



## Progressivism Learning Management in Early Childhood Education: A Strategy for Developing Independence and Creativity in Early Childhood

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### Abstract

This study examines the implementation of progressivism-based learning management as a strategic approach to developing independence and creativity in early childhood within PAUD institutions in Tulang Bawang. Using a qualitative case study design, data were collected through participatory observation, in-depth interviews with principals and teachers, and documentation analysis. The findings reveal that learning management grounded in progressivism principles—child-centered planning, experiential implementation, and authentic evaluation—effectively fosters children’s autonomy and creative capacity. Planning is characterized by flexible, interest-driven curriculum design that integrates local cultural elements, while classroom practices emphasize open-ended exploration, project-based activities, and facilitative teacher–child interactions. Evaluation shifts from product-oriented assessment to continuous, process-focused documentation through portfolios and learning stories. The integration of local materials and cultural context enriches learning experiences, demonstrating that progressivism can be adapted meaningfully in rural settings with limited resources. This study contributes to theoretical and practical insights by providing a holistic model of progressive learning management and highlighting the symbiotic relationship between independence and creativity. Despite challenges related to teacher understanding and facility limitations, strong stakeholder commitment supports sustainable implementation. These findings offer a contextual model that can be adopted by other regions aiming to advance progressive early childhood education aligned with local values.

**Keywords:** Progressivism, Learning Management, Early Childhood Education, Independence, Creativity

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### INTRODUCTION

Early Childhood Education (PAUD) plays a role as a foundation critical that builds the entire development of a child's potential (Katz, 1993), where independence and creativity emerge as two competencies essential that will prepare them to face challenge 21st century (Fisher et al., 2013). Early childhood is period golden age where the child's brain develops very rapidly ( Bodrova & Leong, 2007), so that the experiences and stimulation received in this phase will determine the quality of their subsequent development (Laevers, 2005). Independence includes the ability to take initiative, complete simple tasks, and solve problems, will form Power resilience and responsibility (Dweck, 2006). Meanwhile,

creativity, which is not just ability art but capacity think to generate original ideas and connect seemingly unrelated concepts, to become root from innovation ( Glăveanu, 2013).

early childhood is ability to produce original and meaningful ideas, methods or products according to the level of development (Craft, 2002). In contrast to creativity in adults, which often structured, children's creativity actually emerges through exploration free, imaginative, and spontaneous play processes (Howard-Jones et al., 2002). Characteristics Children's creativity is seen when they are able to change beam wood become palace, drawing the sun in purple, or creating a fantasy story about talking animals (Isbell & Yoshizawa, 2016). The development of creativity during this period is important, because become foundation for ability think divergent, namely the ability to see many possible solutions from one problem (Runco & Acar, 2012). Creative children will not only become innovators in the future (Kim, 2011), but also more adaptive in facing change because accustomed to seeking various alternative solutions to problems ( Beghetto & Kaufman, 2014). This creative process also trains ability cognitive, emotional, and social at the same time, where children learn to express feelings, develop self- confidence yourself, and collaborate with friends peers ( Garaigordobil & Berruero, 2011 ). Supportive environment children's creativity is what gives chance explore without fear of making mistakes, providing curiosity - provoking materials, as well give freedom of expression (Amabile, 2018). The role of educators and parents is not teach creativity, but rather facilitate by providing space and time to experiment, ask open questions, and appreciate every process that the child goes through rather than just demanding perfect results (Leggett, 2017).

These two competencies are becoming increasingly necessary considering that the complex challenges in the 21st century, such as technological disruption and global problems that require creative solutions (Brooks & Beghetto, 2021), as well as the dynamics of very rapid change that demands ability adaptation and learning independence throughout lifelong learning (Trilling & Fadel, 2009). In this context, effective PAUD does not only focus on knowledge academic only, but also in instilling the basics of character and ability think that will making children into independent, resilient, adaptive, and innovative individuals in the future (Hattie, 2009). Independence allows children to believe in themselves. self-reliance in taking initiatives (Mulligan & Mitchelmore, 2009), while creativity plays a role as a motor of innovation (Sawyer, 2012). However, the reality in the field often shows that conventional learning practices are teacher- centered and instructive precisely limit exploration space and turn off Power creation natural child (Pianta et al., 2009). This rigid and uniform approach is considered not enough give opportunities for children to learn through direct experience (Hargreaves, 2012).

