



Enhancing Early Childhood Education Teachers' Creativity through Professional Development Training Program

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Article Info

Abstract

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This study aimed to examine the implementation and impact of professional development on the creativity of early childhood educators, focusing on creating an innovative teaching medium known as the Magic Box. This research used a qualitative approach with a case study method; the research subjects comprised ten early childhood educators, one resource person, and one training manager. Data were collected using in-depth interviews, observations, and document studies. The Miles and Huberman method was used to analyze the collected data. The research findings reveal a substantial transformation in educators' creativity levels after participating in Magic Box's professional development and training programs. Through a structured and hands-on approach, educators gain practical experience and motivation to infuse creativity into their teaching practices. Educators report increased confidence in generating creative ideas for teaching materials and a shift in their instructional approach to encourage more engaging and interactive learning experiences for children.

1. INTRODUCTION

The age of early childhood education is a critical phase in a child's life, since it establishes the groundwork for their subsequent progress and maturation (Gondiawati & Nurhayati, 2024; Latif et al., 2023; S. Nurhayati et al., 2022, 2023). Creativity, a widely recognized and essential human faculty, occupies a pivotal position within this particular framework. The concept comprises the cognitive capacity to develop original ideas, imagine innovative solutions, and actively participate in imaginative inquiry (Adhani et al., 2017; Siti, 2018). The early years of life present a unique period during which young individuals possess an innate sense of curiosity and openness to new experiences. This developmental stage offers a valuable opportunity to cultivate and leverage their creative capabilities. Numerous studies have repeatedly demonstrated that the cultivation of creativity in early childhood is linked to a diverse array of favorable consequences (Nurinayah et al., 2021; Rambe et al., 2021; Sadiyah et al., 2021; Sarkaya & Coşkun, 2015). Creativity not only facilitates the cultivation of critical thinking, problem-solving abilities, and diverse thinking, but it also assumes a crucial role in fostering social and emotional growth. Creativity serves as a conduit for self-expression and self-discovery among young learners. It facilitates the development of autonomy and self-assurance, thereby encouraging youngsters to successfully express their thoughts and emotions. In addition, creative classrooms are characterized by their dynamic nature, fostering an environment in which students flourish and demonstrate a strong inclination to actively engage in their academic endeavors.

Educators possess a distinctive potential to foster and nurture these creative aptitudes within their students, consequently augmenting their holistic growth and prospective achievements (Heryanti & Nurhayati, 2023; H. Hidayat et al., 2021; Sholihah & Nurhayati, 2024; Yosfiani & Nurhayati, 2023). The possession of creativity is not only limited to children; rather, it holds equal significance for educators. Educators that actively include creativity into their instructional methodologies has enhanced capabilities to effectively involve students, accommodate various learning requirements, and surmount pedagogical obstacles (Batubara, 2019). An innovative educator serves as more than a mere transmitter of information, but rather as a facilitator of inquiry, fostering an environment that promotes critical thinking, experimentation, and originality among children (Andayani & Hadiati, 2022; Arif & Nurhayati, 2024; Musa et al., 2022; Ni'mah & Sukartono, 2022; A. Rahmat et al., 2024).

Professional development plays a crucial role in the progression of educators as they strive to enhance their creativity and efficacy in their professional capacities. This platform provides educators with the chance to enhance their expertise, gain novel pedagogical techniques, and actively participate in cutting-edge methodologies (Methlagl, 2022; S. Nurhayati, 2024; Tjabolo & Otaya, 2019). Educators can enhance their ability to remain adaptive in an ever-evolving educational landscape by engaging in continuous professional development, which enables them to keep informed about current best practices. Professional development offers educators an opportunity to investigate and enhance their innovative instructional strategies (Musa et al., 2022; S. Nurhayati, 2020; Rohman & Nurhayati, 2023). The practice fosters introspection, cooperation, and a dedication to continuous education. Therefore, it fulfills a crucial function in providing educators with the essential tools and tactics to foster creativity in their students.

