anything. The persistent component reflects assertiveness in defending personal rights when facing pressure from others, without becoming aggressive. Meanwhile, openheartedness demonstrates a child's openness in sharing thoughts and opinions

without fear. These three components form an important foundation for children's social skills and can be developed through experiential learning methods, such as role-playing.

Furthermore, Ratus and Nevid (in Santoso and Utama) (2019) identified ten aspects of assertive behavior that indicate a high level of assertiveness in an individual. These aspects include assertive speech, the ability to express feelings and disagreements, greeting, asking for reasons, speaking up for oneself, accepting praise, rejecting opposing opinions, looking the other person in the eye, and confronting fear. In the context of early childhood, these aspects can begin to be developed through simple social interactions in the school environment, with the support of teachers and peers. This shows that assertive learning is not just a matter of communication but also a process of character building and strengthening children's social skills.

Previous research has shown that role-playing can improve children's communication and social interaction skills, including assertive behavior (Astuti & Purwaningsih, 2022). Through role-playing, children learn to express their feelings, negotiate, and understand others' perspectives in situations that mimic the real world. Therefore, it is important to integrate role-playing into kindergarten learning activities to optimally develop children's assertiveness. Role-playing is a highly effective learning approach for stimulating early childhood social skills, including assertiveness. Through role-playing, children are given the opportunity to explore various social situations imaginatively and actively, enabling them to learn to express their thoughts and feelings openly. This aligns with the findings of Wahyuni and Fitria (2020), who stated that role-playing can increase children's courage in expressing their opinions and feelings and help them understand social roles more concretely.

In the context of kindergarten learning, role-playing provides a safe space for children to practice assertiveness without fear of criticism. Children can express disagreement, convey their desires, and learn to listen to others' opinions in a fun, playful atmosphere. According to Astuti and Purwaningsih (2022), role-playing not only improves children's communication skills but also fosters self-confidence and the ability to engage in healthy social interactions. Therefore, this method is highly relevant as a learning strategy that supports children's social-emotional development. Assertive skills developed through role-playing reflect improvements in two-way communication. During role-playing sessions, children not only learn to speak but also to listen and respond appropriately to their peers (Fitriani & Susiati, 2025; Santoso & Prasetyo, 2024; Wafa, 2022). Sari and Widodo (2021) found that children's active involvement in role-playing activities positively impacts their courage in expressing opinions and their ability to politely express disagreement. This type of interaction is crucial for developing open communication patterns from an early age.

Role-playing is also effective in helping children manage their emotions and express their feelings verbally. When children act out socially challenging situations, they learn to respond appropriately, rather than with crying or aggression. Research by Nasution and Suriani (2020) shows that role-playing helps children express emotions such as disappointment or anger through verbal expression, which is an indicator of emerging assertive behavior. This demonstrates that the playful approach impacts not only social skills but also children's emotional regulation. Based on the description above, it is clear that role-playing plays a significant role in improving assertiveness in kindergarten children. Through enjoyable play experiences, children learn to express themselves honestly, assertively, and openly without violating the rights of others. Therefore, this study aims to determine the improvement of assertiveness in kindergarten children through the use of role-playing.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

This research is a Classroom Action Research (CAR) conducted collaboratively between the researcher and the classroom teacher at Al-Hidayah Kindergarten. CAR was chosen because this approach allows the researcher to identify, design, implement, and evaluate actions aimed at improving the classroom learning process, particularly in enhancing children's assertiveness. CAR is conducted in cycles, each consisting of planning, action, observation, and reflection. Each cycle is designed to improve learning conditions based on the findings of the previous cycle. The subjects in this study were 15 children in Group B at Al-Hidayah Kindergarten, aged 5–6 years. The research location was the Al-Hidayah Kindergarten classroom because this is the primary learning environment for the children, and the focus is on developing assertiveness skills through role-playing. Subjects were selected purposively, specifically children who exhibited passive or aggressive tendencies in expressing opinions, making them suitable for improvement through structured learning methods.