Based on the problems above, the philosophy of progressivism initiated by John Dewey offers a relevant perspective emphasizing student- centered, active, experiential, and real -life learning (Dewey, 1938). The application of progressivism principles to learning management includes planning, implementation, and evaluation (Siraj-Blatchford et al., 2002) are believed to be can create strategic learning environment to shape children into learners independent and creative (Edwards et al., 2011). District Context Tulang Bawang with its commitment advance education area, become an appropriate locus for study. Although interest in innovative methods at the Tulang Bawang PAUD Institution is starting to grow, there has been no research that specifically study implementation progressive learning management in early childhood education along with its impact in the area Tulang Bawang. Therefore, this research was conducted to fill this gap.

However, based on an analysis of previous research, several relevant studies exist, albeit with different focuses and contexts. Sari and Pratiwi's 2020 study on the implementation of a centered learning approach at Khalifah Kindergarten in Sukoharjo demonstrated that a play-based approach successfully fosters children's creativity through freedom of exploration (Sari & Pratiwi, 2020). Hidayat and Fauzi's 2021 study on project-

based learning management at the Laboratory Kindergarten at Malang State University demonstrated the method's effectiveness in fostering children's independence through planning and self-evaluation (Hidayat & Fauzi, 2021). Meanwhile, Wijayanti and Kurniawan's 2019 study on the Reggio Emilia approach in Jakarta demonstrated a significant increase in creativity through the creation of an aesthetic learning environment (Wijayanti & Kurniawan, 2019). Similarities with the Tulang Bawang study lie in the focus on developing independence and creativity as primary outcomes (Besançon & Lubart, 2008), the application of a child-centered approach (Berger & Hänze, 2015), and the use of qualitative methods (Creswell & Poth, 2018). However, there are fundamental differences that indicate a research gap. Previous studies were conducted in urban areas with leading educational institutions (e.g., Sari & Pratiwi, 2020), while this study focuses on the unique context of Tulang Bawang, which may have different socio-cultural characteristics.

Previous research has only discussed specific methods (such as centered or project-based learning), while this study comprehensively analyzes progressive learning management systems, from planning to evaluation (Siraj-Blatchford et al., 2002). Another difference lies in the explicit philosophical foundation of progressivism (Dewey, 1938), which has not been apparent in previous research. This research gap primarily concerns three aspects: first, the contextual aspect, where no similar research has examined the implementation of progressivism in areas such as Tulang Bawang. Second, the conceptual aspect, where previous research has focused only on specific methods, not the complete management system. Third, the philosophical aspect, where progressivism as a philosophical foundation has not been explicitly stated in previous research. Therefore, the proposed research is not merely a replication, but rather an effort to refine and contextualize previous findings with a more comprehensive and specific approach tailored to the characteristics of Tulang Bawang.

## **METHOD**

This research uses a qualitative approach with a case study to gain an in-depth understanding of the implementation of progressivism learning management in a real-life context at Tulang Bawang Early Childhood Education (PAUD), as recommended in contemporary qualitative research approaches (Creswell & Poth, 2022). This approach was chosen because it allows for a holistic exploration of phenomena from the perspective of participants, thus uncovering the meanings, practices, and experiences related to strategies for developing children's independence and creativity. The subjects in this study included principals, teachers, and students at three selected PAUDs, with subject selection carried out using purposive sampling based on the criteria of teachers actively involved in progressive learning. The research object focuses on progressivism learning management, which encompasses three main aspects: learning planning, learning implementation, and learning evaluation, as well as its impact on children's independence and creativity. To obtain comprehensive and valid data, data collection techniques used triangulation, including participant observation to directly observe the learning process, in-depth interviews with principals and teachers to explore their understanding and experiences, and documentation studies to collect supporting data from documents such as Daily Learning Implementation Plans and children's work.

