

The Influence of Expression Puzzle Building Block Media on Early Childhood Emotional Expression Skills

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This research is based on the importance of emotional expression skills in early childhood as part of their social-emotional development. However, some children still have difficulty in recognizing and expressing emotions appropriately. Therefore, interesting and interactive learning media are needed to help children understand various forms of emotions. One such media is the Expression Puzzle Building Block media. The research method used is quantitative with a pre-experimental design type of one group pre-test and post-test. The research subjects were children aged 4-5 years at Hasyim Asy'ari Banyuwangi Kindergarten using a saturated sampling technique with 28 subjects. Data collection used observation and documentation, the results of the data were analyzed using SPSS on Windows. The results showed that this media has a positive influence on children's emotional expression skills. Children become better able to recognize various types of

emotions, express their feelings appropriately, and show increased social interaction during the learning process. Thus, the Expression Puzzle Building Block media can be an alternative learning media that is effective in developing emotional expression skills in early childhood. This research is based on the importance of emotional expression skills in early childhood as part of their social-emotional development. However, some children still experience difficulties in recognizing and expressing emotions appropriately. Therefore, engaging and interactive learning media are needed to help children understand various forms of emotions. One such media is the Expression Puzzle.

INTRODUCTION

Early childhood education (PAUD) is crucial in supporting children's growth and development toward the next level of education. Early childhood is called the golden period because it experiences rapid physical, cognitive, linguistic, and socio-emotional development (Sari & Fatmawati, 2023). One aspect that requires serious attention is social-emotional development. At this stage, children begin to learn to recognize their own feelings, understand the emotions of others, and develop self-control (Fuadia, 2022). Good social-emotional skills will help children build positive social relationships, both in the family environment and at school.

According to (Erikson, 1995a), Children aged 4-5 years are in the initiative versus guilt phase. In this phase, children begin to show initiative through play, exploration, and interactions with others. They also begin to understand their own feelings and those of others, and begin to develop the ability to regulate their emotions. Children who receive appropriate stimulation will grow into individuals who are able to express their emotions well and have high self-awareness. Data from the 2018 Basic Health Survey Riset Kesehatan Dasar Indonesia shows that approximately 9.8% of children under 15 in Indonesia experience emotional and mental disorders. This figure is expected to increase to 20% by 2023. Meanwhile, among adolescents, the prevalence of emotional problems ranges from 10% to 36.1%, with a higher risk in girls due to environmental factors and the influence of social media (Lestarina, 2022). This can also be seen from the increasing number of bullying cases among students which are linked to an increase in introverted traits (Lugas16313, 2021). Therefore, recognizing emotions from an early age is crucial, enabling children to grow into individuals who are adaptable to their environment.

The ability to recognize emotional expressions is the foundation of emotional intelligence. Children who can recognize emotional expressions well will find it easier to interact, cooperate, and adapt to their social environment (Arfah, 2025a). This is because children are equipped to read social situations through facial expressions, tone of voice, and body gestures displayed by their peers and teachers. This way, they are less likely to misrepresent social situations. Conversely, children who have difficulty recognizing facial expressions tend to face communication barriers, are prone to misunderstandings, and exhibit withdrawn or aggressive behavior (Qori'ah, 2024; Ulya & Lubis, 2026). Therefore, recognizing emotional expression from an early age is crucial so that children grow into individuals who have good emotional intelligence, are able to empathize, and are able to establish healthy and productive social relationships.

Based on initial observations conducted by researchers at Hasyim Asy'ari Kindergarten in Sambimulyo, it was found that some children aged 4–5 years were still in the early stages of recognizing and distinguishing emotional expressions. Some children appeared to have difficulty distinguishing between expressions of happiness, sadness, anger, and fear. These children were also unable to express their feelings appropriately. This condition impacts children's social interactions in the classroom and indicates that the social-emotional stimulation provided still needs to be improved, particularly through the use of more interactive and engaging learning media.

