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The Effect of Flannel Fabric Busy Book Media on Stimulating Expressive Language Skills of Early Childhood

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Abstract

Expressive language skills, defined as young children's capacity to communicate ideas, thoughts, and feelings through spoken words and simple sentences, remain insufficiently stimulated in many Indonesian kindergartens, where instruction continues to rely predominantly on conventional picture-and-explanation media. This study aimed to examine the effect of flannel-fabric Busy Book media on the expressive language skills of children at RA Samasundu, Polewali Mandar Regency, West Sulawesi. A quantitative quasi-experimental approach with a nonequivalent control group design was employed, involving 30 Group B children aged 5–6 years who were selected through saturated sampling and assigned to an experimental group using flannel-fabric Busy Book media (n = 15) and a control group using conventional picture-based media (n = 15). Data were collected using a six-indicator observation sheet based on a four-level developmental scale and analyzed through descriptive statistics, the Shapiro–Wilk normality test, Levene's homogeneity test, paired-samples t-tests, and independent-samples t-tests. The control group's mean score increased only marginally from 13.47 at pretest to 13.73 at posttest, with no statistically significant difference, $t(14) = -0.673$, $p = .512$. In contrast, the experimental

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group's mean score increased from 14.00 to 20.53, representing a statistically significant improvement, $t(14) = -11.678$, $p < .001$. Posttest scores also differed significantly between the experimental and control groups, $t(28) = -12.448$, $p < .001$, with a mean difference of 6.80. Moreover, the experimental group's gain score ($M = 6.80$) was significantly higher than that of the control group ($M = 1.67$), $t(28) = 10.548$, $p < .001$. These findings demonstrate that flannel-fabric Busy Book media is more effective than conventional picture-based media in stimulating early childhood expressive language skills because its concrete, manipulable, and multisensory features encourage active verbal engagement. The study contributes empirical support for constructivist and sociocultural perspectives on early language development and provides teachers with a practical and affordable instructional medium. However, the small single-site sample and brief intervention period limit the generalizability of the findings, warranting further research with larger samples, longer interventions, and comparisons involving alternative instructional media.

Keywords: Busy Book Media; Early Childhood Education; Expressive Language Skills; Flannel Fabric; Quasi-Experimental Research

INTRODUCTION

Early childhood education (ECE) lays the foundation for children's holistic development, particularly during the "golden age," a period in which the brain develops rapidly and children are highly receptive to environmental stimulation; appropriate stimulation during this period is therefore essential for every developmental domain to progress optimally (Herlina et al., 2023). Among these domains, language development occupies a central place, since language is the primary tool through which children convey thoughts, feelings, and needs to others, and well-developed language ability supports social interaction, environmental understanding, and thinking skills more broadly (Herlina et al., 2025). This priority is reinforced in Indonesian policy: Law No. 20 of 2003 on the National Education System states that education should develop learners who are knowledgeable, creative, independent, and able to communicate effectively, while Regulation of the Minister of Education and Culture No. 137 of 2014 on National Standards for Early Childhood Education identifies language development, comprising both receptive and expressive language, as one of the core aspects of early childhood growth.

Expressive language, specifically, is children's capacity to convey ideas, thoughts, feelings, and experiences through words or simple sentences (Armiyati et al., 2026). Vygotsky's sociocultural account holds that language plays a central role in cognitive development because social interaction and communication allow children to build thinking skills and make sense of their surroundings, a view echoed in accounts of language development that stress the importance of learning environments giving children opportunities to talk, interact, and express their thoughts (N. Safitri et al., 2025). In practice, however, expressive language does not always develop optimally: many early childhood classrooms still contain children who struggle to verbalize ideas or feelings, a pattern often attributable to insufficient stimulation and to instructional media that fail to actively engage children in speaking (Husna & Eliza, 2021). Learning media plays a decisive role here, since well-chosen media helps teachers convey material while also increasing children's interest and attention during learning activities.