Data analysis was conducted using the interactive qualitative data analysis technique of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2022), which includes three stages of activities: data reduction by systematically organizing data, data presentation in the form of matrices and narrative descriptions, and drawing conclusions that were verified during the research. Data validity was checked through triangulation of sources and methods, extended participation in the field, member checking ( member checking). checking ) by involving participants to validate data, as well as peer review debriefing ) by discussing the interim findings with colleagues or experts. This research was conducted in accordance with the

principles of research ethics including obtaining informed consent. consent from all participants, ensuring confidentiality of identity by using pseudonyms, and being honest and respecting the socio-cultural values that apply at the research location.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Results**

The findings of this study reveal a comprehensive overview of the implementation of progressivism learning management in three selected early childhood education institutions in Tulang Bawang. The results are presented in accordance with the research questions, which focus on planning, implementation, evaluation, and supporting and inhibiting factors.

#### ***Learning Planning Based on Progressivism Principles***

of progressivism principles through the development of a child-centered curriculum. Conventional, rigid, and uniform learning planning mechanisms underwent a fundamental transformation. Instead of following a standardized guidebook or syllabus, teachers at Tulang Bawang Early Childhood Education (PAUD) began the planning process with in-depth observations of children's interests, questions, and spontaneous behavior during free play. Data from these observations then became the foundation for designing weekly or monthly learning themes. For example, if many children expressed interest in insects they encountered in the schoolyard, the theme "The World of Insects" could be developed, with sub-themes and activities designed based on their curiosity. This process reflected a key principle of progressivism : that learning should stem from students' real-life experiences and interests.

Significant adaptations are also evident in the structure and nature of the planning document itself. The Daily Learning Implementation Plan (RPPH) is no longer a closed instructional scenario that teachers must follow step by step. It has become a flexible map of possibilities or framework. Within it, teachers prepare various learning activities. Activity centers or corners—such as the art corner, science corner, construction corner, and role-playing corner—are equipped with various materials, primarily natural materials and the local context of Tulang Bawang. This flexibility allows 70 percent of the activities to be dynamically modified mid-learning, based on new responses and directions from the children. This demonstrates a shift from the teacher's role as a curriculum deliverer to an architect of a responsive learning environment.

The integration of local Tulang Bawang cultural and environmental elements into the curriculum is the most concrete and contextual adaptation of progressivism. Progressivism emphasizes learning that is relevant to students' lives. Therefore, materials such as banana leaves, coconut fronds, local clay, regional woven motifs, or local folklore are utilized not only as media but also as learning subjects themselves. The hands-on principle Learning through direct experience is realized by allowing children to manipulate, experiment, and create with these materials, which are far more meaningful to them than uniform, manufactured props. This planning process is collaborative and reflective. Teachers do not work in isolation but often discuss planning sessions together to share observational findings and activity ideas. They also intentionally plan for "white space" in the schedule, that is, time that is not strictly scheduled to allow for spontaneous projects initiated by children.

All institutions use thematic planning that integrates elements of Tulang Bawang's local culture, with 85% of teachers developing weekly lesson plans that incorporate children's interests observed during free play sessions. Planning documents demonstrate flexibility, allowing 70% of learning activities to be modified based on children's interests and daily needs. Teachers act as facilitators by setting up various learning centers, including natural materials exploration areas and local craft stations reflecting Tulang Bawang's cultural heritage.

### ***Implementation of Progressive Learning***

The implementation phase revealed several key findings regarding the development of independence and creativity. Through a project-based learning approach, children demonstrated increased autonomy in selecting activities (87% of observed children demonstrated initiative in selecting activities). The study documented significant development of creativity through open-ended activities, with children producing original artwork using local materials. Environmental design emerged as a key factor, with classrooms organized into learning centers that encouraged exploration and independent decision-making. Teacher-child interactions shifted from directive to facilitative, with questioning techniques that stimulated critical thinking observed in 78% of teacher-child interactions. In the implementation phase, the application of progressivism principles manifested itself in lively classroom dynamics centered on child agency. The 87% of children who demonstrated initiative in selecting activities is not merely a statistic, but a tangible demonstration of growing independence. This autonomy emerged because the learning structure provided real choice, not the illusion of choice. Children not only chose from teacher-prescribed activities, but often proposed, modified, or even redesigned project activities based on their own interests. For example, in the "School Garden" project, children are not only given the task of watering the garden, but also participate in discussions about selecting plant species, designing planting patterns, and creating maintenance schedules. This process fosters a sense of ownership and responsibility, which are the foundation for independence.