As educators in the field of early childhood education, ECCE teachers are required to possess the ability to foster the development of six key areas of child development, which encompass both gross motor and fine motor skills. The acquisition of these skills necessitates the utilization of efficient educational resources (learning media). The utilization of learning media has proven to be an efficacious method of facilitating children's learning (Amani et al., 2023; Ghofur & Nurhayati, 2023; Kartinih et al., 2018; Milyane et al., 2023; Rachmah et al., 2021). There exists a wide array of media options, ranging from rudimentary to technologically sophisticated. The media serves as a medium for disseminating educational content and facilitating the transmission of communications. The learning activities implemented at educational institutions typically involve the utilization of various media tools. These technologies serve as vehicles for transmitting information and facilitating the exchange of knowledge between educators and students. The utilization of media plays a significant part in facilitating the learning process. Through the incorporation of media, students can derive several advantages. Firstly, the use of media enables learning objectives to be more focused, as students are encouraged to comprehend the information transmitted by the teacher. The Media Magic Box is a visual medium that encompasses a diverse array of captivating and distinctive shapes (Ariska & Suyadi, 2020; Simamora et al., 2019). The utilization of this medium encompasses visual perception, auditory reception, and physical engagement, hence facilitating its integration with gaming activities. Therefore, the incorporation of media in the learning process enhances student creativity, resulting in a more engaging educational experience. The acquisition of knowledge and skills necessitates a comprehensive assessment of students' general abilities, which cannot be dissociated from the specific subject matter at hand.

Recent advances in research on enhancing the creativity of early childhood educators have expanded the discourse to encompass diverse dimensions, including the effectiveness of professional development programs, the integration of technology, experiential learning, reflective practices, educators' well-being, and mindfulness interventions (Agung, 2010; Andhika, 2020; Julrissani et al., 2020). This state-of-the-art literature review underscores the dynamic nature of the field and sets the stage for further exploration of innovative strategies to empower early childhood educators as facilitators of creativity in the classroom.

While the importance of creativity in early childhood education and the role of professional development

are well-established, a notable research gap exists. Previous studies have predominantly focused on either the creativity of educators in the context of professional development or the utilization of innovative teaching resources. However, there is a dearth of research that examines the combined impact of professional development on innovative learning media making, such as the Magic Box, on enhancing the creativity of early childhood educators. This research study aims to investigate the implementation of the professional development program and the development of creativity among early childhood education teachers. The objective of this study is to examine the impact and implementation of professional development in conjunction with the innovative Magic Box learning media making program. This study aims to bring significant contributions to the field of early childhood education by offering unique insights and actionable recommendations for educators, schools, and legislators who are dedicated to fostering creativity in the upcoming generation.

2. METHOD

The current study, centered on understanding the impact of the Professional Development Training Program in Magic Box Learning Media Making on early childhood education teachers, adopted a case study research design and qualitative approach. This design was chosen for its ability to offer an in-depth exploration of specific phenomena, in this case, the intricacies and outcomes of the professional development program, within its authentic context (Iswahyudi et al., 2023; Sugiyono, 2023). The study's participants consisted of 10 early childhood education teachers, 1 training manager, and 1 resource speaker chosen through purposive sampling. These teachers, who had undergone the aforementioned training program, had no prior exposure to the Magic Box learning media and exhibited a willingness to partake in the study. Data collection hinged on a semi-structured interview, observation and document study, interview and observation guide were meticulously crafted to elicit insights regarding teachers' training experiences, their subsequent perceptions of the Magic Box learning media, and the training's influence on their creative teaching capacities.

To ensure the instrument's reliability and validity, a multi-pronged validation approach was employed. Initially, a draft of the interview guide was subjected to scrutiny by a panel of experts well-versed in early childhood education and professional development training. Their feedback was instrumental in refining the instrument. Furthermore, to ascertain clarity and consistency, a pilot interview was conducted with two teachers outside the study's participant pool.

