



Building Student Independence in Learning Using a Bilingual Approach

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to develop students' independence in understanding learning materials by implementing bilingual approaches in kindergarten students. The study subjects were Class A students of kindergarten Insan Tangkas Batukliang, Central Lombok. This research used a qualitative method with a case study approach. Data collection was conducted through observation, interviews, and documentation. Data analysis followed the Miles & Huberman model, encompassing data collection, data reduction, data presentation, and verification. The results indicated that Sasak and Indonesian languages were used as mediums of instruction in learning process at students of kindergarten Insan Tangkas. Teachers used the Sasak language to explain material delivered in Indonesian. This research demonstrated that the Sasak language was predominantly used in teaching, enabling students to adapt more quickly to Indonesian. Additionally, the bilingual approach improved student outcomes, as evidenced by the enhancement of learning achievements in assessments conducted by Class A teachers using Sasak as the instructional language.

Keywords: *Sasak Language; Bilingual; Kindergarten; Learning*

Introduction

Student independence in learning process is a crucial element in creating a generation that is self-reliant, creative, and critical. One innovative approach that can be implemented is bilingual learning. This approach not only helps students master two languages but also fosters critical thinking skills and independent learning abilities.

Bilingual learning involves the use of two languages, typically the mother tongue and the national language, and sometimes even an international language such as English. In this context, students are encouraged to understand material using both languages, enabling them to delve deeper into information and apply concepts in various situations. This process motivates students to be more active in seeking solutions, asking questions, and exploring learning resources independently.

Learning through a bilingual approach also enhances students' confidence. By using two languages, students find it easier to adapt to diverse learning environments and access global resources. This aligns with the demands of the globalization era, where cross-cultural communication skills have become one of the essential competencies. Therefore, in supporting student independence, teachers play the role of facilitators. They need to create an inclusive learning environment and provide relevant materials in both languages. Additionally, teaching methods such as group discussions, collaborative projects, and technology-based learning can enrich students' learning experiences.

Integrated bilingual learning not only focuses on understanding lesson content but also helps students holistically develop cognitive, emotional, linguistic, and social skills. The ultimate outcome is students who are independent, confident, and ready to face the challenges of the modern world.

Fundamentally, language is the expression of human thoughts and feelings, systematically using sounds (Depdiknas, 2005). Language is one of the critical components of human development. Speaking is one of the components of language skills, and learning to speak is a long and complex process. When a child speaks, they must use language that is meaningful to their interlocutors and also understand the language used by others (Sofyan, 2014:23-24). Thus, through language, people can communicate and greet one another.

To create a good, active, and communicative learning environment, the role of a teacher becomes highly significant. In the learning process, the teacher determines whether the learning material can be well-received and easily understood by students. Teachers employ various techniques tailored to the existing learning material when delivering lessons. So, The selection and use of teaching techniques by a teacher need to consider several factors, one of which is the students' success in the learning process. To foster student success in learning, the delivery and use of easily understood language is key to creating an active and communicative learning environment. Bilingual teaching is one way to equip students with the ability to communicate effectively and efficiently, both orally and in writing.

Furthermore, to help enhance children's abilities and creativity according to their developmental stages, teachers must prepare language learning, which is a fundamental component of developing basic competencies. The goal of language development is to enable children to communicate effectively, express their ideas in an easily understood language, and spark their interest in learning proper and correct Indonesian (Sutiono, 2022). This is because language is inseparable from human life.

In understanding bilingualism, Bloomfield (1958) defines bilingualism as the ability to speak fluently in two languages. Furthermore, according to Kridalaksana (2008:36) in the *Dictionary of Linguistics*, bilingualism refers to the ability or habit of using two languages. Thus, the ability to speak two languages, such as a national and a foreign language, or a regional and a national language, is referred to as bilingualism. This is in line with Mackey's view (in Chaer and Agustina, 2010:84), which states that bilingualism occurs when someone uses two languages simultaneously when conversing with others. It is crucial to master both languages to use them effectively. In this context, the first language typically used by an individual is their regional or mother tongue, while the second is their additional language. Related to this, Weinreich (1970:1) emphasizes that bilingualism not only involves fluency in two languages but also the ability to communicate effectively in both languages concurrently.

