



The Implementation of Shadow Movement Games in Islamic Early Childhood Education for Developing Gross Motor Skills

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Abstract

Gross motor development is a crucial aspect of early childhood growth related to the ability to perform physical movements such as coordination, balance, and agility. One approach that can be used to stimulate these skills is through movement-based games that directly involve visual experiences and physical activity. This study aims to analyze the effectiveness of shadow movement games in developing gross motor skills in young children. This study employed a qualitative method using a case study approach. Data were collected from 15 children in Group B at an Islamic kindergarten through observation, interviews with classroom teachers, and documentation of learning activities. Research subjects were selected purposively, considering the children's engagement in learning activities. The data obtained were analyzed using Miles and Huberman's interactive analysis technique to identify the children's gross motor development. The results of the study indicate that the use of shadow movement games enhances children's engagement and active participation in learning. Children demonstrated higher enthusiasm in imitating movements through body shadows, which positively contributes to gross motor development, particularly in the aspects of coordination, balance, and agility. The implications of this study suggest that shadow movement games can be utilized by early childhood educators as an innovative learning strategy to increase children's physical activity in a targeted manner and to develop multisensory learning models that are more adaptable to the needs and learning characteristics of young children.

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INTRODUCTION

The 0–6-year-old age range is a crucial developmental phase in a child's life known as the golden age a period of rapid growth and development, both physically and psychologically. During this stage, a child's brain development reaches approximately 80% of its capacity, giving the child a high degree of plasticity in responding to various environmental stimulus. This makes children highly sensitive to the learning experiences they gain, where every stimulus provided contributes to the formation of cognitive structures, behavioral patterns, and foundational skills

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that will influence development in subsequent stages (Pramesthi et al., 2024). Consequently, the golden age is the optimal phase for building a comprehensive foundation for a child's development through the provision of appropriate stimulation.

In this context, early childhood education plays a crucial role as a vehicle for providing planned, systematic, and continuous stimulation to optimize all aspects of a child's development, including cognitive, language, social-emotional, moral, and physical-motor development. Asih et al., (2026); Rampai et al., (2020) emphasize that early childhood education programs must be able to integrate the development of foundational values such as religious values, moral values, independence, and social-emotional skills with the development of children's basic abilities. In line with this, demonstrate that interactive and experience-based learning activities can significantly enhance the quality of children's development (Helena et al., 2024). One aspect of development that plays a crucial role in supporting children's activities is motor skills, particularly gross motor skills, which involve coordination between the nervous system, muscles, and the brain to produce directed and controlled movements. Thus, optimal gross motor development supports children's ability to engage in physical activities, enhances independence, and strengthen children's readiness to engage in the learning process more effectively (Tawulo & Anhusadar, 2022).

In line with the importance of stimulating early childhood development, in the context of Islamic education, the educational process does not focus solely on cognitive and physical development but also emphasizes the instillation of Islamic values integrated into all learning activities. Islamic education views child development as a holistic process encompassing both physical and spiritual aspects; thus, the learning process is designed to foster character, discipline, responsibility, and cooperation from an early age. Therefore, Islamic-based early childhood education institutions are required to provide a learning environment that not only supports children's academic and physical development but is also capable of instilling moral and spiritual values in an integrated manner through various learning activities appropriate to the characteristics of child development.

In practice, the development of gross motor skills is a key aspect of early childhood education. Gross motor skills involve the use of large muscle groups to perform basic movements such as running, jumping, and throwing. These skills play a vital role in supporting children's physical readiness, independence, and their overall cognitive, social, and emotional development (Manna et al., 2024). Learning based on direct, multisensory experiences has also been shown to support children's development more effectively by providing opportunities for them to learn through active movement and interaction (Helena et al., 2024). Therefore, learning strategies are needed that can integrate physical activity with enjoyable and meaningful learning experiences, one of which is through the use of games involving active movement such as shadow movement (Asfinolia & Jafar, 2023).

The implementation of learning in early childhood education institutions still faces various challenges, particularly in the development of children's gross motor skills. One of the main issues is the limited variety of methods and play models used by teachers, resulting in learning that tends to be monotonous and fails to engage children's active participation. This situation results in children's limited ability to master basic movement patterns due to a lack of adequate physical stimulation (Raiola et al., 2022). Lindstrand et al., (2016) also explain that learning in early

childhood education settings is still often dominated by methods that lack innovation and do not fully encourage students' active engagement.

