

CASE STUDY OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE INDEPENDENT CURRICULUM IN PUTRA KARYA MANDIRI KINDERGARTEN

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Abstract: This study aims to analyze the implementation of the Independent Curriculum in Putra Karya Mandiri Kindergarten (TK). The Independent Curriculum provides freedom for educational units to design learning that is more flexible and to children's characteristics. In Putra Karya Mandiri Kindergarten, the implementation of this curriculum focuses on the development of children's cognitive, motoric, social, and emotional aspects through a thematic learning approach based on direct experience. This study uses a qualitative descriptive approach by observing the learning process in the classroom, interviews with teachers, and documentation. The results of the survey show that despite challenges in terms of resources and facilities, the implementation of the Independent Curriculum in this kindergarten has succeeded in creating a more enjoyable and creative learning environment for children. Parental involvement in learning also positively contributes to the development of children's character. This study is expected to contribute to developing the Independent Curriculum at the early childhood education level and become a reference for more effective implementation in other educational institutions.

Keywords: Merdeka Curriculum and Early Childhood Education

Introduction

The Independent Curriculum is one of the educational innovations introduced by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology of the Republic of Indonesia in response to the need for more flexible and child-centered education. This curriculum has been implemented in stages since 2021 and continues to be covered at various levels of education, including Early Childhood Education (PAUD). The aim is to encourage learning that is more relevant to children's needs and to develop children's potential holistically. According to data from the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology (2023), as many as 80% of educational units, including PAUD, have begun to adopt the Independent Curriculum in their learning process. However, its implementation in the field shows significant challenges. One of the main challenges is the lack of educators' in-depth understanding of the concept of the independent curriculum and the implementation of project-based learning practices by the characteristics of early childhood.

Putra Karya Mandiri Kindergarten is one of the educational institutions that implement an independent curriculum to improve the quality of early childhood learning. However, the implementation in this educational unit faces similar challenges to those faced by many other PAUD institutions, namely differences in teacher understanding levels, limited learning resources that support an exploration-based approach, and a lack of evaluation that is by the principles of formative assessment emphasized in the independent curriculum.

Previous research shows that the implementation of the independent curriculum in PAUD has not been fully optimal. A study conducted by Hasanah (2021) revealed that many educational institutions still tend to use conventional teacher-centered learning methods, even though the principles of the independent curriculum encourage child-centered learning with a more interactive and contextual approach. Likewise, research by Wijaya (2020) found that the assessments applied in the independent curriculum often do not fully reflect the learning process that occurs, but only focus on the final learning outcomes. The shortcomings in previous research include aspects of the methods and populations used. Most studies emphasize primary and secondary education levels, while the implementation of the Independent Curriculum at the PAUD level has not been explored in depth. This study will fill the existing gap by conducting a more focused analysis of the implementation of the Independent Curriculum at Putra Karya Mandiri Kindergarten.

The main objective of this study is to analyze the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in Putra Karya Mandiri Kindergarten in-depth, identify obstacles faced in implementation, and formulate solutions that can improve the effectiveness of the implementation of this curriculum. The benefits that can be obtained from this study include improving the quality of learning at the PAUD level, developing teacher professionalism, and creating a learning environment that better supports optimal child development. This study is expected to be a reference in efforts to improve the quality of early childhood education in Indonesia, especially in the context of implementing a more inclusive and child-centered Merdeka Curriculum.

Literature Review

The curriculum is one of the important components in education as a reference that is used as a reference by education managers and organizers (Nurzannah and Harfiani, R, 2019). The curriculum changes that occur are the result of an evaluation of the implementation of the previous curriculum and of course will have advantages and disadvantages. Curriculum improvements need to be carried out continuously along with the development of knowledge and technology (Istiqomah, L, 2016; Awwalina, V.F, et al., 2024) Since the 2019 Covid pandemic, the government has implemented a new policy in the use of the curriculum, namely the 2013 curriculum, emergency curriculum and independent curriculum (Fitriyah and Wardani, 2022).