According to Elizabeth B. Hourlock, during the preschool years, children have a strong desire to learn to speak, and language skills, particularly speaking, are the most appropriate tools for the development of the Indonesian language. This is due to two reasons. First, learning to speak is essential for socialization, and second, it helps foster independence. Children can express their thoughts through speaking. A child's language learning ability is significantly influenced by frequent communication with people around them. Children are likely to acquire new vocabulary from what they hear (Huda, 2022).

Moreover, having a regional language is a source of pride for Indonesia, as it reflects the country's cultural diversity. The Sasak language is one of the many regional languages in Indonesia. For individuals born and raised in Lombok, West Nusa Tenggara, it is common to use the Sasak language for daily communication with fellow Sasak people. This is also a way to preserve the Sasak language. However, using the Sasak language as a medium of instruction in education becomes particularly interesting when combined with the Indonesian language. This approach aligns with the background of students whose parents primarily use the Sasak language for daily communication. This diversity in regional languages contributes to making the Indonesian population bilingual.

The teaching of the Indonesian language within communities heavily influenced by regional languages is particularly important, especially for early childhood education. Children born, raised, and living in environments where regional languages, such as Sasak, are predominantly used for daily communication with parents, friends, and relatives are often rarely introduced to Indonesian until they enter formal education.

Early childhood education institutions serve as the foundational level for young children. RA Insan Tangkas, an educational institution located in the village of Bujak, Central Lombok, far from urban settings, provides an interesting case. In this area, the Sasak language with the "meno-mene" dialect is predominantly spoken. Consequently, educators at RA Insan Tangkas must employ bilingual methods in their teaching to help students understand the material. This is particularly evident at the beginning of the school year among Class A students at RA Insan Tangkas, where Sasak is the primary language used for daily communication. This approach is necessary given that the parents of these students, who are mostly farmers and gardeners, primarily communicate in Sasak.

During teaching and learning activities, teachers face challenges in giving instructions in Indonesian. The issue is that students often do not understand the instructions delivered in Indonesian. Regional languages are used more frequently than the national language, which makes it difficult for teachers to convey lessons in Indonesian.

The teaching method employed in such cases is the Mother Tongue-Based Teaching (MTBT) approach. This method uses the students' mother tongue in classroom instruction, allowing them to better absorb the lessons. The approach emphasizes that literacy and learning should ideally begin in the students' mother tongue, with the gradual introduction of a second and third language. The principle aims to boost students' confidence, enhance their understanding of concepts, and support their academic and social success.

Nevertheless, there are several studies related to this topic. First, research conducted by Muston (2017) titled *The Use of Regional Languages as a Medium of Instruction in Lower Elementary School Classes in Palangkaraya City*. Second, research by Juhroti (2011) conducted at TK Masyitoh in the Larangan subdistrict, focusing on the use of Javanese and Indonesian in the learning process. Third, research conducted by Yansyah, Jamiatul, and Lita Ariani (2023) titled *Building Bilingual Literacy Through Big Book Storytelling for Early Childhood*.

However, these previous studies did not emphasize fostering independence among students, which hindered optimal development. This study, in contrast, focuses on examining the application and implementation of bilingual usage to build student independence during learning activities.

Methodology

This study employs a qualitative research method by using descriptive approach. Furthermore, it utilizes both primary and secondary data. Primary data were obtained through observations, interviews with classroom teachers, and documentation. Secondary data were gathered from historical records and

reports, documentation, learning outcomes, and other necessary documents. Data collection techniques included observation, interviews, and documentation to complete the data-gathering process.

The Miles & Huberman model was used for data analysis, which consists of data collection, data reduction, and data display. At this stage, the researcher organizes relevant data to make it meaningful and interpretable. The next step is verification. Data verification is the process of thoroughly validating the data. The final step involves drawing conclusions from the information obtained.

Finding and Discussion

a. Finding

1. Expressions that Used in Sasak Language to Clarify Indonesian Language

During the learning process at *RA Insan Tangkas*, several expressions in the Sasak language were used to clarify certain Indonesian vocabulary. The vocabulary used consists of simple words to make it easier for students to understand the meaning and purpose being conveyed. Some of the vocabulary used is listed in Table 1 below.