In addition, physical activities that are not systematically designed can hinder the development of gross motor skills, such as balance, coordination, and agility (Lestari & Syafril, 2026; Salsabila & Syafril, 2026). Therefore, there is a need for innovation in game-based learning models that are not only enjoyable but also provide ample opportunities for children to move actively and purposefully. The use of movement-imitation-based games is also still relatively limited, even though at this stage of development, children tend to learn through imitation and visual observation. Thus, a learning approach is needed that can integrate structured movement-imitation activities to optimize children's gross motor development more effectively.

Given these various challenges, a learning approach is needed that can accommodate children's motor needs through activities that are both enjoyable and meaningful. One alternative that can be used is shadow movement play, an activity that involves imitating movements by visualizing shadows or specific movement patterns. This approach aligns with the learning characteristics of young children, who rely on imitation and visual observation as primary means of developing motor skills. Through these activities, children are encouraged to actively perform various body movements. These activities can help improve coordination, balance, and muscle strength more effectively. Research Rachmawati, (2020) indicates that imitation-based movement games are effective in improving children's motor skills. Additionally, physical activities involving large-body movements such as running, jumping, and imitating specific movements have also been shown to significantly contribute to children's gross motor development (Purwanti, 2025). However, empirical studies on the application of shadow movement games, particularly within the context of Islamic-based early childhood education, remain relatively limited, necessitating further research. The relationship between previous studies and the position of this research can be seen in the following figure.

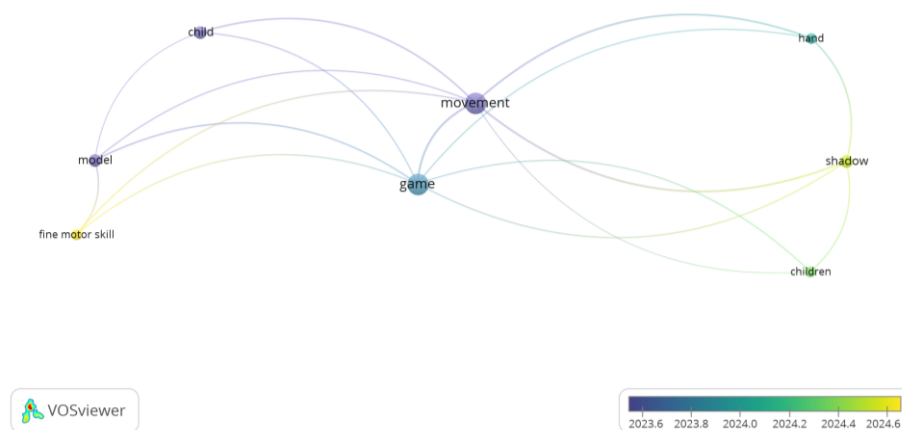


Fig. 1. Vosviewer analysis based on the keyword “shadow movement” in the context of Islamic-based early childhood education

Previous studies have shown that the development of gross motor skills in young children is generally achieved through outdoor play-based physical activities, such as obstacle courses, relay races, and various other movement activities that have been proven effective in improving children's strength, coordination, and agility (Ningrum et al., 2023). Additionally, structured play programs have also been reported to support gross motor development when designed systematically and in

accordance with children's characteristics (Qur'ani & Syafril, 2025). Nevertheless, this approach still has limitations, particularly regarding spatial flexibility and a lack of integration with innovative visual learning media.

On the other hand, research in the context of early childhood education indicates that learning based on direct experience and interactive stimulation has a significant impact on children's development (Mayar et al., 2022), yet the use of visual imitation-based approaches, such as shadow movement games, has not yet been extensively studied. Meanwhile, this approach is relevant to children's learning characteristics, which rely on imitation and visual observation to develop motor skills. Thus, this study offers an innovation through a modified version of the shadow movement game that can be implemented indoors using light, a projector, and audiovisual media. This approach is expected not only to develop gross motor skills but also to stimulate visual-motor coordination, body awareness, and children's movement creativity in an integrated manner. This study aims to examine the implementation of shadow movement games in developing gross motor skills in early childhood, particularly within the context of early childhood education, while also addressing the research gap regarding the use of innovative and contextual visual imitation-based learning models.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Research on gross motor development in early childhood has been extensively examined in numerous previous studies, which emphasize the importance of physical activity in supporting optimal child development. Gross motor development relates to a child's ability to control large body movements such as running, jumping, and maintaining balance, which are significantly influenced by the maturity of the nervous system and environmental stimulation (Rampai et al., 2020). Previous studies indicate that both structured and play-based physical activities significantly contribute to improving children's coordination, strength, and agility (Purwanti, 2025). In the context of early childhood learning, a play-based approach is the most effective strategy because it integrates physical, cognitive, and social aspects simultaneously. Rachmawati, (2020) demonstrates that movement-based games like "animal fun" can significantly improve children's gross motor skills through movement imitation activities.