Learning media is a tool that serves as an intermediary for educators in conveying learning materials to students. Therefore, based on the principles of early childhood learning, learning media that are visually and verbally appealing are needed to direct and maintain children's attention on the material being studied, thereby achieving learning objectives (Wijayati, 2023). Learning media has an important role as a tool to help teachers deliver material in a concrete, interesting and easy-to-understand way for children (Haptanti et al., 2024). In PAUD learning, visual media packaged in the form of educational games has proven to be more effective because it is able to integrate cognitive, affective and psychomotor aspects together (Mulfajril et al., 2023). One innovative medium that can be used is the Expression Puzzle Building Block, a cube-shaped device with various facial expressions that can be changed according to instructions. This tool allows children to not only observe but also manipulate and create expressions directly, thereby developing the ability to recognize, differentiate, and express emotions. This fact is also supported by sales results on the e-commerce platform Shopee, where average sales figures exceed 10,000 (Pramudiya et al., 2015a).

A number of studies have proven that learning media, especially puzzle games, are effective in supporting children's social-emotional development. (Arfah, 2025b) stated that puzzle games have a stronger influence than traditional hopscotch games on improving the social-emotional abilities of early childhood, with an N-Gain Score reaching 0.6219, this research focused on traditional hopscotch. This finding is supported by (Cantika & Ilhami, 2025a) from Sriwijaya University, who found that the activity of playing picture puzzles has a significant effect on the emotional intelligence of early childhood, as shown by the results of the t-test where the calculated t (5.25) exceeds the t table (1.74). In line with these findings, (Eni Henawati & Saeful Milah, 2025a) emphasized that puzzle media can function as an effective stimulus for the social-emotional development of early childhood (Slamet Widiawati & Natalya, 2021a) also added that puzzles not only improve fine motor skills but also help children recognize emotional expressions through manipulative and visual activities. Further, (Andini, Dewi, et al., 2025a) Studies show that implementing play-based learning significantly improves preschoolers' social and emotional skills. Through educational play activities, children become more engaged, learn to recognize their own and others' emotions, and demonstrate better cooperation with peers.

Although there is a lot of evidence supporting the effectiveness of puzzles in general, research specifically examining the Expression Puzzle Building Block media, especially its role in helping children aged 4-5 years old recognize and express emotions, is still very limited. The novelty of this study lies in its specific focus on this media, which combines block-building activities with direct training in expressing emotions, an area that has not been widely explored empirically in early childhood. Based on this research gap, this study aims to examine the effect of the Expression Puzzle Building Block media on the ability to express emotions of children aged 4-5 years at Hasyim Asy'ari Kindergarten Sambimulyo.

Extensive research demonstrates that puzzle-based and play-based learning media are highly effective in fostering children's social-emotional development, as evidenced by significant improvements in emotional intelligence, peer cooperation, and emotion recognition (Andini, Dewi,

et al., 2025b; Cantika & Ilhami, 2025b; Eni Henawati & Saeful Milah, 2025b; Slamet Widiawati & Natalya, 2021b). Rather than opposing these existing frameworks, this study builds upon and extends prior research by addressing a critical literature gap. While previous studies broadly validate conventional puzzles, empirical focus on specialized tools like the Expression Puzzle Building Block media which uniquely integrates tactile block-building with targeted emotional expression for children aged 4–5 remains scarce. Therefore, this study expands the current paradigm by examining the specific impact of this novel media at Hasyim Asy'ari Kindergarten Sambimulyo, moving from generalized play-based theories to a more specialized, dual-action developmental intervention.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study used quantitative research to examine the impact of Expression Puzzle Building Block media on early childhood emotional expression. The design chosen was a pre-experimental one, specifically a one-group pretest-posttest design, which involved only one group of participants without a comparison group (Arifiyah & Lilawati, 2023). The research was conducted at Hasyim Asy'ari Sambimulyo Kindergarten in Bangorejo District, Banyuwangi Regency, East Java Province, from October to December. This location was chosen because no previous research had been conducted there, particularly one focusing on the influence of Expression Puzzle Building Blocks on children's emotional expression.