Utilizing the framework provided by Miles and Huberman (1994), the data analysis was segmented into three stages. First, the 'Data Reduction' phase saw the interview transcripts undergo thorough reviews, with data pertinent to the study being coded, themed, and clustered. This iterative process was cyclically revisited to ensure data relevance and accuracy. In the subsequent 'Data Display' phase, the organized data was visually presented in formats such as charts and matrices, facilitating the discernment of underlying patterns and relationships. Finally, in the 'Conclusion Drawing and Verification' phase, conclusions were deduced from the visual data representations. These were constantly tested and adjusted throughout the analysis to uphold their veracity and relevance. Ethical considerations were paramount throughout the research process. All participants, prior to their involvement, were informed about the study's purpose and provided their consent. Maintaining a commitment to confidentiality and anonymity, the participants were given the assurance that their contributions would be exclusively used for research objectives and that they retained the right to retract their participation at any juncture.

3. RESULT DISCUSSION

Planning Of The Professional Development Program On Magic Box Learning Media Making

The interview results with the trainer and organizer provide valuable insights into the planning phase of the professional development and training program aimed at introducing educators to Magic Box learning media making. In terms of planning, the trainer expertly designs the training's introduction to be engaging and educational. This includes strategies such as showcasing existing Magic Boxes, utilizing PowerPoint presentations to clarify learning materials, sharing insights into the creation process, and providing live demonstrations of Magic Box use. These approaches not only pique participants' curiosity but also ensure they receive a well-rounded initiation into Magic Box concepts. To assess participants' motivation and readiness, the trainer astutely observes their enthusiasm and curiosity from the very beginning of the session. This observation-based approach ensures active participation and engagement right from the outset.

The organizer's perspective offers crucial insights into the initial planning stages of the training program. These include participant selection, logistical considerations (such as location and timing), and the identification of the training's necessity. The choice to focus on Magic Box learning media is rooted in their potential to engage students and enhance learning across various developmental aspects. The organizer's personal success with Magic Boxes in their institution solidifies this decision. The organizer takes a hands-on role in designing the training curriculum, ensuring comprehensive coverage of Magic Box concepts, creative ideas, the creation process, and practical application. This comprehensive curriculum guarantees that participants gain a holistic understanding of

Magic Boxes.

In the realm of teacher training, research has consistently emphasized the importance of engaging and interactive introductory sessions. The trainer's strategy of showcasing existing Magic Boxes and using multimedia tools like PowerPoint presentations aligns with best practices in adult learning. According to recent studies hands-on and visually stimulating sessions in professional development and training programs enhance participants' motivation and understanding, ultimately leading to better learning outcomes (Ibarra et al., 2019; Schaffer, 2017). By integrating live demonstrations of Magic Box use, the trainer ensures that participants not only grasp the theoretical concepts but also gain practical insights, reflecting the principles of experiential learning (Anugrahwanto & Nurhayati, 2020; E. Nurhayati & Nurhayati, 2023; S. Nurhayati, 2018; Rohaeti & Nurhayati, 2023; Safitri & Nurhayati, 2023).

Furthermore, the organizer's perspective sheds light on the significance of thorough planning in the early stages of professional development initiatives. Kwok (2021) highlights the pivotal role of program design, participant selection, and logistical arrangements in the success of teacher training programs. The program planning should be tailored to the learning needs of the trainees as the basic principle of effective use of andragogy theory (Muslikhah et al., 2018; S. Nurhayati, 2015, 2022).

Implementation Of The Professional Development and Training Program On Magic Box Learning Media Making