Other studies also confirm that play not only impacts physical development but also contributes to children's social development and interactions during the learning process. Play activities involving active interaction have been shown to enhance children's cooperation and participation in learning activities (Maulida et al., 2024). In line with this, in the context of early childhood education, learning that integrates hands-on experiences and interactive activities serves as an effective approach to optimizing children's holistic development. This is supported by research Hidayati & Yulsyofriend, (2022) indicating that activity-based learning and hands-on experiences within early childhood education settings can support children's optimal development, particularly in terms of skills and creativity.

Most previous studies have focused on the use of traditional games and outdoor physical activities to develop children's gross motor skills. Although effective, these approaches still have limitations in terms of methodological variety and a lack of utilization of visual and innovative learning media (Faniati et al., 2023). Furthermore, the approach based on visual movement imitation (visual imitation learning) has not yet been extensively studied specifically in the context of early

childhood education. On the other hand, children's learning characteristics in early childhood are heavily influenced by observation and imitation as the primary mechanisms for acquiring new skills. Thus, this study differs fundamentally from previous research as it specifically examines the implementation of shadow movement games as a visual imitation-based learning model designed to stimulate the gross motor development of young children in a more targeted, innovative, and contextual manner.

METHODS

This study employs a qualitative method using a case study approach. This approach was chosen to gain an in-depth understanding of the process of implementing shadow movement games in learning and how these activities stimulate the gross motor development of young children in a natural context. Qualitative methods allow researchers to gain a comprehensive understanding through direct observation of phenomena occurring in the learning environment (Lindstrand et al., 2016). This approach is also consistent with previous research that used case studies to examine children's motor development contextually through direct observation and interviews (Juliana et al., 2022). The research subjects consisted of 15 children aged 5–6 years in one class, comprising 9 boys and 6 girls. In addition to the children as the primary subjects, the classroom teacher was also involved as an informant to provide information regarding the learning process and children's motor development. Subject selection was conducted purposively, considering alignment with the research objectives (Munawarah, 2023).

The data sources in this study include primary and secondary data. Primary data were obtained through direct observation of children's activities during the shadow movement game, interviews with classroom teachers, and documentation of learning activities. Meanwhile, secondary data was obtained from relevant scientific literature on gross motor development in early childhood. This aligns with previous research indicating that data collection through observation, interviews, and documentation is an effective technique in qualitative research within the context of early childhood education (Ananda, 2017).

Data collection methods included observation, semi-structured interviews, and documentation. Observation was used to monitor children's activities, particularly in terms of gross motor skills such as balance, coordination, agility, and muscle strength. Interviews were conducted with classroom teachers to obtain more in-depth information regarding the implementation of instruction and children's responses to the activities carried out. Documentation was used as supporting data in the form of photos of activities and field notes taken during the study. The use of movement-based activities in learning has been proven effective in stimulating children's gross motor development through direct engagement in physical activities (Purwanti, 2025).

The research instrument used was an observation sheet for children's gross motor development, which referred to developmental assessment indicators: Not Yet Developed (BB), Beginning to Develop (MB), and Developing as Expected (BSH). Additionally, an interview guide was used to gather data regarding the implementation of games and changes in children's motor skills during the learning process. The use of observation instruments to assess gross motor skills has also been widely employed in previous studies to systematically identify the motor

development of young children (Rachmawati et al., 2020).