Table 1. Indicators of Emotional Expression Ability

No	Variable	Indicator
1	Early Childhood Emotional Expression Skills	1. Understanding Emotions 2. Managing & Controlling Emotions 3. Expressing Emotions

Source modified from: (Nurjannah & Sitorus, 2025)

Therefore, this location offers scientific novelty. Based on initial observations, children in group A had not yet mastered basic emotional expressions and tended to respond with crying or silence. Available learning resources were also limited, consisting only of stories and songs without props. However, some children were already accustomed to playing with simple puzzles, making the Expression Puzzle Building Blocks easier to introduce. This situation highlights the need to develop the ability to recognize and express emotions in children aged 4–5 years. This study involved 28 participants, all of whom were students of Hasyim Asy'ari Kindergarten. A saturated sampling technique was used, meaning the entire population was sampled due to the small number and to align with the research objectives (Slamet Widiawati & Natalya, 2021b).

The data collection method in this study was carried out using non-participant observation and documentation in the form of photos, as well as recording the results of learning activities (Anshori & Iswati, 2023a). Meanwhile, photographic documentation was used as supporting data to

strengthen the observation results and provide a realistic picture of children's activities during learning activities. Non-participant observation was conducted by the researcher, accompanied by the class teacher. The researcher observed the children's behavior without participating in the play activities. The instruments used were observation sheets compiled based on indicators of emotional expression ability, as well as a word wall game used during the pretest and posttest. Assessments were conducted using the institution's developmental scale.

The instrument in this study was developed based on indicators of emotional expression abilities in children aged 4-5 years. Instrument development began with the development of a grid tailored to the research objectives, followed by the creation of an observation sheet to measure the emotional expression abilities of early childhood children (Conita Ananto & Vinayastri, 2021). The instrument in this study was developed based on indicators of emotional expression abilities in children aged 4-5 years, which include the ability to observe, ask questions, experiment, and communicate the results of observations. Instrument development began with the preparation of a grid tailored to the research objectives, followed by the creation of an observation sheet as a tool to measure children's scientific literacy abilities.

Instrument validity testing is carried out using a construct validity approach through expert judgment from experts in their fields and learning media experts (Yusup, 2018a). This validity determination was conducted using SPSS software and involved 33 respondents who were experts in the field of Early Childhood Education (PAUD). The results of the validity test are presented as follows:

Table 2. Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.724	10

Based on the results of the table in the validity test, it is known that the Cronbach's Alpha value is 0.724, which means that the instrument is declared valid. According to (Yusup, 2018b), An instrument is declared reliable if the Cronbach's Alpha value obtained reaches ≥ 0.70 . Thus, a value of $0.724 > 0.70$, it can be concluded that the instrument used to measure the emotional expression ability of early childhood through the Expression Puzzle Building Block media is declared reliable. This means that this research instrument is consistent and suitable for use in collecting data in the study entitled "The Effect of Expression Puzzle Building Block Media on the Emotional Expression Ability of Early Childhood."

The research results were analyzed using SPSS software. Prior to this, a normality test was performed to determine whether the data were normally distributed. If the significance value obtained was >0.05 , the data were declared normally distributed, and a paired t-test was used. Conversely, if the significance value was <0.05 , the data were declared non-normally distributed, so the non-parametric Wilcoxon test was used to test the hypothesis.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Based on the results of the research that has been conducted, data was obtained regarding the comparison of children's scientific thinking abilities between the initial and final conditions after the following treatment:

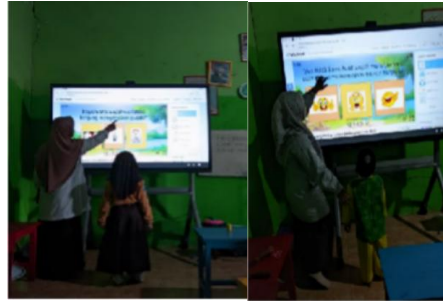


Figure 1. Pretest and posttest documentation

The pretest and posttest results are intervened through the pretest and posttest data recapitulation results to further refine the presentation of quantitative data (Anshori & Iswati, 2023b). The results of the measurement of children's emotional expression abilities before and after the intervention of the Expression puzzle building block educational game are not only presented in tables but also visualized in bar charts. This visualization aims to provide a clearer and more comprehensive picture of the differences in pretest and posttest scores for each subject. The diagram illustrates the trend of increasing individual and collective scores and facilitates the identification of patterns of change after the intervention. Therefore, graphical representation is expected to facilitate visual interpretation of the data and strengthen the finding that the Expression puzzle building block educational game has a positive impact on the emotional expression abilities of early childhood.

Of course, before the posttest, the researcher had provided treatment using the Expression Puzzle Building Block media to the children as follows:



Figure 2. Treatment Documentation

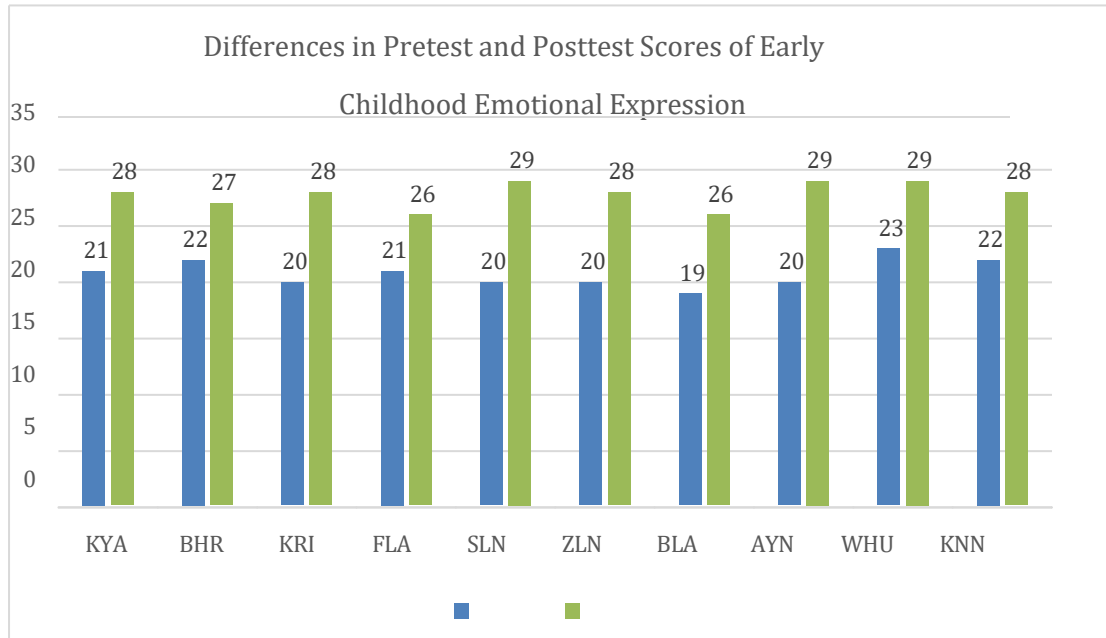


Figure 3. Recapitulation of pretest and posttest score data

Based on the results presented in the score comparison table, it can be seen that all study participants experienced an increase in their emotional expression ability scores after participating in learning sessions using the Expression puzzle building block educational game. Participants' pretest scores ranged from 19 to 23, increasing to 26 to 29 in the posttest. The average pretest score of 21.25 increased to 27.43 in the posttest, with an average increase of 7 points. Specifically, SLN and AYN experienced an increase from 20 to 29 (an increase of 7 points). This increase occurred consistently across all subjects, without any decline or stagnation in scores. This indicates that the intervention in the form of Expression puzzle building blocks contributes positively to the development of emotional expression in early childhood.