Significant developments in creativity are evident in the way children utilize local materials. Creativity here is not measured by the uniform beauty of the final result, but by the originality of the process and the resulting product. The use of natural materials such as dried leaves, seeds, clay, and natural fibers opens up endless possibilities for experimentation. A child might see a twig not as trash, but as a pole for an imaginary tent or a paintbrush. Open-ended activities without step-by-step instructions force children to think divergently: "What can I do with this?" The result is highly personal and diverse artwork, where each piece tells the story of each child's unique exploration and discovery.

The design of the physical environment has proven to be a highly effective third teacher. Classrooms organized into learning centers—such as an art center, a science center, a block center, and a literacy center—create an environment that invites exploration. Each center is designed with attractively displayed and easily accessible materials, allowing children to independently select areas of interest, retrieve materials, begin activities, and put them away. This arrangement directly fosters independent decision-making and self-management. Flexible spaces and open-ended materials ) sends a powerful message to children that they are in control of their own learning. The most profound transformation occurs in the patterns of teacher-child interactions. The shift from a directive approach ("Do it like this") to a facilitative one ("How do you think it would work?") changes the entire learning climate. Questioning techniques that encourage critical thinking, observed in 78% of interactions, become a catalyst for the development of independence and creativity. Teachers ask more open-ended questions such as, "What would happen if...?", "How could you solve this problem?", or "What other ideas do you have?" Rather than providing answers, teachers guide children to find their own solutions. These interactions build not only cognitive abilities but also children's confidence that their ideas and abilities are valuable.

This implementation phase demonstrates that autonomy and creativity are not separate competencies, but interconnected and mutually reinforcing within a progressive learning ecosystem. Purposefully designed environments, stimulating materials, and facilitative teacher interactions create a virtuous cycle : autonomy provides space for creativity to flourish, and successfully expressing that creativity further strengthens children's intrinsic motivation and independence. These findings demonstrate that when

children are given the right trust, space, and support, they naturally develop into independent learners and innovative creators.

### ***Evaluation System***

The evaluation system implemented in progressivism learning at Tulang Bawang Early Childhood Education (PAUD) has undergone a fundamental transformation, moving from a conventional assessment model focused on products and outcomes to a holistic and ongoing, authentic assessment. The evaluation process is no longer considered a separate activity at the end of the learning period, but is instead organically integrated into every moment of children's interaction and exploration. This is reflected in the use of diverse assessment methods, including portfolio documentation, learning stories, and more. stories ), and anecdotal notes form the main backbone. A portfolio not only collects a child's best work, but also chronologically records the entire learning process—from initial sketches, experiments, and revisions—so that the development of a child's mindset, perseverance, and creativity can be clearly monitored.

The implementation of a continuous observation system by 92% of teachers was key to the success of this evaluation. Teachers acted as researchers in the classroom, intentionally and systematically observing, recording, and reflecting on children's behavior, conversations, and interactions in a natural setting. These detailed developmental notes were not numbers or scores, but rather narrative descriptions rich in context. For example, instead of giving a "B" for fine motor skills, the teacher documented: "Today, Rafa successfully cut along a curved line for the first time with focus for 10 minutes. He smiled proudly and showed his work to his friends." This approach allowed for a deep focus on process evaluation, where the child's effort, strategies, resilience, and metacognitive development were valued more than the perfection of the final product.

This emphasis on process aligns with the philosophy of progressivism, which views learning as a dynamic journey. Evaluation does not aim to compare one child with another ( assessment). of learning ), but more to understand and support each child's learning process ( assessment for learning ). Teachers use data from observations and portfolios to plan the next intervention or challenge that is appropriate to the zone. of proximal Each child's development. Thus, evaluation serves as a pedagogical compass that guides subsequent learning steps, making it truly responsive to individual needs. The collaborative aspect of evaluation is strengthened through active parental involvement. This involvement is facilitated through weekly sharing sessions and structured portfolio discussions. In these sessions, parents do not simply receive passive reports but are invited to become partners in interpreting their child's learning story. Through portfolios containing photos, short videos, the child's work, and teacher notes, parents can directly see evidence of their child's development in a meaningful context. The dialogue between teachers and parents shifts from discussing "what the child can't yet do" to discussing "what interests, strengths, and learning processes the child is developing." This practice not only increases transparency but also builds a strong partnership between school and home, creating a consistent, supportive ecosystem for the development of independence and creativity in children.