NO	SASAK LANGUAGE	INDONESIA	ENGLISH
1	<i>Salim juluk</i>	<i>Salaman dulu</i>	Greet first
2	<i>Wahm nyampah</i>	<i>Sudah sarapan</i>	Have breakfast
3	<i>Napi kandok/ape kandok</i>	<i>Lauknya apa</i>	What's the side dish
4	<i>Jelo ape</i>	<i>Hari apa</i>	What day
5	<i>Nani</i>	<i>Sekarang</i>	Now
7	<i>Uik</i>	<i>Kemarin</i>	Yesterday
8	<i>Lemak aru</i>	<i>Besok</i>	Tomorrow
9	<i>Tame</i>	<i>Masuk</i>	Enter
10	<i>Paling solah</i>	<i>Paling bagus</i>	The best
11	<i>Kanggo</i>	<i>Boleh</i>	Can
12	<i>Peleq</i>	<i>Pilih</i>	Choose
13	<i>Sae wah mandiq</i>	<i>Siapa yang sudah mandi</i>	Who has showered
14	<i>Ape kadu</i>	<i>Pakai apa</i>	Wear what
15	<i>Besebuq</i>	<i>Menggujur</i>	Pour
16	<i>Kentok</i>	<i>Telinga</i>	Ear
17	<i>Irung</i>	<i>Hidung</i>	Nose
18	<i>Mato</i>	<i>Mata</i>	Eye
19	<i>Imo</i>	<i>Tangan</i>	Hand
20	<i>Naen</i>	<i>Kaki</i>	Foot
21	<i>Lalo ojok</i>	<i>Pergi ke</i>	Go to
22	<i>Isikm</i>	<i>Anda Pakai</i>	You wear
23	<i>Maum</i>	<i>Makan</i>	Eat
24	<i>Aok / enggih</i>	<i>Iya</i>	Yes
25	<i>Tokol</i>	<i>Duduk</i>	Sit

The use of the Sasak language is also evident in the conversation between the teacher and students during school and the teaching and learning process. The language used can be seen in Table 2 below.

Tabel 2. Sentences and expressions in Indonesian and Sasak that are used by the teacher during the learning process

NO	SASAK LANGUAGE	INDONESIA	ENGLISH
Teacher	<i>Wahm nyampah?</i>	<i>Sudah sarapan?</i>	Have you had breakfast?
	<i>Sae atongm baruk?</i>	<i>Siapa yang antar tadi?</i>	Who was the one who dropped you off earlier?
	<i>Jelo apo nane?</i>	<i>Hari apa sekarang?</i>	What day is it today?
	<i>Tanggal piro nani?</i>	<i>Tanggal berapa sekarang?</i>	What's the date today?
	<i>Sae wah maum baruk?</i>	<i>Siapa yang sudah makan tadi?</i>	Who has eaten already?
	<i>Sae wah mandik?</i>	<i>Siapa yang sudah mandi?</i>	Who has taken a shower?
Student	<i>Apo aran sak ni buk guru?</i>	<i>Apa namanya ini bu guru?</i>	What is this called, teacher?
	<i>Buk guru endek tao</i>	<i>Bu guru saya tidak bisa</i>	Teacher, I can't do it.
	<i>Buk guru melek maum jajo</i>	<i>Bu guru saya mau makan jajan</i>	Teacher, I want to eat snacks.
	<i>Buk guru melek nginem?</i>	<i>Bu guru saya mau minum</i>	Teacher, I want to drink.
	<i>Berembe entan buk guru?</i>	<i>Bagaimana caranya bu guru?</i>	How do we do this, teacher?
	<i>Salim bu guru juluk ni</i>	<i>Salaman sama bu guru dulu</i>	Greet the teacher first.
	<i>Aneh tamo jelap</i>	<i>Ayo cepat masuk</i>	Let's go inside quickly.
	<i>Sugulan pensil/potlot</i>	<i>Keluarkan pensil</i>	Take out the pencil.
	<i>Lekaq sepatum</i>	<i>Sepatunya dilepas</i>	Take off your shoes.