Data collection in this study utilized a variety of complementary techniques. The primary techniques used were observation, interviews, and documentation. Observations were used to record children's assertive behavior during role-play, using observation sheets based on assertive behavior indicators. Interviews were conducted with classroom teachers to obtain additional information regarding children's social-emotional development before and during the intervention. Documentation, in the form of photographs and field notes, was used to strengthen the observation data and provide a visual representation of the changes that occurred during the intervention. The data obtained from the observations and documentation were analyzed descriptively and qualitatively, examining changes in children's assertive behavior from cycle to cycle. Data from the observation sheets were analyzed by calculating the frequency and percentage of assertive behavior indicators, then comparing the conditions before, after, and after the intervention. Interview data

were analyzed thematically to determine teachers' perspectives on changes in children's behavior. Documentation data was used to support the interpretation of the observation results. The analysis results served as the basis for drawing conclusions and providing learning recommendations. The data analysis technique used in this study was descriptive qualitative, with the following categorization of research results:

Table 1. Criteria for Categorizing Research Results

Interval	Category
76% - 100%	Developing Very Well
51% - 75%	Developing As Expected
26% - 50%	Starting to Develop
0% - 25%	Not Yet Developed

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Results

This study aims to improve assertiveness skills in early childhood through role-playing at Al-Hidayah Kindergarten. Assertiveness encompasses children's skills in expressing their opinions, feelings, and desires openly but politely. The study subjects were 15 children, consisting of 8 girls and 7 boys. The study was conducted in three stages: pre-cycle, cycle 1, and cycle 2. The indicator of success was that 75% of the children achieved at least the "Developing According to Expectations" (BSH) category. Assertiveness criteria are divided into four categories: BB (Not Yet Developing), MB (Beginning to Develop), BSH (Developing According to Expectations), and BSB (Very Well Developing). Children's assertiveness skills include expressing their opinions, feelings, and desires openly and politely. The pre-cycle results indicated that most children tended to be passive. Only 4 children were in the "BSH" category, capable of expressing their opinions openly and politely; 3 children were in the "MB" category, and the remainder were in the "BB" category. This indicates that children's assertiveness skills are still low. Based on these results, the researchers, in collaboration with teachers, took the next step of using role-playing activities with the aim of improving children's assertiveness skills. This finding is supported by Wurjinem (2020), who found that role-playing activities can improve assertive behavior in early grade students, particularly the ability to openly express thoughts, feelings, and beliefs.

3.1.1 Cycle 1

In this cycle 1, the researcher started the activity by planning before implementing the cycle I action. In the role play in this cycle, I, the researcher, used the theme "my choice today" with the criteria for achieving the development of children's assertive abilities observed as follows: 1) In the aspect of expressing opinions openly and politely, namely BSB: Children are able to express opinions clearly and coherently, using polite words, and can provide logical reasons; BSH: Children express opinions openly and politely, but the reasons/logic are not complete; MB: Children express opinions but are still hesitant, stammering, or the reasons are not clear; BB: Children do not want to express opinions or only point without speaking. 2) In the aspect of expressing feelings, do so openly and politely, namely BSB: Children are able to express their feelings in complete sentences and clear reasons and convey them with a polite attitude; BSH: Children are able to express their feelings and reasons, but the delivery is not yet fluent; MB: Children only express their feelings without reason or with facial expressions without speaking; BB: Children do not want to express their feelings, remain silent, or only nod/shake their head. 3) In the aspect of expressing their desires openly and politely, namely: BSB: Children express their desires clearly, using complete and polite sentences, and are willing to wait their turn; BSH: Children express their desires politely but are still limited in word choice and intonation; MB: Children express their desires incompletely, only pointing while saying one or two words; BB: Children do not express their desires, simply taking toys without asking permission or fighting over them. The research also prepared materials to be used in role-play activities, including blocks of various shapes, picture storybooks, and crayons as cards for children to choose from.

The activity began with a preparation phase, where the teacher set up a play corner area that included blocks, reading, drawing, role-playing, and cooking. Each corner was provided with appropriate tools, such as toy blocks, storybooks, drawing tools, mini professional costumes, and a toy kitchen. The teacher also prepared an activity choice board, picture cards, and name tags for children to attach according to their choices. In addition, an observation sheet was prepared to record each child's assertiveness based on the BSB, BSH, MB, and BB indicators. The core activity begins with the children gathered in a circle. The teacher explains the activity in simple language and provides concrete examples, such as explaining that the teacher chose reading because she enjoys animal stories. Afterward, the children are asked to come forward one by one, choose a picture of their favorite activity, and attach their name tags to the board. After choosing, the teacher asks them why they chose that activity, such as, "Why did you choose to play with blocks?" or "What do you want to draw today?" Children who are able to answer in complete sentences and confidently are categorized as BSB, while those who answer in one or two words or still need teacher assistance are categorized as BSH or MB. Children who are unable to answer despite being directed are categorized as BB.