### **Discussion**

These findings demonstrate that progressivism learning management effectively serves as a strategy for developing independence and creativity in early childhood in the Tulang Bawang context. This study revealed that integrating local cultural elements with a progressive approach creates meaningful learning experiences that value local wisdom while fostering 21st-century skills. The results of the planning phase align with Dewey's principles of experiential education, where the lesson plan serves as a flexible guide rather than a rigid script. These findings support previous research by Sari and Pratiwi (2020) on the importance of play-based learning, while extending it through the integration of local cultural elements in Tulang Bawang, which makes learning more contextual and

meaningful. In practice, the development of independence through activity choices and self-directed learning confirms the findings of Hidayat and Fauzi (2021) regarding project-based learning. However, this study provides deeper insights into how environmental design specifically supports the development of autonomy in a rural educational context. The observed development of creativity through open-ended activities using local materials demonstrates the effectiveness of integrating a progressive approach with locally available resources.

The evaluation system findings challenge conventional assessment practices in early childhood education. The portfolio-based, authentic assessment approach successfully documented children's developmental progress while upholding the principles of progressive education. This addresses the gap identified in previous studies regarding the lack of a comprehensive evaluation system in the implementation of progressive learning. The identified enabling and inhibiting factors provide practical insights for education policy development. The finding of strong leadership support demonstrates the importance of principal engagement in educational innovation, while teacher training needs highlight areas for professional development investment.

Compared with previous studies conducted in urban settings, this study reveals that the implementation of progressivism in Tulang Bawang requires adaptation to local resources and cultural contexts. The successful use of natural and local materials demonstrates that progressive education can be implemented effectively regardless of geographic location or resource constraints. This study contributes to the theoretical understanding of progressivism implementation by explicitly linking philosophical principles with practical management aspects. The comprehensive approach encompassing planning, implementation, and evaluation provides a holistic model that can be adapted by other regions with similar characteristics. These findings have significant implications for early childhood education policy, suggesting the need for curriculum flexibility, teacher professional development in progressive approaches, and assessment system reform. This study provides a concrete example of how progressivism principles can be translated into daily classroom activities that effectively develop children's independence and creativity.

Based on the results and discussion, this study yields several significant innovations. First, contextually, the study successfully demonstrates that the principles of progressivism can be effectively adapted in areas such as Tulang Bawang by utilizing local resources and wisdom as the core of the curriculum. This finding offers a contextual model relevant to other regions in Indonesia with similar characteristics. Second, conceptually, this study explicitly integrates progressivism as a philosophical foundation for analyzing the entire learning management system holistically, from dynamic planning, facilitative implementation, to authentic evaluation. Third, the research's empirical findings reveal a symbiotic relationship between independence and creativity in progressive learning environments. The data show that autonomy in choosing activities creates space for creativity to flourish, and successful creative expression in turn strengthens children's independence. Fourth, this study presents a practical and empowering authentic evaluation model, where portfolios and narrative records serve not only as assessment tools but also as a medium for building partnerships between teachers and parents. The finding that 92% of teachers consistently documented progress demonstrates the sustainability of this model in practice.

## **CONCLUSION**

The progressivism learning management implemented at the Tulang Bawang Early Childhood Education Institution has proven effective as a strategy for developing independence and creativity in early childhood. The success of this approach lies in the integration of progressive principles with local cultural elements, child-centered planning, facilitative implementation, and authentic evaluation. Despite challenges in teacher

understanding and limited facilities, strong commitment from education stakeholders and the richness of local resources provide a solid foundation for sustainable development. This study offers a comprehensive model that can be adapted by other regions seeking to implement progressive education while maintaining local cultural relevance.

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