



Implementation of the Independent Curriculum for Early Childhood at SPS Permata Hati Bekasi

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Abstract

This study analyzed the implementation of the Independent Curriculum (Kurikulum Merdeka) in Early Childhood Education (PAUD) at SPS Permata Hati Bekasi. Using a descriptive qualitative approach with a case study design, the research explored several key aspects, including curriculum planning, implementation strategies, challenges encountered, and the resulting impact on teaching and learning. The findings indicated that the planning stage was carried out thoroughly, with the school successfully developing relevant learning programs and aligning activities with the principles of the Independent Curriculum. Despite this strong planning, the actual implementation did not reach its full potential. Teachers relied heavily on traditional, teacher-centered methods, which limited the effectiveness of student-centered learning approaches. As a result, some students experienced confusion, and the intended learning outcomes of the curriculum were not fully realized. The study highlighted the importance of enhancing pedagogical strategies that prioritized active student engagement, providing continuous professional development and training for teachers, and optimizing the use of diverse learning resources. By addressing these areas, the school could better achieve the objectives of the Independent Curriculum, fostering more meaningful and effective learning experiences for young children.

Keywords: Independent Curriculum, Early Childhood Education, SPS Permata Hati, Bekasi.

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INTRODUCTION

Early childhood education (PAUD) is a crucial stage in laying the foundation for children's physical, cognitive, socio-emotional, and spiritual development. Comprehensive efforts are required to ensure that these developmental milestones are achieved successfully (Talango, 2020). The period of rapid growth, often called the "golden age," is particularly significant as it determines the trajectory of a child's future development (Indrawari et al., 2021).

Cognitive development, according to Piaget (Mu'min, 2013), progresses through four main stages that emphasize the quality of thought. Lev Vygotsky, on the other hand, highlights that children learn effectively through guidance from adults or more knowledgeable peers. Through collaboration, communication, and participation in social

activities, children internalize knowledge, tools, and values from their environment (Telaumbanua, 2024).

Emotional intelligence (EQ) is another essential component of early development. Daniel Goleman emphasizes that EQ significantly influences children's social interactions and emotional stability (Chintya & Sit, 2024). A holistic approach in early childhood education, integrating cognitive, social, and emotional aspects, has been shown to enhance school readiness, reduce behavioral problems, and improve long-term academic outcomes (Jones, Grandberg, & Crowley, as cited in Arisanti, Wahyudi, & Muttaqin, 2024).

The Independent Curriculum (Kurikulum Merdeka), launched by the Indonesian Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology in 2022, represents a paradigm shift toward student-centered learning. It implements differentiated instruction and Teaching at the Right Level (TARL) with simpler and more holistic learning outcomes (Jayanti, Suprijono, & Jacky, 2023). Following Ki Hajar Dewantara's philosophy, the curriculum emphasizes holistic education that develops cognitive skills, global competencies, Pancasila-aligned behavior (Profil Pelajar Pancasila), and lifelong learning (Yulianto, 2024).

The primary goal of the Independent Curriculum is to foster children's independent thinking, beginning with teacher autonomy in planning and delivering instruction. It provides space for teachers to address and solve learning challenges, encourages flexibility in instructional approaches, and positions teachers as creative and adaptive facilitators (Mulyasa, 2023; Widiatmika, 2019). This approach emphasizes child-centered learning, such as project-based and exploratory activities. However, differences between the Independent Curriculum and the 2013 Curriculum remain significant in terms of competency frameworks, curriculum structure, teaching methods, assessments, and supporting materials (Mawardini & Sajjad, 2023).

At SPS Permata Hati Bekasi, the Independent Curriculum is implemented to create a rich learning environment where children engage in project-based activities, educational games, and hands-on exploration. The aim is to develop children who are academically capable while also nurturing emotional intelligence and strong character. The Standard of Child Development Achievement Level (STPPA) guides teachers to ensure each learner develops into a well-rounded and competent individual with strong character (Hawali et al., 2024).

The curriculum allows teachers to adapt learning materials to students' interests and needs. The inclusion of thematic projects strengthens the Profil Pelajar Pancasila and provides students with ample time to master concepts and competencies without being restricted by rigid subject boundaries (Hehakaya & Pollatu, 2022). By creating an inclusive and flexible learning environment, the curriculum also integrates contextual factors such as culture, school vision, and individual student needs (Nursalam, Sulaeman, & Latuapo, 2023).

