

Implementation of the Independent Learning Curriculum in Increasing Children's Creativity at RA Al Rizky Padang Sidempuan

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Abstract

This study aims to explore how the implementation of the Independent Learning Curriculum can contribute to increasing early childhood creativity at RA Al Rizky Padang Sidempuan. This curriculum gives educators the flexibility to design learning that is contextual, fun, and student-centered, with an emphasis on developing children's potential and creativity. The research uses a qualitative approach of the case study type, with data collection methods through interviews, observations, and documentation. The data were analyzed using Miles and Huberman's interactive analysis model, which consisted of three stages: reduction, presentation, and conclusion drawn. The results of the study show that the implementation of the Independent Curriculum has succeeded in encouraging the growth of children's creativity in the learning process. Children show increased courage in expressing ideas, confidence, and the ability to create unique works through activities such as drawing, role-playing, and exploration of natural materials. Teachers act as facilitators who support the exploration process and provide free space for children to create. Overall, the Independent Curriculum has proven to be the right approach in supporting creative and meaningful early childhood learning.

Keywords: Independent Learning Curriculum, Early Childhood Creativity, RA Al Rizky Padang Sidempuan, Qualitative Case Study, Miles and Huberman Analysis Model, Student-Centered Learning

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Introduction

Early childhood education (PAUD) is the main foundation in shaping children's character, personality, and creativity from an early age. Early childhood is a golden age where all aspects of child development experience rapid growth, including creative thinking skills. Therefore, an appropriate educational approach is needed to stimulate these developments optimally.

The Government of Indonesia through the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology launched the Independent Learning Curriculum as a solution to improve the learning system that has been considered too rigid and less contextual. This curriculum is designed to give freedom to educational units and teachers in creating a more fun, relevant, and meaningful learning atmosphere. As explained by the Ministry of Education and Culture (2023), "The Independent Curriculum provides flexibility for educational units and teachers to create more fun and meaningful learning according to the context and needs of students."

The Independent Learning Curriculum is an innovation in the world of education that emphasizes freedom and flexibility in the learning process. The goal is to adjust to the unique needs and potential of each child, so that they can learn more meaningfully according to their individual interests. In order to increase children's creativity, this curriculum provides greater space for students to express themselves and develop creative ideas without being bound by rigid learning patterns. This flexibility allows teachers to adapt teaching methods to the character of students so that their creative potential can develop optimally.

One of the important aspects of implementing this curriculum is to give children the opportunity to determine for themselves the material, topic, or project they want to study. By choosing according to their interests, children become more motivated and have a sense of responsibility in their learning process. The project-based learning approach is very effective for practicing creativity because children are encouraged to think critically, find solutions, and create innovative products based on their ideas. This is different from traditional methods that focus more on teachers and memorization of materials.

The learning methods in the Independent Learning Curriculum are also very diverse and interactive. Teachers act as facilitators who help children explore their creative ideas, not just as teachers. Through discussions, experiments, simulations, and educational games, children are invited to think actively, work together, and create. This fun learning environment supports the growth of imagination and problem-solving skills, which are an important part of creativity.

Strengthening creative character is also an important part of this curriculum. Children are encouraged to dare to try new things, accept failure as a learning process, and continue to innovate. A supportive and non-judgmental learning atmosphere makes children feel comfortable to experiment and develop creativity without fear of failure. Values such as courage, perseverance, and curiosity are built consistently to be a provision for children to face life's challenges.

The use of technology also plays a big role in supporting children's creativity in the current digital era. The Independent Learning Curriculum encourages the use of digital media and information technology as a means of learning and creativity. Children can use various creative applications such as graphic design, animation, and video editing, as well as interactive learning platforms to express ideas visually and multimedia. The use of this technology not only makes learning more engaging, but also enhances digital literacy skills that will be important in the future.

Assessments in the Independent Learning Curriculum are designed to support the development of children's creativity. Assessment does not only focus on the final result in the form of grades, but also pays attention to the learning process carried out by children. Teachers provide constructive feedback so that children are encouraged to continue to develop innovation and the quality of their work. Thus, assessment serves as a motivation and a tool

for creativity development, not as an obstacle or pressure.

According to Rozana, S., Widya, R., & Rambe, A. (2024) The Independent Curriculum is a curriculum concept that focuses on developing students' potential and creativity and provides freedom for schools to organize learning according to local needs and culture. The Merdeka curriculum prioritizes learning that gives children the freedom to explore, develop creativity, and learn through real experiences (Munisa et al., 2023). The phenomenon of the implementation of the Independent Curriculum in early childhood education institutions (PAUD) is an interesting thing to be researched, especially in the context of the use of games as an effective and attractive teaching tool for early childhood (Munisa, 2020).