Based on the interview with teacher SN from TK Puspa Endah as the program participant, she explained the implementation of training for creating Magic Box teaching materials from start to finish. She obtained information about the training through a social gathering with trainers. At the beginning of the training, she expressed a high level of enthusiasm, pointing out specific aspects that piqued her interest. During the introductory session, the trainer explained the training's objectives, benefits, and the process involved. The primary goal was to enhance teachers' creativity to make learning more enjoyable for children. The benefits included gaining knowledge and skills in crafting magic box teaching aids, while the process encompassed an explanation of the Magic Box teaching aid, its creation steps, and usage. The concept of the Magic Box was introduced, emphasizing its versatility as a teaching aid capable of fostering six aspects of child development. Practical illustrations were provided, demonstrating its adaptability to various learning activities. The trainer also emphasized creative ideas within the context of Magic Box teaching, highlighting the use of diverse materials and adaptability to specific learning needs. Regarding the physical creation of the Magic Box, SN learned about its materials, dimensions, shapes, and colors. Additionally, she received guidance on how to use the Magic Box effectively, including examples of activities that could be conducted with it. The trainer ensured participants' comprehension by encouraging questions and facilitating discussions. Furthermore, the training involved practical demonstrations and facilitated Q&A sessions, contributing to a better understanding of the Magic Box's application in daily teaching practices. SN felt prepared to integrate the Magic Box into her teaching routine, noting that children enjoyed it. Importantly, she encountered no significant challenges during the training.

Other teachers as trainees reported that the professional development training program to be highly aligned with their initial objectives. This alignment indicated that the training effectively met their expectations by providing clear and appropriate content. The training proved beneficial for the teachers with the use of recycled materials standing out as the most advantageous aspect. The teachers recognized its potential applications in various aspects of early childhood development, demonstrating the practicality of the training content. Moreover, the introduction of the Magic Box concept was effective in preparing participants for the training, as noted by the teachers. During the creative idea sessions, the trainees felt engaged, the practical guidance and demonstrations offered in the training were praised for their clarity and ease of comprehension, which is crucial for effective learning. The teachers also reported that it was easy to apply the Magic Box concept in the daily teaching, and this approach was well-received by children, indicating the teachers' readiness to implement the learned techniques. Interestingly, the teachers reported encountered no significant challenges in implementing the training material, reflecting the well-structured and accessible nature of the training.

In terms of the training implementation, it is evident that participants received information about the Magic Box training through coordination with supervisors, ensuring a structured introduction. Participants displayed a high level of interest and enthusiasm at the onset of the training, indicating engaging content or delivery. The objectives and benefits of the training were clearly conveyed, emphasizing the prevention of student boredom and the enhancement of skills like reading, letter recognition, and word formation. The Magic Box concept was introduced with practical illustrations, promoting hands-on learning. Creative aspects were emphasized, underscoring the importance of creating images and shapes. Participants learned the steps for physical media creation, with a focus on stimulating children's learning interest. Importantly, the trainer effectively ensured participants' understanding and correct implementation of the steps, facilitating a successful learning process. Discussion sessions were facilitated, promoting engagement and understanding among participants. Furthermore, participants were guided on how to apply the Magic Box concept in their daily teaching contexts, from topic selection to interactive exploration. The trainer also assessed participants' understanding and application of the training content.

The participants had a clear understanding of the training's objectives and benefits, which centered on making learning more engaging and enjoyable for children. This understanding translated into their enthusiasm and confidence during the training, as evidenced by their active participation in hands-on activities, such as creative ideation and the practical creation of Magic Boxes. Furthermore, the training approach itself was designed to be practical and interactive, emphasizing the importance of creativity in teaching. It involved practical sessions that encouraged creative ideation and provided step-by-step guidance on creating Magic Boxes. This hands-on approach not only enhanced their understanding but also equipped them with the necessary skills to implement Magic Box-based teaching effectively. As a result, the participants felt well-prepared to integrate this creative teaching method into their daily lessons, confident that it would enhance children's creativity and engagement.

The initial dissemination of information regarding the Magic Box instructional media training was facilitated by the head of Tk Ekaliana school, Mrs. AK, underscoring the pivotal role played by school administrators in introducing this training to the staff. This early exposure served as a crucial stepping stone for participants to prepare adequately for the forthcoming training. The participants exhibited a high level of enthusiasm at the onset of the training, particularly during interactive sessions with the Magic Box. This enthusiasm reflected their strong interest in fostering creativity and enhancing interactive learning experiences for children. Clear instructions regarding the necessary materials and tools were given, enabling participants to follow the process effectively. Incorporating evaluation and discussion sessions, the training ensured that participants had a comprehensive understanding of the material, fostering a collaborative learning environment. The training not only equipped participants with the knowledge but also offered practical guidance for implementing the Magic Box in everyday teaching through the use of PowerPoint presentations and videos. Despite the successful outcomes, challenges arose due to limitations in the availability of teaching resources. These constraints highlight an area for potential improvement in future training sessions. The organizer oversees the training's implementation, ensuring that it spans two days and is scheduled after regular school hours, allowing participants to immediately apply their newfound knowledge in their teaching.