Based on the data recapitulation results, there appears to be an effect from the pretest to the posttest. These recapitulation results were then followed up with statistical tests to produce normality test results.

Table 3. Normality Test Results Test of Normality

	Kolmogorov-Smirnov ^a			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
PRETEST	.193	28	.009	.915	28	.027
POST- TEST	.188	28	.012	.927	28	.053

a. Lilliefors Significance Correction

Table 2 presents the results of the normality test for pretest and posttest scores using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk tests. The Kolmogorov-Smirnov test yielded a significance value of 0.009 for the pretest and 0.012 for the posttest. Meanwhile, the Shapiro-Wilk

test yielded a significance value of 0.027 for the pretest and 0.053 for the posttest.

Based on the decision-making criteria stating that data is normally distributed if the significance value is > 0.05 , the pretest data shows a value below 0.05 ($p = 0.009$ in Kolmogorov-Smirnov and $p = 0.027$ in Shapiro-Wilk). Thus, the pretest data is declared not normally distributed. The posttest data in the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test shows a value of 0.012 (< 0.05) which means it is not normal, but in the Shapiro-Wilk test shows a value of 0.053 (> 0.05) which means it is normal. Therefore, because the data was found to be abnormal (pretest), the more appropriate nonparametric statistical test to use to test the research hypothesis is the Wilcoxon test.

Table 4. Statistical Test Results Paired Samples Statistics

	Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error
	Mean			
Pair 1 PRETEST	21.25	28	1.041	.197
POST TEST	27.43	28	1.731	.327

Table 5. Paired Sample Test

	Paired Differences					t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
	Mean	Std.Deviation	Std Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
				Lower	Upper			
Pair 1 Pretest- Posttest	-6.179	2.038	.385	-6.969	-5.388	-16.045	27	.000

Based on the paired statistical table above, it is known that the average pretest score is 21.25 with a standard deviation of 1.041, while the average posttest score is 27.43 with a standard deviation of 1.731. The number of subjects in this study was 28 children. From the results of the paired t-test, a significant value was obtained indicating a significant difference between the pretest and posttest results. The calculated t-value obtained was -16.045 with degrees of freedom (df) = 27. The significance value (2-tailed) showed a figure of 0.000 which means it is far below the 0.05 limit. Thus, the null hypothesis (H_0) is rejected and the alternative hypothesis (H_a) is accepted, which indicates that the Expression puzzle building block media has a significant effect on improving the emotional expression abilities of early childhood children.

In the posttest, the emotional expression skills of group A children after the application of the Expression Puzzle Building Block media experienced a significant increase compared to before the application. Children began to be able to demonstrate better observation skills, where they were able to show various basic emotional expressions such as happiness, sadness, anger, fear, and so on. In terms of the ability to collect data and information, children began to get used to expressing appropriate emotional expressions. Furthermore, the ability to show children's emotional expressions increased rapidly, as seen from their ability when the teacher showed one of the facial expression pictures, the children were able to name the emotions seen, such as happiness, sadness, anger, or fear. Some children were even able to imitate the facial expressions

accurately.