According to Rozana, Widya, and Rambe (2025) There are several goals that want to be achieved through the implementation of this independent curriculum, including:

1. Improve the quality of learning for more fun and effective
2. Reduce students' academic load so that they have more time to explore their talents and interests
3. Encourage teachers to be more creative and innovative in making relevant learning methods
4. Forming the character of students who are independent, critical, and have good social sensitivity

In the context of the implementation of the Independent Curriculum, games can be the right means to introduce and integrate local cultural values (Rozana, 2020). In the context of early childhood education, the Independent Curriculum is directed to cultivate children's potential as a whole. Children are no longer only focused on academic ability, but rather on exploratory processes and real experiences in learning. According to BanuaInfo (2022), "The Independent Early Childhood Education Curriculum aims to create a safe, fun, and experiential learning environment for children, with a focus on the development of Pancasila values and essential competencies." This shows the importance of this curriculum in shaping children's character and creativity from an early age.

Furthermore, the meaningful play approach is the main method in early childhood education learning based on the Independent Curriculum. Through activities such as role-playing, drawing, coloring, and environmental exploration, children can develop imaginative skills, problem solving, and critical thinking. Kelanakids (2022) states that, "In the Independent Early Childhood Education Curriculum, children are given the freedom to explore and learn through play. Play activities are positioned as the main method in shaping children's creativity and skills naturally." Of course, the implementation of this curriculum is not without challenges, especially in terms of the readiness of educators and resource support. According to Olah Denk (2022), "The implementation of the Independent Curriculum opens up a wide space for teachers to innovate in learning and develop children's creative potential from an early age." Therefore, continuous training and support from various parties are needed so that teachers can design effective and contextual learning activities.

One of the important approaches in this implementation is to play meaningfully. As explained by Times Indonesia (2022), "PAUD in the Independent Curriculum prioritizes a meaningful play approach, with activities designed to build children's creativity, social skills, and cognitive skills from an early age."

Seeing the importance of implementing the Independent Curriculum in early childhood education, RA Al Rizky Padang Sidempuan is one of the institutions that adopted this policy. Therefore, this study aims to examine how the implementation of the Independent Learning Curriculum can increase children's creativity at RA Al Rizky, as well as identify supporting and inhibiting factors in its implementation.

Research Methods

The approach used in this study is a qualitative approach. This approach is used because it has the goal of understanding in depth related to the implementation of the Independent Curriculum can increase children's creativity. This type of research is a case study. This research study is focused on one of the PAUD Units, namely RA Al Rizky Padang Sidempuan which is a school that has implemented the Independent curriculum. This research will focus on the process of observing the learning process, interviews with teachers and analyzing learning documents to gain a comprehensive understanding.

The data collection technique in this study uses three main methods: interviews, observations, and documentation studies. Interviews are held semi-structured with teachers to explore children's experiences, perceptions, and views on the implementation of the Independent Curriculum. Observations are made during the learning process to record interactions, activities, and learning strategies implemented by teachers. The documentation study involves learning documents to obtain supporting data regarding curriculum implementation practices. In this study, the data analysis technique in this study was carried out using the Miles and Huberman interactive model, which is divided into 3 (Three) stages

Main: Data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions. The data obtained from interviews, observations, and documents will be reduced by grouping relevant information according to the focus of the research. Furthermore, the data is presented in the form of a descriptive narrative to describe the patterns, relationships, and main findings related to children's creativity and the final stage is the drawing of conclusions.

Results and Discussion

Based on the results of the research obtained through data triangulation techniques, namely direct observation in the classroom, in-depth interviews with educators, and documentation studies on various learning documents, it is known that the implementation of the Independent Learning Curriculum at RA Al Rizky Padang Sidempuan has a real influence on increasing early childhood creativity. This research uses a qualitative approach of case studies, which provides a complete and in-depth picture of the process and impact of curriculum implementation in a real context.

Through observations made in several learning sessions, it was seen that children were actively involved in various activities designed to stimulate creativity. The activities observed included free drawing, making buildings from blocks, role-playing with the theme of daily life, and exploration of natural materials and used goods as a medium for work. Children are given the freedom to choose activities that suit their interests and desires, and are not limited to one way of solution. This facilitates the emergence of new ideas and a wider self-expression of each child.

The freedom to choose activities and ways of working is a reflection of the basic principles of the Independent Curriculum, namely learning that is on the side of children and provides space for exploration according to the needs and stages of development of students. Children are seen exhibiting creative behaviors, such as uniquely mixing different colors, creating imaginative stories while role-playing, and designing new shapes from available materials.

The results of interviews with teachers at RA Al Rizky reinforce the observational findings. The educators said that with the flexibility in the Independent Curriculum, they can more freely develop learning methods and activities that suit the characteristics of each child. Teachers are not only the presenters of the material, but also the role of facilitators who accompany the children's learning process. They noted that children became more confident in expressing their opinions, were more courageous in experimenting with new ideas, and were more persistent in completing tasks.