After expressing their opinions and reasons, the children are allowed to go to the play corner and carry out their chosen activity. The teacher conducts direct observations while the children play and records their progress in assertiveness skills on an assessment sheet. At the end of the activity, the children are gathered back in the circle for a group reflection session. The children are given the opportunity to voluntarily share their experiences during play and mention what they enjoyed. The teacher expresses appreciation to each child, especially those who have demonstrated courage and courtesy in expressing their opinions. The following are the results of children's assertive abilities in cycle I.

Table 2. Children's Assertiveness Skills in Cycle I

Number	Student	Score	Percentage	Description
1	Student A	4	25%	BB
2	Student B	5	41.67%	MB
3	Student C	4	33.33%	MB
4	Student D	5	41.67%	MB
5	Student E	5	41.67%	MB
6	Student F	5	41.67%	MB
7	Student G	3	25%	BB
8	Student H	4	33,33%	MB
9	Student I	8	66.67%	BSH
10	Student J	4	33,33%	MB
11	Student K	6	50%	MB
12	Student L	8	66.67%	BSH
13	Student M	6	50%	MB
14	Student N	7	58.33%	BSH
15	Student O	8	66.67%	BSH

Based on [Table 2](#), the results of the first cycle of children's assertiveness assessments show that of the 15 children, 4 (26.67%) developed as expected in assertiveness, 9 children were beginning to develop, and 2 children were not yet developed. The results of cycle 1 indicate that the success indicator, which is 75% of children achieving the minimum category of Developing According to Expectations (BSH), was not met. Based on these results, the researchers conducted the next stage, called cycle 2. Based on observations and teacher notes, it was found that not all children were able to express their reasons clearly and confidently. Some children remained shy, gave very brief answers, or simply indicated their choices without explanation. Some children were also confused when asked "why they chose that activity," indicating they were not yet accustomed to expressing their reasons or feelings verbally. This is evident in the children's passive communication; their sentences were limited or incomplete; they were not yet accustomed to linking feelings to choices; and the activities were still one-way, centered on questions and answers between the teacher and the children. Based on the observation results, the researcher made a plan to address the problems that occurred in cycle 1. The researcher will use the theme "I Like It, Don't Like It." In cycle 1, children only focused on "choosing," not yet on "why I like/dislike." With the theme "I Like, I Don't Like It," which focuses more on the ability to express feelings openly and politely, both about things that are liked and disliked.

3.1.2 Cycle 2

During Cycle II, researchers made improvements based on reflections from the previous activities (Cycle I). The first cycle's activities showed that most children still had difficulty expressing their opinions and reasons openly, so it was decided to strengthen the emotional aspect of the activities through role-playing with the theme "I Like, I Don't Like." This activity was designed to enable children to identify and express their feelings more personally, namely by sharing their likes and dislikes in their daily lives. Researchers chose this approach because young children tend to be more receptive to directly discussing their emotions.

The activities were conducted in a relaxed and fun classroom atmosphere. The teacher prepared several pictures of daily activities such as eating vegetables, playing in the sand, listening to stories, cleaning up toys, and so on. The children were then asked to point to the pictures of their likes and dislikes and explain their reasons (DeCosta et al., 2017; Heijden et al., 2022; Madden et al., 2017). Before asking the children for their opinions, the teacher provided simple role-play examples, such as "Mrs. Teacher likes to eat fruit because it's sweet" and "Mrs. Teacher doesn't like it when the floor is dirty because she might fall." This stimulated the children to express their feelings confidently (Adella et al., 2024; Zanada

et al., 2023).

Based on observations, the children showed improvement in their assertiveness. They appeared more interested and motivated to speak up, feeling that their opinions were heard and valued. The natural role-playing environment also helped children express themselves spontaneously. Some children who were previously passive in Cycle I began to express their feelings, albeit in simple sentences. For example, one child said, "I like drawing because I can make flowers," and another said, "I don't like vegetables because they taste bitter."