Table 1. Assessment instruments

Code	Category	Description
BSB	Developing Very Well	The child is able to perform movements very accurately, independently, and quickly without assistance
BSH	Developing as Expected	The child is able to perform movements correctly and in accordance with the developmental targets of their age
MB	Still Developing	The child has begun to perform movements but still appears hesitant
BB	Not Yet Developed	The child is not yet fully able to perform movements according to instructions or is unwilling to participate properly

The data analysis technique used in this study employs the interactive qualitative data analysis model proposed by Miles and Huberman, which comprises three main stages: data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions (Aryasutha et al., 2025; Engkizar et al., 2025; Engkizar et al., 2026; Htay et al., 2025; Huberman, 2014). During the data reduction stage, the researcher selects and focuses on the data obtained from observations, interviews, and documentation. The data is then presented in the form of narrative descriptions to facilitate understanding and the derivation of meaning (Qomaruddin & Sa'diyah, 2024). The final stage is drawing conclusions, which is conducted gradually and continuously throughout the research process. This analytical approach is considered effective in producing valid and in-depth findings in qualitative research in the field of early childhood education, particularly research based on contextual learning activities (Hidayati & Yulsofyend, 2022).

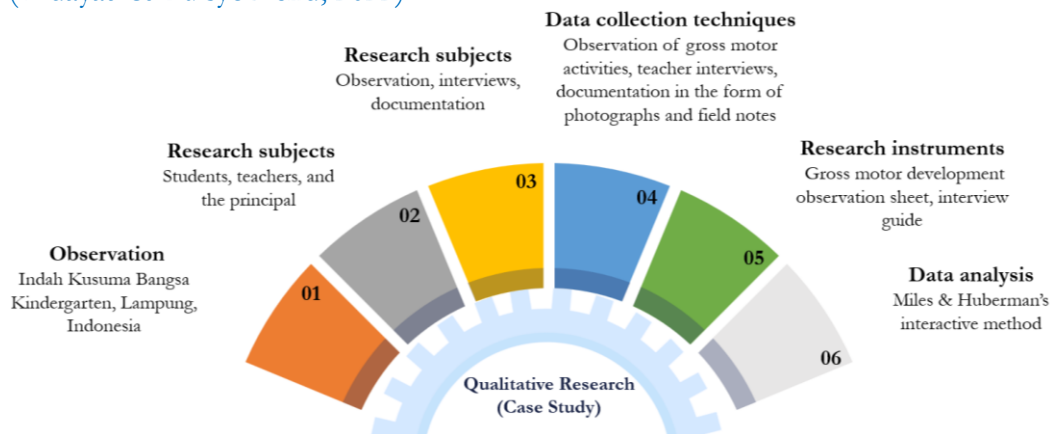


Fig 2. Stages of the research method

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Based on observations of the learning activities, the analysis results indicate that there are several key patterns in the implementation of shadow movement games for developing gross motor skills in children. These patterns are reflected in the sequence of activities carried out during the learning process.

Based on the observation results, it can be explained that the implementation of the shadow movement game is carried out through several main activities, namely: i) selection of the learning theme, ii) presentation of visual media in the form of images using light (shadows), iii) activities where children guess the images, and iv) activities of imitating sounds and movements in accordance with the displayed theme.

Next, the researchers described the results of their observations based on the series of activities. The descriptions presented are the results of direct observations of the children's behavior and responses during the activities. Although there were variations in the responses of each child, they generally showed relatively similar patterns, particularly in terms of enthusiasm, active participation, and the ability to imitate movements all of which are indicators of children's motor development.

First, selection of learning themes. The shadow movement game theme in this study focused on land and sea animals, such as rabbits, cats, butterflies, penguins, dolphins, ducks, monkeys, chickens, frogs, fish, and snakes. The selection of this theme made it easier for the children to understand the context of the movements they were to perform. The following image shows illustrations of the types of animals used in the learning activities.



Fig 3. Selection of animal themes

“...the children seemed to grasp the activities more easily when the teacher introduced the animal theme...” (informant 1); ...the children immediately named the animals they knew when the theme was introduced... (informant 3); ...the theme used helped the children focus more on the activities...” (informant 5)

Second, shadow-based visual media presentation. The materials used include a flashlight and a piece of cloth to create shadow images on the classroom wall. The use of these materials serves as the primary visual stimulus in the learning activity. The following image illustrates shadow-based visual media.