Successful implementation of the curriculum requires strong support from both central and regional government authorities, including adequate financial and material resources (Hilmin, Novianti, & Nafisah, 2022). School leaders play a pivotal role in providing vision, motivation, and inspiration to teachers, staff, students, and parents, thereby fostering a collaborative and conducive environment for learning (Supardi et al., 2024). Teachers, as classroom leaders, are responsible for creating interactive, personalized, and student-focused learning experiences (Sahrandi & Bahri, 2023).

Preliminary observations at SPS Permata Hati Bekasi indicate that, although the curriculum structure aligns with its intended design, challenges remain in adaptation and implementation by teachers. Many educators still rely on teacher-centered methods, dominating lessons through lectures, demonstrations, one-way questioning, and rigid assignments. This approach limits students' exploration, collaboration, creativity, and critical thinking, and reduces the meaningfulness of learning experiences while hindering social and emotional development.

Previous studies also support these findings. Research on the Independent Curriculum includes analyses of overall implementation across educational levels (Ramadan, Imam, & Tabroni, 2020), strengthening learning committees in PAUD settings (Munawar, 2022), improving teachers' pedagogical competence (Mufidah, 2024), project-based learning management (Rasmani et al., 2023), and the effects of project-based learning models in PAUD units (Shalehah, 2023). Together, these studies highlight the promise of the Independent Curriculum while underscoring the critical role of teachers in bridging the gap between curriculum policy and classroom practice, ensuring that children achieve their full potential.

METHOD

The study employs a descriptive qualitative research design with a case study approach, following the methodology outlined by Creswell and Poth (2018) and Yin (2018) for understanding complex phenomena within real-life contexts. The research focuses on gaining a deep understanding of the experiences and processes involved in implementing the Independent Curriculum at SPS Permata Hati Bekasi. The objective is to obtain a holistic and comprehensive perspective on curriculum implementation from the viewpoints of directly involved parties, including the principal and teachers.

The data collected include information on curriculum planning, implementation, evaluation, challenges encountered, and strategies to overcome these challenges in the Independent Curriculum implementation. Data are descriptive and consist of narratives, field notes, interview transcripts, and relevant documents (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Data collection techniques include participatory observation, in which the researcher is directly involved in learning activities to observe teacher-child interactions (Patton, 2015). Semi-structured interviews are conducted with the principal and teachers to gather insights on their experiences, perceptions, and strategies in implementing the curriculum (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015).

In addition, relevant documents such as lesson plans (RPP), teaching modules, and other instructional materials related to the implementation of the Independent Curriculum at SPS Permata Hati Bekasi are collected and analyzed (Bowen, 2009). Document analysis allows researchers to triangulate data from observations and interviews, ensuring credibility and completeness of the findings.

The use of multiple data sources, including observations, interviews, and documents, aligns with the principles of methodological triangulation in qualitative research, strengthening the validity and reliability of the study (Denzin, 2017).

Participatory observation enables the researcher to capture real-time interactions and the dynamics of classroom activities, providing rich contextual data on how teachers facilitate learning and how children respond to different instructional strategies. Observing both structured and spontaneous activities allows for a more nuanced understanding of the practical implementation of curriculum objectives (Spradley, 1980).

Interviews complement observational data by providing insights into teachers' and principals' perspectives on challenges, adaptations, and innovations in curriculum implementation. Semi-structured interviews are particularly useful in capturing detailed narratives while allowing flexibility for participants to elaborate on their experiences (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). Document analysis further enhances the research by providing concrete evidence of curriculum planning, instructional materials, and learning outcomes. Reviewing lesson plans and teaching modules helps to identify the alignment between curriculum objectives and classroom practices, highlighting areas of success and potential improvement (Bowen, 2009).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The results of the study at SPS Permata Hati Bekasi indicate that the school has successfully adapted in the preparation of KOSP (Curriculum Implementation Plans), differentiated learning planning, and the integration of the Pancasila Student Profile Strengthening Projects (P5). However, the implementation of learning has not yet been fully child-centered. Teachers still rely on conventional methods, and differentiated learning is not yet optimized. The use of the environment as a learning resource has been applied, but the role of teachers as facilitators remains limited. Authentic and continuous assessments have been implemented, aligning with best practices in early childhood education (Hawali, Udju, Lopo, & Fomeni, 2024; Hehakaya & Pollatu, 2022).