One medium suited to stimulating expressive language is the flannel-fabric Busy Book, an interactive activity book composed of matching, attaching, arranging, and simple role-play tasks, typically made from brightly coloured, textured flannel with detachable and attachable components so that children learn while playing. Through play with a Busy Book, children can be trained to name objects, answer questions, and narrate the pictures it contains, thereby stimulating expressive language ability. Preliminary observation at RA Samasundu indicated that expressive language skills still require strengthening: roughly 60% of children struggled to produce simple sentences, tended to answer teachers' questions with a single word, and were still not able to retell pictures or simple everyday experiences, while about 40% could name objects or pictures shown by the teacher but still needed guidance to compose clear simple sentences. Several prior studies support the developmental value of Busy Book media, showing that it can help children recognize new vocabulary and name objects, colours, and shapes through enjoyable play (Aisyah et al., 2022), that its content and difficulty level can be tailored to a learning theme and to individual children's needs (Astuti et al., 2022), and that it also lends itself to strengthening related domains such as fine-motor coordination (I. Safitri et al., 2024) and multiliteracy (Astuti et al., 2022). However, studies that isolate the effect of flannel-fabric Busy Book media specifically on expressive language skills, using a controlled comparison group rather than a single-group design, remain comparatively limited; most existing Busy Book research instead centres on fine-motor, cognitive, or multiliteracy outcomes.

This study addresses that gap by examining, through a quasi-experimental Nonequivalent Control Group Design, whether flannel-fabric Busy Book media produces a significantly greater improvement in early childhood expressive language skills than the conventional picture-based media ordinarily used in the classroom. The novelty of this study lies in two areas: first, it isolates expressive language, an outcome addressed only indirectly in earlier Busy Book research, as the sole dependent variable under a controlled comparison; and second, it provides layered statistical evidence, descriptive comparison, within-group paired-sample testing, and between-group independent-sample testing of both posttest and gain scores, extending prior Busy Book studies that have generally relied on single-group pretest-posttest designs. Accordingly, this study aims to describe expressive language skills in the control group before and after conventional learning, to describe expressive language skills in the experimental group before and after learning with flannel-fabric Busy Book media, and to analyze whether flannel-fabric Busy Book media has a significant effect on early childhood expressive language skills at RA Samasundu, Polewali Mandar Regency.

METHODS

This study used a quasi-experimental design, chosen because it allows comparison between groups to draw conclusions about changes caused by a treatment. The researcher divided the research subjects into a treatment group that received the intervention and a control group that did not (Hikmawati et al., 2022).

The study employed a Nonequivalent Control Group Design, consisting of one experimental group and one control group, each given a pretest and a posttest. In this paradigm, O1 and O3 denote the pretest scores of the experimental and control groups respectively, X denotes the treatment (learning with flannel-fabric Busy Book media), and O2 and O4 denote the posttest scores of the experimental and control groups respectively. This design allowed the researcher to compare the change in expressive language skills between the group receiving Busy Book treatment and the group receiving conventional instruction, so that the effect of the treatment could be analyzed from the difference between pretest and posttest results in both groups.

The population comprised 30 Group B children (aged 5-6 years) at RA Samasundu, Latta Sub-village, Limboro District, Polewali Mandar Regency, West Sulawesi Province, an age group chosen because children at this stage already display more developed vocabulary,

question-answering, sentence-construction, and narrative ability than younger groups. A saturated sampling technique was used, whereby the entire population served as the research sample because of its relatively small size, producing a more complete picture of the treatment's effect. The 30 children were divided into an experimental group (n = 15), taught using flannel-fabric Busy Book media through interactive activities such as vocabulary recognition, object naming, question-answering, opinion-giving, and simple experience narration, and a control group (n = 15), taught using the conventional media routinely applied at RA Samasundu, namely pictures, teacher explanation, and other everyday supporting materials, which served as the comparison for judging the outcomes obtained in the experimental group.

Data were collected through three complementary techniques: observation, a performance test, and documentation. Observation was conducted using an observation sheet covering six expressive-language indicators, namely naming objects or pictures shown in the Busy Book, naming colours or shapes of indicated objects, answering the teacher's simple questions, composing simple sentences of two to four words, retelling pictures or activities shown in the Busy Book, and expressing simple ideas or opinions during learning. Each indicator was rated using the standard Indonesian early-childhood developmental categories, BB (Belum Berkembang/Not Yet Developed), MB (Mulai Berkembang/Beginning to Develop), BSH (Berkembang Sesuai Harapan/Developing as Expected), and BSB (Berkembang Sangat Baik/Developing Very Well), converted into numerical scores of 1, 2, 3, and 4 respectively for statistical analysis. The performance test comprised a pretest, administered before treatment to determine children's baseline expressive language ability, and a posttest, administered after the learning sessions to determine the improvement produced by the treatment; both were embedded in learning activities in which children were asked to perform tasks using the instructional media while the teacher posed questions or instructions to prompt speech. Documentation, including photographs and field notes, supplemented the quantitative instruments and helped capture the classroom dynamics accompanying each session. Data analysis was carried out using IBM SPSS Statistics version 23.0 for Windows.