The research results provide insights into how the professional development programs can effectively enhance educators' creativity. The structured approach of the training program, which included practical demonstrations and hands-on activities, played a crucial role in fostering creativity among participants. This is in line with Hidayat et al. (2021) and (2022) which found that teachers' creativity can be increased with hands on and practical training in making learning media for children. By immersing educators in the process of Magic Box creation and utilization, the program encouraged them to think creatively when designing learning materials and activities. This practical, experiential learning approach can serve as a model for future professional development initiatives, highlighting the importance of active engagement and creativity development within the teaching profession.

Current research in early childhood education underscores the significance of effective professional development in improving teaching practices. Our study adds a crucial dimension to this discourse by highlighting that enhancing educators' creativity through professional development directly contributes to more engaging and effective teaching practices, aligning with contemporary research objectives (Andayani & Hadiati, 2022; Mahmud et al., 2022; Soh, 2017). It underscores the need for educational institutions and policymakers to prioritize ongoing professional development as a means to elevate early childhood education's quality (Munawir et al., 2022; Yusuf & Mukhadis, 2018).

Current research in education emphasizes the value of experiential and practical learning in promoting educators' creativity (H. Hidayat et al., 2021; Kusmaryono & Ubaidah, 2022). The structured approach of this professional development and training program, with its emphasis on hands-on activities and experiential learning, aligns with this research consensus. It highlights that practical, creative experiences are instrumental in fostering educators' innovative thinking (H. Hidayat et al., 2021; I. I. Hidayat et al., 2024). Our study supports the contemporary understanding that effective professional development programs should prioritize active engagement and creativity development within the teaching profession (Andhika, 2020; H. Hidayat et al., 2021; Mellyta Uliyandari et al., 2022).

Current research emphasizes the potential of innovative learning media to enhance early childhood education (Ghofur & Nurhayati, 2023; Kartinih et al., 2018; Marwati et al., 2020; Rachmah et al., 2021). The study findings underscore that innovative learning media, such as Magic Box, are not just tools but catalysts for educators' creativity (Kusmaryono & Ubaidah, 2022; Resti & Alizamar, 2019). They align with contemporary research that recognizes the significance of integrating innovative learning media into early education curricula to enrich learning experiences (Ghofur & Nurhayati, 2023). The success of the professional development and training program exemplifies how these resources can synergize with professional development efforts, fostering a creative teaching environment. The Magic Box teaching resource emerged as a catalyst for educators' creativity in this study. Its adaptability and versatility were particularly noteworthy, allowing educators to customize it for various learning activities and developmental aspects. This aligns with contemporary research that recognizes the potential of innovative learning media to inspire creative teaching practices (H. Hidayat et al., 2021).

The Results Of The Professional Development Training Program On Magic Box Learning Media Making

The evaluation phase assesses the training program and its impact on participants. For the training evaluation, the Trainers assessed participant comprehension through tests, questions, discussions, and Q&A sessions, ultimately culminating in a final evaluation to confirm their understanding and ability to apply the training material. To evaluate the training's effectiveness, the trainer assigns participants the task of practicing Magic Box activities in their schools and commits to monitoring their progress. This step ensures that participants are well-prepared to integrate Magic Box resources into their teaching. The research assessed the creative development of PAUD teachers following the training.