Challenges include limited facilities, educational teaching aids, and the need for time for teachers to transition to the Independent Curriculum paradigm. Adjustment efforts include creating teaching aids from recycled materials, utilizing natural resources, continuous teacher training, individual mentoring, and learning communities (Sahrandi & Bahri, 2023; Andari & Wiguna, 2023).

Combining the Independent Curriculum with conventional methods can have positive impacts such as smoother transitions, accommodating diverse learning styles, and providing a strong theoretical foundation (Dewi Mawardini & Sajjad, 2023). However, it may also produce negative effects, including confusion for both students and teachers, and suboptimal achievement of curriculum objectives.

This study explores the implementation of the Independent Curriculum at SPS Permata Hati Bekasi across different age levels (Playgroup, TK A, TK B1, TK B2). Overall, findings indicate strong planning commitment, but implementation still faces challenges (Budiman, Muazza, Rahman, & Mailina, 2023).

In terms of planning, learning at SPS Permata Hati Bekasi has successfully prepared KOSP aligned with local characteristics and children's needs. This aligns with previous studies emphasizing the importance of formulating CP, TP, and ATP as a foundation for daily learning activities (Budiman et al., 2023; Jayanti, Suprijono, & Jacky, 2023). The integration of P5 is a key aspect, with themes that are contextual and relevant to children's world (Arisanti, Wahyudi, & Muttaqin, 2024).

However, the implementation of the Independent Curriculum still shows misalignment between planning and practice. Learning has not been fully child-centered, with teachers continuing to use conventional methods, indicating obstacles in shifting the teacher's role from primary source of information to facilitator (Hehakaya & Pollatu, 2022; Munawar, 2022).

In the TK B1 class, learning activities were well aligned with CP and TP. However, the use of learning resources still requires improvement, and differentiated activity options are not optimal. Teachers remain the main source of information and rely heavily on lecture-based methods. Nonetheless, children appeared active and enthusiastic. Assessment was conducted through continuous observation and constructive feedback (Shalehah, 2023; Sahrandi & Bahri, 2023). Classroom management lacked flexibility, although teachers were responsive to children's emotional and individual needs.

In the TK B2 class, planning was aligned with CP and TP. The use of learning resources was adequate but lacked variety. Differentiated activities were still limited. Teachers used lecture-based methods, and student involvement and collaboration were low. Assessment was conducted continuously, with constructive feedback, but classroom management remained rigid (Rasmani et al., 2023).

In the TK A class, planning was effective and activities aligned with CP and TP. Teachers utilized various learning resources and accommodated children's interests and learning styles. The teacher's role as facilitator was better realized, but lecturing was still used frequently. Children were active, enthusiastic, and collaboration was relatively good.

Assessment was continuous with feedback, and classroom management was sufficient, though teacher-centered methods persisted (N Mufidah, 2024).

In the Playgroup class, planning was adequate, with activities aligned with CP and TP. Learning resources were relatively varied, and differentiated activities were sufficient. Teachers acted as facilitators to a fair extent, although they tended to dictate instructions. Children were less actively involved, collaboration was minimal, and assessment was conducted continuously with feedback. Classroom management was sufficiently varied, and teachers were responsive to children's emotional and individual needs (Andari & Wiguna, 2023; Munawar, 2022).

Overall, the findings show that the implementation of the Independent Curriculum at SPS Permata Hati Bekasi varies across age levels. The main strengths are careful planning and teacher responsiveness to students' needs. Major challenges include the shift in teachers' mindset, limited learning resources, and flexible classroom management. These results confirm prior research emphasizing the importance of holistic approaches, teacher facilitation, and alignment with Pancasila student profiles in early childhood education (Indrawari et al., 2021; Chintya & Sit, 2024; Yulianto, 2024). Further research is needed to explore the factors influencing the successful implementation of the Independent Curriculum across different educational contexts (Ramadan & Imam Tabroni, 2020; Nursalam, Sulaeman, & Latuapo, 2023).

CONCLUSION

SPS Permata Hati Bekasi shows strong commitment to implementing the Independent Curriculum, with well-prepared planning, differentiated learning, and P5 integration. However, implementation remains largely teacher-centered, limiting student choice and collaboration. Positive practices include using the environment as a learning resource and continuous assessment. The main challenge is shifting teachers' mindset to a flexible, child-centered approach.

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