Descriptive statistics (minimum, maximum, mean, and standard deviation) were first computed to characterize the pretest and posttest data of each group. Prior to hypothesis testing, the data were checked against the assumptions required for parametric analysis: a Shapiro-Wilk normality test, chosen for its stronger sensitivity to departures from normality

in small-to-moderate samples compared with the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test (Field, 2018), and Levene's Test of Homogeneity of Variances (Sugiyono, 2022), both evaluated at a significance level of 0.05. Hypothesis testing then proceeded through a Paired Samples t-test, used to determine whether each group's expressive language scores differed significantly between pretest and posttest, and an Independent Samples t-test, used to determine whether the improvement in expressive language skills differed significantly between the experimental and control groups. Decisions were based on the two-tailed significance value ($\alpha = 0.05$): H_0 was rejected and H_1 accepted when Sig. (2-tailed) < 0.05, indicating a significant effect of the Busy Book media, and H_0 was retained when Sig. (2-tailed) ≥ 0.05 (Ghozali, 2021).

RESULTS

1. Normality and Homogeneity of the Data

Before hypothesis testing, the pretest and posttest data of both groups were checked for normality using the Shapiro-Wilk test. As shown in Table 1, all four data sets returned significance values above 0.05, indicating that the pretest and posttest scores of both the experimental and control groups were normally distributed.

Table 1. Shapiro-Wilk Test of Normality

Data Set	Statistic	df	Sig.
Experimental – Pretest	.935	15	.324
Experimental – Posttest	.953	15	.575
Control – Pretest	.958	15	.666
Control – Posttest	.921	15	.198

Source: SPSS output, 2026.

Homogeneity of variance was then examined using Levene's Test. As shown in Table 2, the Based on Mean statistic yielded a significance value of 0.233 (> 0.05), indicating that the variances of the experimental and control groups were homogeneous and that the data satisfied the assumptions required for parametric analysis, including the Independent Samples t-test.

Table 2. Levene's Test of Homogeneity of Variances

Basis	Levene Statistic	df1	df2	Sig.
Based on Mean	1.485	1	28	.233
Based on Median	.921	1	28	.345

Source: SPSS output, 2026.

2. Expressive Language Skills in the Control Group: Pretest and Posttest

As shown in Table 3, the control group's mean expressive language score rose only slightly after conventional instruction, from 13.47 (SD = 1.959) at pretest to 13.73 (SD = 1.668) at posttest, an increase of 0.26 points. The Paired Samples t-test in Table 4 shows a mean difference of -0.267, t(14) = -0.673, p = .512. Because this significance value exceeds 0.05, H_0 was retained, indicating that the improvement observed in the control group was not statistically significant.

Table 3. Descriptive Statistics – Control Group

Measure	N	Mean	SD	Std. Error
Pretest	15	13.47	1.959	.506
Posttest	15	13.73	1.668	.431

Source: SPSS output, 2026.

Table 4. Paired Samples t-Test – Control Group

Pair	Mean Diff.	SD	Std. Error	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Pretest – Posttest	-.267	1.534	.396	-.673	14	.512

Source: SPSS output, 2026.

3. Expressive Language Skills in the Experimental Group: Pretest and Posttest

As shown in Table 5, the experimental group's mean expressive language score rose substantially after learning with flannel-fabric Busy Book media, from 14.00 (SD = 1.773) at pretest to 20.53 (SD = 1.302) at posttest, an increase of 6.53 points, accompanied by a reduction in standard deviation indicating a more homogeneous spread of scores after treatment. The Paired Samples t-test in Table 6 shows a mean difference of -6.533, t(14) = -11.678, p < .001. Because this significance value is well below 0.05, H_0 was rejected and H_1 accepted, confirming that flannel-fabric Busy Book media produced a statistically significant improvement in the experimental group's expressive language skills.

Table 5. Descriptive Statistics – Experimental Group

Measure	N	Mean	SD	Std. Error
Pretest	15	14.00	1.773	.458
Posttest	15	20.53	1.302	.336

Source: SPSS output, 2026.

Table 6. Paired Samples t-Test – Experimental Group

Pair	Mean Diff.	SD	Std. Error	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Pretest – Posttest	-6.533	2.167	.559	-11.678	14	.000

Source: SPSS output, 2026.