Teachers recorded the children's assertiveness development through observation sheets, referring to indicators of their ability to express opinions, feelings, and desires openly and politely. Improvement was particularly evident in children who were previously at the MB (Starting to Develop) level and are now at the BSH (Developing as Expected) level. Children classified as developing very well (BSB) were seen able to express their reasons coherently and politely. They even began to listen to their peers' opinions and respond appropriately. This demonstrates the development of assertiveness skills, which include self-expression and two-way communication.

Table 3. Children's Assertiveness Skills in Cycle II

Number	Student	Score	Percentage	Description
1	Student A	8	66.67%	BSH
2	Student B	10	83.33%	BSB
3	Student C	8	66.67%	BSH
4	Student D	9	75%	BSH
5	Student E	9	75%	BSH
6	Student F	9	75%	BSH
7	Student G	6	50%	MB
8	Student H	8	66.67%	BSH
9	Student I	11	91.67%	BSB
10	Student J	8	66.67%	BSH
11	Student K	11	91.67%	BSB
12	Student L	11	91.67%	BSB
13	Student M	10	83.33%	BSB
14	Student N	9	75%	BSH
15	Student O	11	91.67%	BSB

Based on **Table 3**, the results of children's assertiveness skills in Cycle 2 indicate that all 15 children experienced improvements in their assertiveness skills. These results indicate that 6 children (40%) demonstrated very good assertiveness, 8 children were in the "Developing as Expected" category, and 1 child was in the "Beginning to Develop" category. The results of Cycle 2 indicate that every child at KB Al-Hidayah experienced improvements in their assertiveness skills. Furthermore, in terms of success indicators, all children experienced improvements and met the success indicators. This is because 75% of the children achieved the minimum "Developing as Expected" category. Therefore, these results indicate that the established completion criteria of 75% had been achieved in Cycle II, thus declaring the learning success of Cycle II successful or complete. During the implementation of Cycle 2 activities, with the theme "I Like, I Don't Like," it was evident that children were beginning to express their opinions, feelings, and desires openly and politely. Children were more active in role-play activities and were able to express their preferences, such as "I like cleaning up toys" or "I don't like cleaning up toys," with appropriate expressions and polite language. Teachers provided opportunities for each child to express their feelings through role-play, small group discussions, and observation sheets. The learning environment was fun and participatory and made children feel valued when expressing their opinions (Adderley, 2017; Concincion et al., 2024; Rahmad et al., 2024).

Observation data showed that of the 15 children, 6 (40%) were in the Very Well Developing (BSB) category, 8 (53.3%) were in the Developing as Expected (BSH) category, and only 1 (6.7%) was still in the Beginning to Develop (MB) category. No children were in the Not Yet Developing (BB) category. This indicates that the majority of children were able to express their opinions or feelings confidently and ethically. Children also began to respect the opinions of their peers, even if they differed. This activity significantly contributes to the development of social and communication skills in early childhood. The results of cycle 2 showed that learning using the role-playing method on the theme "I Like, I Don't Like" successfully achieved the set success indicator, namely a minimum of 75% of children achieving the minimum category of Developing According to Expectations (BSH). This is evident from the 14 children (93.3%) who are in the BSH and BSB categories. Only 1 child is still in the MB category and has shown improvement compared to the previous cycle. This achievement is

evidence that the role-playing method can improve the development of children's assertiveness skills at KB Al-Hidayah.

4. CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the study in two learning cycles, there was a significant increase in the development of children's assertiveness skills at Al-Hidayah Kindergarten. In the first cycle, although the role-playing activity with the theme "My Choice Today" had been implemented with careful planning, most children still experienced difficulty in expressing their opinions, feelings, and desires openly and politely. Only 26.67% of children were in the Developing According to Expectations (BSH) category, while the majority were still in the Starting to Develop (MB) and Not Yet Developing (BB) categories. Furthermore, in the second cycle with an improved approach through the theme "I Like-I Don't Like," which emphasized the expression of personal feelings, children showed better development of assertiveness skills. The pleasant classroom atmosphere, concrete examples from teachers, and activities relevant to children's daily experiences encouraged them to be more active and confident in expressing their opinions and feelings. The observation results showed that 93.3% of children had achieved the minimum BSH category, and 40% of them were in the Very Well Developing (BSB) category. Thus, learning using the role-playing method has proven effective in improving the assertiveness of early childhood children at KB Al-Hidayah, and indicators of learning success have been achieved in cycle II.

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