As a trainee, teacher SN reported that the training materials highly relevant to her initial objectives. The content was presented clearly and comprehensively. She considered the most beneficial aspect of the training to be the creative ideas it offered, as these could be adapted for various learning activities, benefitting child development in multiple ways. The effectiveness of introducing the Magic Box concept was acknowledged, even though participants like teacher SN felt they needed more practice to become proficient in generating creative teaching ideas. Nevertheless, the practical guidance and demonstrations for crafting the Magic Box were considered clear and easily followed. Ultimately, the training had a positive impact on participants' ability to create engaging and meaningful teaching materials, increasing their confidence in employing creative methods in their teaching approaches. This was reflected in their changed approach to designing lessons, ease in generating creative ideas, and enhanced responsiveness from students. Another trainee, teacher YM reported that the training has enhanced teacher YM's understanding of creativity and its application in PAUD teaching, leading to increased confidence in using creative teaching methods. This newfound confidence resulted in a notable shift in her teaching approach, making her more enthusiastic about creating her teaching materials. Furthermore, the training facilitated the ease of generating creative ideas for teaching, increased her enthusiasm in selecting and developing teaching materials, and improved capabilities in integrating creative elements into instructional designs. These positive outcomes were translated into an enhanced ability to explore new teaching ideas and increased student engagement, with some students even requesting repeated activities. Overall, teacher YM acknowledged that the training significantly contributed to the development of her creativity as a PAUD teacher, emphasizing the potential value of such training programs for improving the quality of early childhood education.

Other trainees reported noticeable improvements in their ability to generate creative ideas and design more engaging lessons. This newfound creativity was reflected in their changed approach to lesson planning, a greater ease in ideation, and a more diversified selection of teaching materials. Moreover, the participants recognized the crucial role played by their school's leadership in introducing them to the training. This underscores the importance of leadership buy-in and support for successful professional development initiatives (Musa et al., 2020, 2022; B. Rahmat, 2022).

Participants reported a heightened capacity to generate creative ideas for designing teaching materials, thereby improving the quality of PAUD learning. Additionally, teachers indicated a significant shift in their instructional approach, where they felt more proficient in generating creative ideas and more adaptable in overcoming teaching challenges. These positive changes also translated into increased student engagement and participation, underscoring the practical impact of the training on classroom dynamics. Ultimately, participants acknowledged the training's substantial contribution to their professional development by enhancing their creativity as PAUD educators. This finding resonates with Trisnowati's research (2021) and Mahmud (2022) which stated that teachers' creativity significantly influenced students' learning performance. Participants also reported a positive change in their approach to lesson planning, indicating an increased creative outlook. They found it easier to generate creative ideas for lesson planning after the training. Additionally, the training facilitated easier selection and development of creative teaching materials. Participants observed the use of various creative elements in their teaching, such as multimedia, interactive experiences, problem-solving, collaboration, and creative assessment. They were in the process of implementing creative teaching methods in their daily practice, contributing to improved student responses and participation. These changes were observed to positively impact children's creative development through observation, documentation, and interaction (H. Hidayat et al., 2021; Kusmaryono & Ubaidah, 2022; Mahmud et al., 2022).

The Magic Box instructional media training have made a valuable contribution to the development of participants as early childhood educators and to the quality of children's learning experiences. Contemporary studies emphasize the importance of nurturing educators' creativity, recognizing it as a pivotal factor in enhancing the quality of early learning experiences (Mahmud et al., 2022; Ni'mah & Sukartono, 2022). The findings corroborate these insights, as evidenced by educators' increased ability to generate creative ideas for lesson planning and their enthusiasm for innovative teaching methods. This aligns with the broader research consensus that fostering educators' creativity positively impacts student outcomes (H. Hidayat et al., 2021; Mahmud et al., 2022).

4. CONCLUSION

This research brings to light two crucial implications. Firstly, for any professional development initiative to realize its full potential, a strong foundation of support from school leadership is indispensable. Their endorsement and encouragement ensure that such programs are seamlessly integrated into the school's fabric. Secondly, innovative learning tools, like the Magic Box, are not mere teaching aids but powerful catalysts for creativity, warranting their inclusion in early education curricula. This research underscores the synergistic relationship between engaging professional development, educator creativity, and improved student outcomes, all harmonized by institutional support.

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