4. Comparison of Posttest Scores Between Groups

Table 7 compares the posttest scores of the two groups: the experimental group achieved a higher mean (20.53, SD = 1.302) than the control group (13.73, SD = 1.668), a difference of 6.80 points. The Independent Samples t-test in Table 8 confirms this difference is significant, with Levene's Test showing homogeneous variances (Sig. = .233) and the Equal-variances-assumed row yielding $t(28) = -12.448$, $p < .001$, mean difference = -6.800. H_0 was therefore rejected, indicating that children taught with flannel-fabric Busy Book media achieved significantly higher posttest expressive language scores than those taught with conventional media.

Table 7. Group Statistics – Posttest Scores

Group	N	Mean	SD	Std. Error
Control	15	13.73	1.668	.431
Experimental	15	20.53	1.302	.336

Source: SPSS output, 2026.

Table 8. Independent Samples t-Test – Posttest Scores

Test	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Diff.
Equal variances assumed	1.485	.233	-12.448	28	.000	-6.800

Source: SPSS output, 2026.

5. Comparison of Gain Scores between Groups

To confirm the treatment effect independently of baseline differences, the gain score (posttest minus pretest) of each child was compared between groups. As shown in Table 9, the experimental group's mean gain (6.80, SD = 1.568) was markedly higher than the control group's mean gain (1.67, SD = 1.047). The Independent Samples t-test in Table 10 shows Levene's Test confirming homogeneous variances (Sig. = .276) and the Equal-variances-assumed row yielding $t(28) = 10.548$, $p < .001$, mean difference = 5.133. This result reinforces the conclusion drawn from the posttest comparison: the improvement in expressive language skills attributable to flannel-fabric Busy Book media was significantly greater than that produced by conventional media.

Table 9. Group Statistics – Gain Scores

Group	N	Mean	SD	Std. Error
Experimental	15	6.8000	1.56753	.40473
Control	15	1.6667	1.04654	.27021

Source: SPSS output, 2026.

Table 10. Independent Samples t-Test – Gain Scores

Test	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Diff.
Equal variances assumed	1.235	.276	10.548	28	.000	5.1333

Source: SPSS output, 2026.

Taken together, the descriptive and inferential results show that expressive language skills improved in both groups over the course of the study, but the improvement was statistically significant only in the experimental group taught with flannel-fabric Busy Book media, and the magnitude of that improvement significantly exceeded the improvement observed in the control group taught with conventional media.

DISCUSSION

1. Expressive Language Skills in the Control Group Before and After Conventional Learning

The control group's mean score rose from 13.47 to 13.73, but the Paired Samples t-test confirmed this change was not statistically significant ($p = .512$). This finding suggests that ordinary classroom instruction, using pictures, picture cards, and direct explanation under the Kurikulum Merdeka, still gave children some opportunity to listen, answer questions, and communicate with the teacher and peers, but remained largely teacher-centred, limiting children's opportunities to explore speaking, express opinions, and use vocabulary more broadly. This pattern is consistent with the view that learning media must give children an active role if language stimulation is to be optimal, and with Piaget's (1952) account of the preoperational stage, in which children aged five to six learn more effectively through concrete experience and direct manipulation of objects than through explanation alone; instruction still dominated by teacher talk and limited media correspondingly narrows children's opportunities to build language ability through direct experience.

2. Expressive Language Skills in the Experimental Group Before and After Busy Book Learning

The experimental group's mean score rose from 14.00 to 20.53, a change confirmed as statistically significant by the Paired Samples t-test ($p < .001$). This improvement indicates that flannel-fabric Busy Book media provided stimulation well matched to the learning characteristics of young children: throughout the sessions, children were actively engaged in observing pictures, naming objects, recognizing colours and shapes, answering questions,

matching objects, and retelling pictures shown in the media, activities that gave them direct opportunities to use language in an enjoyable learning context and so develop their ability to express ideas, share opinions, and expand vocabulary. Consistent with Piaget's (1952) preoperational-stage account, children aged five to six learn most effectively through concrete experience and play; the manipulative activities built into the Busy Book, opening and closing fasteners, matching pictures, grouping objects, direct interaction with the media, therefore helped children grasp learning content while also prompting them to communicate, voice opinions, and use vocabulary across varied situations. This finding is consistent with evidence that Busy Book media helps children recognize new vocabulary and name objects, colours, and shapes through play (Aisyah et al., 2022), that its design can be adapted to a learning theme and to children's developmental characteristics to sustain active participation (Astuti et al., 2022), that the soft, appealing texture of flannel fabric heightens children's attention and engagement (Herawati et al., 2024), and that sensory, activity-based media of this kind gives children direct learning experiences that support more active communication (I. Safitri et al., 2024).