The Independent Curriculum is a learning concept applied in Indonesia to provide more flexibility in the teaching and learning process. This curriculum was launched by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology in 2022, with a primary focus on achieving competency and developing children's character through learning that is more relevant and by the needs and interests of children by the 5 principles or often referred to as the Pancasila student profile (Safitri, et al., 2022; Anwar, 2021; Indarta, 2022). The Merdeka Curriculum gives teachers and children the freedom to adjust teaching methods and materials to local needs, potential, and conditions. One of its main goals is to create a learning process that is more enjoyable, active, and based on children's needs.

In early childhood, the independent curriculum is a foundation phase, namely the phase that becomes the first foothold for children in the world of education and its purpose is to facilitate optimal child growth and development, which is not only ready to go to school, but more ready to take their journey in developing and playing a role in the child's future in the future. In this phase, children are taught religious values and morals as a basis for behavior. Religious values must be taught from an early age and it has been proven that children who attend early childhood education have better values and advantages in

elementary school in the field of religion than children who do not attend PAUD at all (Masitah & Setiawan, 2017). Not only religious values and morals, but the independent curriculum also develops reasoning and critical thinking. The implementation of the independent curriculum focuses on character formation, development of children's potential, and achievement of basic competencies through direct experience, exploration, and activity-based learning. The Independent Curriculum for early childhood emphasizes the importance of developing children's character holistically, which includes cognitive, motor, social, and emotional aspects. This approach gives educators the freedom to develop teaching materials that are more oriented toward experience-based learning, games, and exploration. In this context, children are allowed to learn through fun activities that are appropriate to their age. Not only focusing on achieving academic competence but also on the formation of social and moral values that are important for their lives.

The main principle of the independent curriculum is more diverse and more optimal extracurricular learning by emphasizing the understanding of concepts and skills that can be used in real life. This approach also requires the active involvement of children in the learning process and pays attention to the diversity of potential of each individual. In its implementation, the Independent Curriculum provides a choice between the standard curriculum and a more flexible curriculum, known as the Independent Learning Curriculum. In other words, each educational unit can choose a path that suits the characteristics of the child and the educational environment (Yuris & Raniyah, 2022).

The main characteristics of the independent curriculum are project-based learning, focusing on literacy and numeracy, and flexibility because learning involves local context and content (Hartono, et al. 2022). Learning is more child-centered where children are directly involved in connecting with the real situation so that children can solve their own problems and gain direct experience. This is successful if teachers can understand the meaning and purpose of the independent curriculum.

One of the main challenges is the readiness of teachers to adopt this new approach. Teachers are expected to have the ability to design learning that suits the characteristics of children and their environment. Therefore, training and professional development for teachers is very important. Teachers have a very important role in the success of the curriculum that is being implemented so that it runs well and according to expectations (Rasmani, et al., 2023; Jannah, MM and Harun, 2023, Anwar, R.N, 2022). In the independent curriculum, teachers are expected to be able to explore various potentials and develop these potentials so that children have better reasoning and thinking skills (Rahmadayanti & Hartoto, 2022).

Method

This research is a qualitative descriptive study with a case study approach. The case study approach is an in-depth and focused study to understand a particular phenomenon, event, or situation in its original context. Case studies examine integrated systems, such as programs, activities, events, or groups of people in certain conditions or circumstances. The research was conducted at Putra Karya Mandiri Kindergarten Medan. The data collection process was carried out by conducting observations and in-depth interviews with teachers and principals. The data collected was then analyzed and described by examining the content and meaning contained in each source studied. This analysis process was carried out by grouping data that had similar topics or problems so that comprehensive conclusions could be drawn regarding the implementation of the Independent Curriculum at Putra Karya Mandiri Kindergarten. Through this method, the research not only revealed the theory

underlying the Independent Curriculum but was also able to identify gaps in the application of the concept in the field, which became the basis for recommendations for improving the quality of education at the PAUD level.

Result and Discussion

Based on the results of observations and interviews, there are visible differences in learning before implementing the independent curriculum and after implementing the independent curriculum. Although not yet complete, Putra Karya Mandiri Kindergarten has started to use the independent curriculum slowly. The Principal and all teachers have attended many socializations in the implementation of the independent curriculum. Starting from learning planning, learning implementation, and learning evaluation.