Fig 4. Shadow-based visual media presentation

This is evident from the following observations:

“...the children seemed enthusiastic when they saw the shadows of the images being projected...” (informant 2); ...the children tried to get closer to the light source to see the shapes of the shadows...” (informant 4); ...the shadow activity helped the children focus more on the activity...” (informant 6)

Third, the picture guessing activity. The picture guessing activity is conducted by asking stimulus questions related to the animal’s name, color, sound, habitat, and movement. This activity serves as an introduction before the children engage in physical activities. The following image shows students guessing the silhouette of an animal.



Fig 5. Picture-guessing activity

This is evident from the following observations:

“...the children took turns naming the animals they saw in the shadows...” (informant 7); ...some children raised their hands to answer enthusiastically...” (informant 9); ...the children were seen having brief discussions with one another to guess the pictures...” (informant 10)

Fourth, imitating animal sounds and movements. The core activity in the shadow movement game is imitating animal sounds and movements based on the shadows displayed. Children are asked to follow the teacher’s instructions and adjust their body movements to match the characteristics of the animals. The following image shows students imitating animal movements based on the shadows of animal figures.



Fig 6. Imitating Animal Sounds and Movements

This is evident from the following observations:

“...the child enthusiastically imitated the hopping movements of a rabbit...” (informant 11); ...the child imitated animal sounds while moving according to instructions...” (informant 13); ...most of the children were able to follow the movements with fairly good coordination...” (informant 15)

In this study, the assessment of children’s gross motor development was based on three main categories: not yet developed, beginning to develop, and

developing as expected. These categories were used to describe the level of children's achievement in the areas of movement imitation, body balance, and movement coordination.

Based on the observation results, improvements were found in all three aspects. These improvements were evident in changes in the children's ability to imitate movements, maintain body position, and coordinate limb movements during learning activities. Of the 15 children who were the subjects of the study, the distribution of developmental levels showed a wide range of abilities. Three children were in the "not yet developed" category, five were in the "beginning to develop" category, and seven were in the "developing as expected" category. These data indicate that the majority of the children had reached the expected developmental level after participating in learning through shadow movement games.

More specifically, children in the "developing as expected" category demonstrated optimal ability in participating in the activities. They were able to accurately imitate movements according to the provided examples, maintain body balance while moving, and coordinate hand and foot movements in harmony. Additionally, children in this category appeared more confident, active, and able to fully participate in the learning activities.

Meanwhile, children in the "beginning to develop" category show signs of progress, although they are not yet consistent in performing movements correctly. They have begun to participate and attempt to imitate movements, but still require guidance and encouragement from the teacher. At this stage, their balance and coordination skills begin to emerge, but they are not yet stable and still need to be strengthened through repeated practice. Children in the "not yet developing" category tend to show limited participation. They still appear passive, lack confidence, and struggle to imitate movements, maintain balance, and coordinate body movements. Additionally, their interaction during learning activities remains relatively low.

The selection of contextual themes plays a crucial role in enhancing children's engagement in learning. Animal themes that are closely tied to daily life allow children to connect their prior experiences with the activities they engage in. Additionally, the distinct movement characteristics of each animal provide varied stimuli for children's physical activities (Manna et al., 2024). These findings align with the constructivist theory proposed by Jean Piaget, which asserts that children construct knowledge through direct experience and interaction with their surroundings. In the context of early childhood education, the use of themes closely tied to children's real-life experiences facilitates the processes of assimilation and accommodation of new knowledge. Contextual learning also fosters meaningful learning because children understand the connection between learning activities and the real-life experiences they encounter (Rachmawati et al., 2020). Thus, the use of animal themes in shadow movement games serves as an effective strategy to enhance active participation while stimulating the gross motor development of young children.

Shadow-based visual media provide an engaging and unique learning experience for children. Strong visual stimuli can enhance attention and focus, thereby increasing children's engagement in the learning process. Additionally, the use of light and shadow creates a multisensory learning experience that integrates visual and kinesthetic aspects (Mayar et al., 2022). These findings align with

multisensory theory, which posits that young children learn most effectively when they receive stimuli through multiple senses simultaneously. According to Lev Vygotsky, children's learning develops through active interaction with their environment and media that provide concrete experiences. In shadow movement play, shadow-based media serve as visual stimulation tools that help children understand shapes, the direction of movement, and the relationship between the body and space. The use of light and shadow also creates a more exploratory and enjoyable learning atmosphere, encouraging children to move actively without feeling as though they are participating in a formal learning process. This indicates that visual media not only serve as learning aids but also as psychological stimuli capable of enhancing children's intrinsic motivation to engage in motor activities.