3. Effect of Flannel Fabric Busy Book Media on Expressive Language Skills

The Independent Samples t-test on gain scores confirmed that the experimental group's improvement ($M = 6.80$) significantly exceeded the control group's improvement ($M = 1.67$), $p < .001$, demonstrating that flannel-fabric Busy Book media is more effective than conventional media for stimulating early childhood expressive language skills. This difference is attributable to the Busy Book's capacity to engage children in play activities that involve direct interaction with the medium: rather than only listening to teacher explanation, children actively observed pictures, named objects, recognized colours and shapes, matched objects, answered questions, and retold picture content, activities that consistently prompted active language use. This is consistent with Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural account, in which language develops through social interaction, and with the closely related notion of a Language Acquisition Support System, in which adult-structured interaction, through questions, prompts, and feedback, scaffolds children's move from recognizing objects toward making fuller verbal requests and statements (Bruner, 1983); during Busy Book sessions the teacher's questions, instructions, and feedback created exactly this kind of scaffolded interaction, supporting children's expressive language development in a manner conventional, more teacher-centred instruction did not replicate to the same degree. The finding is further corroborated by evidence that flannel fabric's texture and contrasting

colours stimulate children's tactile senses and sustain their attentional focus while interacting with the medium (Kurniawati & Aulia, as cited in the developing Busy Book literature), that Busy Book media can be flexibly adapted to different themes and developmental needs to increase active participation (Astuti et al., 2022), and that related sensory-play media designed for early childhood similarly support active communication and confidence in speaking (Rahmawati et al., 2025).

4. Research Implications

Theoretically, these findings extend Piagetian constructivism and Vygotskian sociocultural theory to a concrete Indonesian early-childhood setting, reinforcing that concrete, manipulable, and socially scaffolded media can measurably stimulate expressive language development. Practically, the validated use of flannel-fabric Busy Book media equips PAUD and RA teachers with a low-cost, easily produced instructional tool, requiring only fabric, thread, and adhesive components, that can be adapted to different themes under the Kurikulum Merdeka. For institutions, the findings offer a concrete model for strengthening language-stimulation practice without reliance on costly or technology-dependent media, addressing a resource constraint common in many Indonesian early-childhood settings. Methodologically, the study demonstrates how a Nonequivalent Control Group Design, combined with both Paired Samples and Independent Samples t-tests on posttest and gain scores, can strengthen the evidentiary basis for claims about instructional media effectiveness in early-childhood research.

5. Research Limitations and Directions for Future Research

This study is limited by its relatively small sample of 30 children and its single-site design at RA Samasundu, which restricts the generalizability of the findings, and by its comparatively short implementation period, which leaves open the durability of the improvement observed. Future studies are encouraged to replicate this design with larger and more diverse samples across multiple institutions, extend the treatment period, and examine the contribution of flannel-fabric Busy Book media to other developmental domains such as receptive language, social-emotional skills, and fine-motor coordination, in line with recommendations emerging from the broader Busy Book and sensory-media literature (Aisyah et al., 2022; Rahmawati et al., 2025).

CONCLUSION

Expressive language skills in the control group improved only marginally after conventional learning, from a mean of 13.47 to 13.73, a change that was not statistically significant ($p = .512$). In contrast, expressive language skills in the experimental group improved substantially after learning with flannel-fabric Busy Book media, from a mean of 14.00 to 20.53, a change confirmed as statistically significant ($p < .001$). The Independent Samples t-test further confirmed that this improvement was significantly greater than that of the control group, both for posttest scores (mean difference = 6.80, $p < .001$) and for gain scores (mean difference = 5.13, $p < .001$), demonstrating that flannel-fabric Busy Book media has a significant effect on early childhood expressive language skills at RA Samasundu, Polewali Mandar Regency.

This study contributes theoretically by demonstrating the applicability of Piagetian constructivist and Vygotskian sociocultural frameworks to a concrete, sensory-based instructional design for early childhood, and practically by providing PAUD and RA teachers with an empirically validated, low-cost, easily produced medium for stimulating vocabulary use, sentence construction, question-answering, and narrative ability in children aged 5-6 years.

Future research should test flannel-fabric Busy Book media across larger and more diverse samples and multiple institutions, extend the implementation period to examine the durability of gains, and explore its integration with other developmental domains beyond expressive language, such as receptive language, social-emotional development, and fine-motor skills, as well as its combination with other instructional media or methods to build a more comprehensive picture of its effectiveness for early childhood learning.

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