Learning planning at Putra Karya Mandiri Kindergarten begins with an analysis of the needs and environment around the school. Teachers prepare teaching modules according to the KOSP which has been described through Learning Outcomes and Learning Objective Flow. Teachers are given the freedom to design teaching modules, which are adjusted to the stages of child development. Some teaching modules still use the themes stated in the RPPH. Teachers also plan P5 projects using the “Theme: I Love the Earth” because of the flood that has just been experienced by several children at home.

The learning process of Putra Karya Mandiri Kindergarten begins to be child-centered. Not tied to learning with paper and working on LKS but more playing using nature as part of learning. Children learn while playing using materials available around them (loose parts) and interact more with their peers. Learning at Putra Karya Mandiri Kindergarten starts at 08.00 - 11.00 WIB. In the initial activities, children are given the habit of praying, singing, affirmations, and motivation. Then the core activities are adjusted to the teaching modules that have been made. Play activities are based on topics that have been agreed upon between the teacher and the children the previous day. Before entering intracurricular activities, the teacher makes a class agreement to teach a sense of responsibility. The teacher gives children the opportunity to gather information, reason, imagine, and communicate with their friends. Children are also given the freedom to develop their ideas and thoughts in which the teacher acts as a facilitator in this process. After all activities are carried out, it is continued with rest and eating. Closing activities are carried out after the rest activities which contain recalling and discussing the activities of the day to trigger children's memories of the activities that have been carried out. Here, children are also given the freedom to present their work or tell about their play activities that are done alternately and give other children the opportunity to ask questions when a friend comes forward when presenting their results. The teacher also reflects with the children about the positive things that have been done that day. Then the teacher invites the children to discuss the activities tomorrow that the children want to do and continues with praying after studying.

Learning evaluation is carried out using three assessments, namely diagnostic assessment, summative assessment, and formative assessment. The assessment is carried out through a question-and-answer process, observation, interviews, anecdotal notes, portfolios, checklists, and work results.

At Putra Karya Mandiri Kindergarten (TK), the implementation of the independent curriculum prioritizes a more flexible approach and is based on the potential and development of children, to improve the quality of early childhood learning. Putra Karya Mandiri Kindergarten is one of the early childhood education institutions that strives to implement an independent curriculum by adapting a more creative learning approach. Prioritizing the principle of learning based on experience and play activities children are

expected to be able to learn through direct exploration, observation, and interaction with the surrounding environment, which are methods that have been proven effective for early childhood development.

In addition, the use of technology in learning has also begun to be introduced at Putra Karya Mandiri Kindergarten, although it is still in a limited stage. The use of digital aids such as educational videos and story-based or picture-based learning applications helps children to be more interested and enthusiastic in learning. This technology does not replace the role of physical play or social interaction but functions as a tool that supports a more interesting and varied learning process (Azri & Raniyah, 2024; Monalisa. & Irfan, A. 2023). Although the independent curriculum provides greater freedom for teachers in designing learning, its implementation is not without challenges.

One of the main challenges faced by Putra Karya Mandiri Kindergarten is the lack of adequate resources, both in terms of facilities and trained educators. Improving the quality of educator and education personnel management requires technical training in organizing the administration of learning in early childhood education institutions so that the services of educators and education personnel will be of higher quality and will be more optimal according to community expectations (JF, N.Z., & Latif, M.A. 2020). Although all teachers have received training on the independent curriculum, it is necessary to undergo ongoing training and professional development. As stated by Lestari, M, et al. (2024) many teachers feel the need to receive effective training and greater support so that the independent curriculum can run well. In addition, there are challenges in terms of meeting the need for teaching materials that are by the principles of experience-based learning. At Putra Karya Mandiri Kindergarten, project-based learning or direct activities require more diverse teaching materials and resources, which can involve natural materials or teaching aids that are not always available. Therefore, greater support is needed from the government and related parties to provide facilities and teaching materials that support the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum at the kindergarten level.

Conclusion

Based on the discussion above, it can be concluded that the independent curriculum at Putra Karya Mandiri Kindergarten has begun to implement the independent curriculum well. Starting with learning planning, the learning process and evaluation carried out have followed the rules in implementing the independent curriculum. Although there are limitations in terms of resources and facilities, this policy provides space for teachers to be more creative in designing activities that are relevant to children's lives. So that support is needed from the government and related parties, it is hoped that the Independent Curriculum can continue to be implemented more effectively, providing sustainable benefits in creating more equitable and quality education in Indonesia.

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