The activity of guessing pictures not only trains children's cognitive abilities but also enhances social interaction and participation in learning. The question-and-answer process provides children with opportunities to think, communicate, and express their knowledge. This finding aligns with the theory of social interactionism proposed by Lev Vygotsky, which emphasizes that children's cognitive development occurs through social interaction and communication with their surroundings. In picture-guessing activities, children not only engage in visual identification but also participate in verbal activities that develop receptive and expressive language skills (Ningrum et al., 2023). Additionally, the question-and-answer process in the game provides space for children to develop symbolic thinking skills, retain information, and express opinions in simple terms. The interactions that occur during the game also help children build social skills such as cooperating, waiting for their turn, listening to peers, and responding to the teacher's instructions (Munawarah, 2023). Thus, the picture-guessing activity in the shadow movement game serves not only as an entertainment activity but also as a means of stimulating integrated cognitive and social development.

The activity of mimicking movements is a form of imitation, in which children learn through observation and hands-on practice (Asfinolia & Jafar, 2023). Through this activity, children practice hand-eye coordination, maintain balance, and control their movements in a more purposeful manner. These findings align with Albert Bandura's social learning theory, which explains that children learn through the processes of observation, imitation, and reinforcement from their surroundings. In shadow movement play, children observe the shape of a shadow and then attempt to represent those movements through direct physical activity. This imitation process plays a crucial role in gross motor development as it involves coordination of large muscle groups, control of body posture, and the ability to maintain movement stability. Additionally, imitating movements helps children develop body awareness and an understanding of their own bodily functions. As children attempt to align their movements with the observed shadow shapes, a process of integration occurs between visual perception and motor responses, supporting their neuromuscular development. Thus, imitation activities in shadow movement games make a significant contribution to optimizing gross motor development in young children.

These findings indicate that shadow movement games provide a multisensory learning experience, integrating visual and kinesthetic aspects. Through the medium of shadows, children receive engaging visual stimuli, while the activity of imitating movements involves direct physical engagement (Purwanti, 2025). Thus, this game not only increases physical activity but also strengthens the learning process as a

whole, particularly in developing gross motor skills in young children. Furthermore, the activities in this game directly train children's coordination, balance, and body movement control. This demonstrates that game-based learning not only provides an enjoyable experience but is also effective in comprehensively developing gross motor skills. These findings reinforce Howard Gardner's view that children possess various types of intelligence that develop through diverse learning experiences, including bodily-kinesthetic intelligence. In this context, the shadow movement game serves as a medium capable of accommodating children's learning needs through simultaneous movement, visualization, and exploration. Thus, the shadow movement game can be viewed as a relevant educational innovation for use in early childhood education because it holistically integrates cognitive, social, visual, and motor aspects (Calero-Morales et al., 2023).

CONCLUSION

Based on the results of the study, it can be concluded that the implementation of shadow movement games in learning contributes positively to the gross motor development of young children. This activity enhances children's ability to imitate movements, maintain body balance, and coordinate hand and foot movements. These improvements occur through children's active engagement in visual and kinesthetic play activities, thereby providing a concrete and meaningful learning experience. Furthermore, the application of shadow movement games has also proven effective in increasing children's participation and enthusiasm during the learning process. Children are not only physically engaged but also demonstrate positive emotional responses, such as joy and interest in the activities being conducted. This indicates that innovative and interactive game-based learning can serve as an effective alternative strategy for stimulating the gross motor development of young children.

Shadow movement games can be recommended as a relevant learning model for implementation in early childhood education settings, particularly in learning contexts that integrate physical activity with visual media. The implementation of this method is expected not only to support children's motor development but also to create a learning environment that is enjoyable, participatory, and aligned with the developmental characteristics of young children.

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DECLARATIONS

Author Contribution

Adellie Putri Anggraeni: writing-preparation of original manuscript, conceptualization, visualization, investigation, methodology, improve language,
Syafrimen Syafril: improve content, data accuracy.

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The data and language usage in this article have been validated and verified by English language experts and no AI-generated sentences are included in this article.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that this research was conducted without any conflict of interest in the research.

Ethical Clearance

The place or location studied has agreed to conduct research and is willing if the results of this study are published.

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