2. Learning Activities

At RA Insan Tangkas, pre-learning activities begin by greeting the children with a greeting and reciting Iqra (a basic Quranic reading). After that, the children line up outside before entering the classroom. Inside the classroom, the children pray, sing, and discuss the theme of "Individual" in both Sasak and Indonesian. The following table shows the activities conducted during the learning process.

a. Initial Activities in the Learning Process

Activities	English	Indonesia language	Sasak language	Instruction
Welcoming the children, reciting Iqra (Quranic reading), marching, entering the classroom, praying, singing, and talking about oneself.	<i>Assalamualaikum</i> (Islamic greeting) Let's read Iqra first, okay? What day is it today? What is today's date?	<i>Assalamualaikum</i> - <i>Ayo ngaji dulu nggih,</i> - <i>Hari apa namanya</i> <i>sekarang?</i> , - <i>Tanggal berapa sekarang?</i>	<i>Assalamualaikum</i> <i>um</i> - <i>ngaji juluk nggieh,</i> - <i>Jelo apo aran nani?</i> , - <i>Tanggal piro nani?</i>	Encouraging students to communicate directly

In the main activity, the teacher selects two children, one boy and one girl, to come forward. The teacher then asks the other children to observe their friends standing at the front. The teacher begins by asking the children for the names of the friends in front, using both languages. The children are then asked to mention the gender and identify any visible differences between the two friends. After this, the children are asked to form a circle resembling the shape of a head.

b. Main Activities in the Learning Process

Activities	English	Indonesian language	Sasak language	Instruction
In the main activity, the teacher asks two children—one boy and one girl—to come to the front. Then, the teacher asks the other children to observe their friends who are standing at the front.	What is the name of your friend standing in front? Is Juan a boy or a girl? What about Elsa? Can Juan wear a skirt?	- <i>Siapa nama temannya yang ada didepan?</i> - <i>Kalau Juan ini dia cowok atau cewek?</i> - <i>Kalau Elsa?</i> - <i>Kalau Juan boleh tidak Juan pakai rok?</i>	- <i>Sae aran baturm sak lik julu ini?</i> - <i>Lamun Juan ya nino apo mamo?</i> - <i>Lamun elsa jak?</i> - <i>Lamun Juan apo mun kadu sik Juan?</i> - <i>Lamun elsa?</i> - <i>Terus kanggon ape ndek Juan kadu rok?</i>	Encouraging and stimulating students to communicate directly.

After the main activity, the children are asked to tidy up all the items they used, including pencils, books, bags, and desks. Then, the instructor asks the children to sit neatly and start praying before and after eating, as well as exchanging greetings. During the break time, there are several expressions used by the teacher in the rest activities.

c. Activities During Break Time

Activities	English	Indonesian language	Sasak language	Notes
Break Time: During the break, the children are asked to tidy up all the items they have used, such as pencils, books, bags, and desks. Afterward, the teacher asks the children to sit neatly and start praying before and after eating, as well as exchanging greetings.	- Tidy up your desks - Put the books and pencils into your bag. - Then sit nicely and get ready to go out and play. Don't run; play properly, okay?	- <i>rapikan mejanya</i> - <i>masukkan buku dan pensil kedalam tas</i> - <i>terus duduk yang bagus siap-siap untuk keluar main</i> - <i>jangan lari-lari, bagus-bagus caranya bermain nggih</i>	- <i>Peririk mejo,</i> - <i>Tamak buku potlotm dalam tas.</i> - <i>Terus tokol solah-solah Siep-siep sugul mengkedek.</i> - <i>dendek saling dorong</i> - <i>dendek pelai solah-solah entan mengkedek nggih</i>	Instructions given using bilingual communication.

The teacher asks the children to return to the classroom. The teacher invites them to play a game using pencils and cups. The children are asked to pass the cup to their friends using pencils without touching it with their hands. After playing, the teacher asks the children about their feelings and evaluates what they have learned today. Afterward, the children are asked to pray and line up