The findings of this study indicate that Expression puzzle building block media is effective in improving the emotional expression skills of early childhood. Research from Sriwijaya University by (Cantika & Ilhami, 2025b) proved that playing with picture puzzles had a significant effect on the emotional intelligence of early childhood, with a calculated t value $(5.25) > t$ table (1.74) . The study also concluded that playing puzzles not only develops emotional intelligence, but also cognitive aspects (symbolic thinking and problem-solving skills), fine motor skills (eye-hand coordination), and social aspects (overcoming shyness and fear). This finding is also supported by research (Asmarani et al., 2023) which states that the application of educational games with puzzle media has a significant effect on the emotional intelligence of early childhood, with a coefficient of determination of 56.5%. This means that puzzle media makes a significant contribution, namely more than half (56.5%), in developing children's ability to recognize and manage emotions. Furthermore, this research (Mubaroroh et al., 2023) also revealed that the emotion change puzzle game has a significant influence on children's development, especially in terms of improving children's visual-spatial intelligence through interactive play activities. The Expression puzzle building block media used in this study has similar characteristics, namely in the form of puzzle blocks with pictures of facial expressions (happy, angry, afraid) which allow children to manipulate and create expressions directly, thus developing not only emotional intelligence but also the child's visual-spatial aspects.

Theoretically, the results of this study support the theory of psychosocial development put forward by (Erikson, 1995b), especially in the initiative vs. guilt stage (ages 4-5 years). At this stage, children begin to show initiative through play, exploration, and interactions with others. Erikson explained that children in this phase learn to understand their own and others' feelings and begin to develop skills in regulating emotions. Expression puzzle building block media provides opportunities for children to take the initiative in recognizing and expressing emotions through play, thus aligning with Erikson's principles of child development. This finding is also relevant to research (Widya Nurfiani & Septi Purnama, 2026) who developed a Social Emotional Learning (SEL)-based Puzzle Expression Emotion media to improve students' emotional regulation. The results of the study showed that the puzzle expression media was effective in improving emotional regulation with a t -value of -14.411 and $p < 0.001$, and an N-Gain of 0.3761, which is included in the moderate category. This further strengthens the evidence that puzzle media based on emotional expression is effective in supporting children's social-emotional development. In addition, the study (Adiweni et al., 2022) Research on the use of puzzle media also found that puzzle media can improve children's social-emotional abilities, although specific strategies are required in its implementation. This finding indicates that Expression puzzle building block media is not only effective in general, but also requires the support of an active role of teachers in facilitating play activities so that children truly understand the meaning of each emotional expression learned.

In fact, this media has a high appeal among users, as seen from the large number of enthusiasts and the high sales figures for this product on the Shopee e-commerce platform, which reach an average of more than 10,000 units (Pramudiya et al., 2015b). This indicates that the

Expression puzzle building block media is not only visually appealing, but is also considered effective and beneficial in supporting children's learning process. Interest in this media was also observed during the learning process, where children showed great enthusiasm, were actively involved in activities, and more easily understood the concepts presented. Thus, based on the dialogue between research results, previous studies, and child development theory, it can be concluded that the Expression puzzle building block media has proven effective and is suitable for use as an alternative learning media to develop the emotional expression skills of early childhood, especially in the age range of 4-5 years.

CONCLUSION

Based on the recapitulation of pretest and posttest score data, all 28 children experienced an increase in their emotional expression ability scores after being given treatment. The average pretest score increased from 21.25 to 27.43 in the posttest, with an average increase of 7 points. The statistical test results showed a very significant difference ($t = -16.045$; $p < 0.001$). Thus, the Expression puzzle building block media was proven effective in improving the emotional expression ability of children aged 4-5 years at Hasyim Asy'ari Sambimulyo Kindergarten.

This study still has limitations, namely the study was only conducted on one group without a control class, so the effect of the media has not been compared with other learning media. The research subjects were also limited to one institution with a relatively small sample size, so the results cannot be generalized widely. Furthermore, this study only focused on children's emotional expression abilities within a certain period without measuring the long-term impact of using the Expression Puzzle Building Block media. Therefore, it is recommended for PAUD teachers to use media as an alternative learning introduction to emotional expression that is more innovative and fun in introducing emotional expression. For future researchers, it is recommended to involve a control group, expand the scope of subjects, and conduct further measurements to see the sustainability of the effects of using this media.

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