The teachers also stated that the project-based learning and meaningful play adopted in this curriculum had a positive impact on the development of children's thinking skills. In addition, the activities designed not only encourage creativity, but also train social skills such as cooperation, empathy, and communication.

The findings from observations and interviews were strengthened through documentation studies of various learning documents, such as Daily Learning Implementation Plans (RPPH), children's work portfolios, and daily progress records. In the RPPH, it can be seen that teachers have arranged activities that provide a wide space for children to create and explore. For example, the themes used are flexible and relevant to children's daily lives, such as the theme "My Environment", "Profession", or "Environment", which are used as a basis for children to draw, tell stories, or role-play. Children's portfolios show very diverse works, both in terms of shape, color, and techniques used. This shows that children are not directed to produce something uniform, but are given the freedom to develop his own ideas. Similarly, developmental records reflect progress in children's creativity indicators, such as the ability to create new ideas, solve simple problems, and show uniqueness in working.

The results of the study also underlined the importance of the role of teachers in creating a learning atmosphere that encourages children to think creatively. Teachers play an active role as mentors who not only provide direction, but also provide a safe and supportive environment for children to experiment. In open-ended activities, children have full freedom to express ideas without fear of being wrong, so that the learning process becomes more meaningful and fun.

Teachers also provide constructive feedback, which does not judge right or wrong, but emphasizes more on the child's process and effort in producing works. This makes children feel valued and motivated to continue to try and develop their potential.

From the overall results of the analysis, both from observations, interviews, and documentation, it can be concluded that the implementation of the Independent Learning Curriculum has succeeded in creating a learning atmosphere that supports the development of children's creativity. This curriculum not only provides space for freedom in learning, but also positions children as the main subjects in the learning process, who actively explore, discover, and create.

Varied learning activities, an inclusive classroom atmosphere, and the adaptive role of teachers are key factors in the success of increasing children's creativity. Children not only learn to produce something, but also learn to think independently, work together, and find solutions to the challenges they face in their daily activities.

Discussion

With an approach that emphasizes freedom of learning and exploration, this curriculum is proven to provide ample space for children to express their ideas and potentials optimally. Through varied and fun learning activities, children become more active in showing their initiative and creativity.

4.1 Freedom in Learning Encourages Creative Expression

The implementation of learning that focuses on children and gives them the opportunity to choose activities that they like, has a significant influence on the growth of independent attitudes and creative thinking skills. Activities such as role-playing, free drawing, and designing shapes using blocks and scrap materials allow children to imagine and develop ideas spontaneously.

This is in line with the basic principles of the Independent Curriculum which aims to create fun and meaningful learning. Children are given the opportunity to learn something from hands-on experience, not just one-way instruction. These results support Munisa and Rozana's view that a flexible approach in the curriculum has a major impact on the development of

children's potential from an early age.

4.2 Transforming the Role of Teachers in Learning

In the Independent Curriculum, teachers no longer play the role of the main source of information, but rather as companions who support the children's learning process. Teachers help children explore ideas, give open direction, and give children the opportunity to complete tasks in their own way. This research shows that the role of teachers is crucial in creating an atmosphere conducive to the development of children's creativity.

The teacher provides feedback that encourages the child to think more broadly, without limiting it to one "right answer". Positive and supportive interaction from teachers makes children feel confident in experimenting with unique ideas and works.

4.3 Play as a Means of Creative Learning

Play is not only a recreational activity, but is the core of early childhood learning in the Independent Curriculum. This study found that through meaningful play activities, children can improve their ability to think, work together, and solve problems. Activities that are not fixated on the final result, but rather appreciate the process of exploration, have been shown to be effective in stimulating creativity.

Children who are given the freedom to complete activities according to their interests demonstrate the ability to create original solutions and produce works that reflect personal thoughts. This approach is in line with the findings of Kelanakids and Times Indonesia, which emphasize the importance of play as a foundation for developing children's creativity and character.

4.4 Supporting Factors and Implementation Challenges

Although the results obtained are quite encouraging, the success of the implementation of the Independent Curriculum still depends heavily on the readiness of teachers and support from the school. Teachers need to have a good understanding of curriculum principles as well as skills in structuring contextual and creative learning. Professional training and development are an important need in ensuring the effectiveness of implementation in the field.

In addition, parental involvement and the learning environment at home are also supporting factors that can strengthen learning outcomes at school. When children receive support for exploration and freedom of expression at home, their creativity development will be more optimal.

Conclusion

This study aims to explore how the implementation of the Independent Learning Curriculum can contribute to increasing early childhood creativity at RA Al Rizky Padang Sidempuan. This curriculum gives educators the flexibility to design learning that is contextual, fun, and student-centered, with an emphasis on developing children's potential and creativity. The research uses a qualitative approach of the case study type, with data collection methods through interviews, observations, and documentation. The data were analyzed using Miles and Huberman's interactive analysis model, which consisted of three stages: reduction, presentation, and conclusion drawn.

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supporting creative and meaningful early childhood learning.

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