d. Final Activities in the Learning Process

Activities	English	Indonesian language	Sasak language	Notes
In the final activity, the children are asked to return to the classroom. After that, the teacher invites the children to play a game with pencils and cups. The teacher asks the children to pass the cup to their friends using a pencil but without touching it. After playing, the teacher asks the children about their feelings and evaluates what they have learned that day. Finally, the children are asked to pray and line up before going home	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Who wants to play with the teacher? - Now we will play using cups and pencils. - Pass it to your friend, but don't touch it with your hands, okay? - How do you feel today? - Happy or not? What did we learn earlier? 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Siapa yang mau bermain sama bu guru?</i> - <i>sekarang kita akan bermain menggunakan gelas dan pensil.</i> - <i>oper ketemannya tapi jangan di pegang pakai tangan nggih</i> - <i>bagaimana perasaannya hari ini?</i> - <i>senang atau endek?</i> - <i>apa yang sudah kita pelajari tadi?</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Sae mele bermain kance buk guru?</i> - <i>nani yakt bermain kadu gelas knce potlot?</i> - <i>oper juk baturm muk dende tegel sik ime nggih</i> - <i>berembe perasaan anak Ra jelo ini?</i> - <i>seneng atau endek?</i> - <i>ape waht pelajari onek?</i> 	Communication and instructions delivered using bilingual methods.

Discussion

Language plays a crucial role in the learning process: besides serving as a medium of communication, language is a tool for conveying information, expressing feelings, and sharing thoughts. Additionally, the role of language for children is vital because, through language, they can interact with and explore their environment, as well as develop the ability to communicate their desires and needs.

Indonesian language is the national language that must be mastered by all its speakers because it is the official language used in various formal situations, such as in schools. This was also conveyed by a teacher from RA Insan Tangkas during an interview, as follows:

"I use Bahasa Indonesia at school and in the classroom because it must be used. Besides striving to keep using it, we also use the Sasak language to clarify and as an aid in teaching." (Teacher of Class A, Mrs. Muji Hayati, S.Pd., Friday, July 21, 2024)

For some communities, the status of Bahasa Indonesia as the official and national language can be a challenge because they are not accustomed to using it in daily life. This is often seen in small villages where people commonly communicate in their local language.

"I have to use Bahasa Indonesia and Sasak as an aid because RA Insan Tangkas is located in a hamlet where people use Sasak as their everyday language. In family settings, the first language taught to children is Sasak, so I must use Sasak to clarify Bahasa Indonesia to make learning more effective." (Teacher of Class A, Mrs. Muji Hayati, S.Pd., Friday, July 21, 2024)

In terms of government regulations and policies related to the use of Bahasa Indonesia, it is mandated as the language of instruction in national education, aligning with the following statement:

"I strive to use Bahasa Indonesia predominantly because it is mandated in the education curriculum and also so that children quickly become accustomed to it, even though it can be challenging at the early levels." (Teacher of Class A, Friday, July 21, 2024)

A lack of language comprehension reduces communication and learning effectiveness. This triggers the use of bilingualism in the teaching and learning process. To create a communicative learning environment, teachers must ensure their students understand what is being taught, as expressed by a Class A early-level teacher at RA Insan Tangkas:

"I use Bahasa Indonesia in every lesson, but since the children in this early-level class have limited understanding and predominantly use Sasak, I must adapt to make the learning environment more communicative and effective." (Teacher of Class A, Mrs. Endang Kartini, Friday, July 21, 2024)

Furthermore, teachers adapt their approach to the needs and situations of the class during lessons. This was also conveyed by the teacher:

"In every lesson, I always start by using Bahasa Indonesia, followed by Sasak, because if I don't, the children will remain silent or fail to respond appropriately." (Teacher of Class A, Mrs. Endang Kartini, Friday, July 21, 2024)

In education, the use of Bahasa Indonesia cannot always be implemented optimally. Particularly in certain regions, local languages must be used as a medium to facilitate the learning process. This is a common occurrence in early-grade classes, as students' proficiency in Bahasa Indonesia is still limited.

"If I only use Bahasa Indonesia, the children will remain mostly silent, there will be little interaction, and the learning process will become very passive. In conversations and Q&A sessions, the children will hesitate, feel confused, not know how to respond, or sometimes give irrelevant answers." (Teacher of Class A, Mrs. Endang Kartini, Friday, July 21, 2024)

As stated in the introduction, the learning approach used is the MTBT (Mother Tongue-Based Teaching) approach. This approach emphasizes that literacy and learning should begin with the student's mother tongue, then gradually introduce the second and third languages. As one of the language skills, speaking is the ability to use language effectively. Speaking helps us express what we want to communicate. Direct speech makes communication more effective, highlighting the importance of speaking in our daily lives. Language skills help children communicate and interact effectively with their social environment. These skills are indirectly acquired as children interact with people in their surroundings.

According to Vygotsky (in Rusyini, 2008), a child's early language acquisition begins with interactions with their environment. Although children inherently possess a basic ability to learn language, referred to as the Language Acquisition Device (LAD) by Chomsky, this ability will only develop further when the environment provides adequate stimulus. Otto (2015) states that the home, school, and play environments significantly influence a child's language acquisition.

The home or family environment is the primary factor in a child's acquisition of their first language. Communication with parents forms the first language that children learn indirectly. The daily language used by children becomes ingrained by the time they reach preschool age. Language knowledge is acquired through two processes: language acquisition and language learning. Language acquisition occurs when someone learns a language for the first time, such as an infant or toddler absorbing language from parents, family, and the surrounding environment. In this context, Sasak is the first language

children use to communicate and interact daily with those around them. Bahasa Indonesia becomes the second language they learn upon entering the school environment.

When children start school, they interact with teachers and peers, initially using their first language or mother tongue. As children receive both verbal and written education, they gradually begin learning a new language as their second language. To communicate effectively in school, children must first have a solid foundation in their first language before they can effectively learn the second.

When learning a second language, especially Bahasa Indonesia, several processes are involved. After acquiring their mother tongue or first language, second-language learning can proceed smoothly. The design of second-language learning for children should mimic the natural process of language acquisition. This distinction is essential because language acquisition and language learning have different characteristics (Musfiroh, 2002: 32).

Furthermore, there are factors influencing language learning success; first, Motivation: Motivation drives an individual to learn effectively and achieve success. Second, Environment: Both formal and informal environments play a role. The formal school environment provides structured, rule-based learning activities, as part of teaching objectives (Krashen, 2002: 26). Third, Age: Lambert (1972: 31) suggests that children have a critical period for language learning, increasing their chances of mastering a language. Allan & Paivio (1981: 73) emphasize that children are likely to speak fluently during this period, provided they learn naturally and follow the language's rules and norms (Brewer, 1995: 66).

The fourth factor is formal language learning. Formal learning enables children to grasp language rules quickly; however, the application of language mastery might not be evident in natural communication. Fifth, factor is intelligence, where it is assumed that a child's ability to learn a new language quickly is influenced by their level of intelligence.

In this case, during the teaching and learning process in Class A of RA Insan Tangkas, Bahasa Indonesia is more frequently used, followed by the local language, Sasak, to clarify meanings that the children do not understand. This approach allows students to easily grasp the material delivered by the teacher.

As shown in the data above, RA Insan Tangkas is one of the schools that implements bilingual education. Teachers use Bahasa Indonesia as the official language in the classroom, and children are taught Bahasa Indonesia as the formal language in school. It is not surprising that language skills are used as indicators and benchmarks of a child's success in learning across various aspects of their development. The desired outcome from the language development competency aspect is that children will be able to use language effectively and communicate confidently, which will significantly benefit their learning process and critical thinking.

According to the teachers' assessment, Class A students show progress. The bilingual approach used by teachers as a tool or medium for teaching contributes to the students' development. At RA Insan Tangkas, both Bahasa Indonesia and Sasak are used as instructional languages. Indonesian language is predominantly used in teaching to help children become accustomed to using it correctly and effectively, making it easier for them to learn as they advance to higher levels of education. Sasak language is used selectively to aid children in better understanding what the teacher conveys. Using the local language in teaching allows children to understand lessons more easily.

In bilingual learning, where the local or mother tongue serves as a medium to clarify the second language, several outcomes show that children can achieve developmental milestones based on specific indicators. This is evidenced by the assessment results conducted by Class A teachers at RA Insan Tangkas.

Conclusion

Using bilingual language as a medium of instruction in the learning process is highly necessary, tailored to the circumstances of the teaching environment. At RA Insan Tangkas, the learning process employs a bilingual approach by integrating Indonesian and Sasak languages simultaneously. The Sasak language is used to explain the Indonesian language utilized by the teacher during instruction.

Therefore, by using a bilingual approach, classroom learning situations can become more active, communicative, and effective. This is because children understand the material more quickly when the mother tongue is used as a medium to clarify the second language, which is Indonesian. Additionally, the use of the Sasak language as an instructional medium supports teacher in enhancing children's learning outcomes.

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