

Application of the Center Learning Model in Increasing Early Childhood Independence at RA Lestari Padang Sidempuan

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Abstract

This study aims to describe in depth the impact of the application of the centered learning model on increasing early childhood independence in RA Lestari Padang Sidempuan. With a qualitative approach, this study involved 24 children of group B as the main subjects as well as teachers and principals as additional informants. Data collection was carried out through observation, interview, and documentation methods, then analyzed using interactive techniques from Miles and Huberman which included data reduction, information presentation, and conclusion drawn. The results of the study show that center-based learning activities significantly encourage the development of children's independence. Children are able to show independent behavior in carrying out activities, make their own decisions, interact socially well, and show discipline and responsibility in various learning situations. In addition, they are also starting to be able to meet their needs independently without relying much on adults. A thematically designed, child-centered learning environment helps them gain a fun and meaningful learning experience. In conclusion, learning with a centered approach makes an important contribution to the development of early childhood independence. The results of this study can be a reference for the development of learning methods in PAUD that not only focus on cognitive aspects, but also on the formation of children's character and independence from an early age.

Keywords: Center-Based Learning, Independence, Early Childhood, RA Lestari Padang Sidempuan, Qualitative Research, Miles and Huberman Analysis

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International Conference Global Islamic Education: Cultivating Tolerance and Interfaith Cooperation in A Multicultural (GIE), Theme: Strengthening Tolerance and Peace.

<https://proceeding.pancabudi.ac.id/index.php/GIE>

Introduction

Early childhood is a very important and decisive developmental period for later life. According to Utami (2018), early childhood is also a unique period of children's development to go through phases called the sensitivity period, egocentric period, imitation period, group period, exploration period and disobedience period. Therefore, early childhood is not able to control emotions, is not independent, cannot distinguish between good and bad deeds, wants to win on their own, is not able to socialize with their environment and so on. Early childhood is also very special because this age is the golden age or also called the golden age, where during this time all potentials begin to develop, starting from the development of physical, cognitive, social-emotional abilities, art, self-concept, religious and moral values (Putri & Lubis, 2025). At this age, children experience rapid growth both physically, cognitively, socially, and emotionally. One of the aspects of development that is very crucial to be grown from an early age is independence. Independence is the ability of children to perform tasks independently without depending on others, which includes the ability to take care of themselves, make decisions, and be responsible for their choices.

Early Childhood Education (PAUD) has a strategic role in fostering children's independence. According to Munisa (2020), Early Childhood Education (PAUD) is an education that provides care and services to early childhood children 0-6 years old. Because this age is the golden age along the age range of human development. Early Childhood Education (PAUD) is a strategic initial stage to introduce and develop character values because this period is the golden age of child development, where they are very easy to accept everything they see, hear, and feel. Character education also means making earnest, systematic and sustainable efforts to awaken and strengthen the awareness and belief of all Indonesians that there will be no better future without building and strengthening the character of Utami, Munisa, and Harahap (2020).

In the PAUD learning process, the learning model used has a great influence on the achievement of child development. One of the approaches that is considered effective in encouraging children's independence is the central learning model. This model places children as active subjects in learning through hands-on experience in various play centers such as block centers, art centers, natural materials centers, role centers, and others.

The centered learning model emphasizes planned, structured, and child-centered learning. Children are given the opportunity to choose activities, explore, and solve problems independently in a supportive environment. Thus, children not only acquire knowledge, but also learn to become independent and responsible individuals.

According to Mulyasa (2017), child-centered learning such as the center model is able to create an environment conducive to character development, including independence. The same thing was stated by Widodo & Wahyudin (2020) that the center learning model provides a wide space for children to learn to manage themselves and their environment. Research by Suryana and Andriani (2022) also shows that the application of the center model can significantly increase the aspect of children's independence because children are trained to make decisions and complete tasks without direct intervention from teachers.

The center learning model is very relevant in fostering an independent attitude in early childhood. Through the center rotation system, children get used to following the schedule and switching activities regularly without being forced. In addition, children are taught to pick up their own toys, use them correctly, and clean them up when they are finished, which indirectly instills responsibility and discipline.

The role of teachers in the center model is not as an information center, but as a facilitator. Teachers provide direction as necessary, but encourage children to find their own solutions when facing challenges. This trains children's ability to make decisions, solve problems, and foster confidence. At RA Lestari Padang Sidempuan, early childhood learning is faced with

challenges in fostering an independent attitude, especially in daily activities such as tidying up playground equipment, eating alone, and making decisions in games. According to Zairina, & Harahap, A. S. (2025) Independence is one of the important aspects of development in childhood, which reflects the child's ability to make decisions, complete tasks independently, and be responsible for his behavior. Therefore, the application of the central learning model becomes potential solutions to improve children's independence as a whole.

Through this study, the author wants to examine how the centered learning model is applied in RA Lestari Padang Sidempuan and the extent to which this model contributes to increasing early childhood independence. It is hoped that the results of this research can be a reference for other PAUD institutions in developing learning models that support children's growth and development optimally.

The consistent application of the center-based learning model has had various positive impacts on the development of early childhood independence. Children become more confident, have a sense of responsibility, get used to completing tasks to completion, and being able to choose activities that suit their interests and needs. In addition, the social interaction that occurs in the center group also trains children to work together, take turns, and express their opinions in a good way.

It can be concluded that the center learning model has a positive impact on increasing early childhood independence. Through thematically designed and structured play activities in each center, children are given space to take initiative, choose activities, and complete tasks according to their abilities. In this process, the child learns to make decisions, take responsibility for his choices, and begin to rely on himself without always relying on the help of the teacher.

Research Methods

The research conducted at RA Lestari Padang Sidempuan PAUD uses qualitative research methods. The research was conducted from January to May 2025. The subjects of this study are group B children totaling 24 children. There are two data sources used, namely primary data sources in the form of group B children totaling 24 people in the block center, school principals, classroom teachers and block center teachers, and secondary data sources in the form of documentation of activities of 24 group B children during the learning process at school for one day, as well as RPPM, RPPH and activity assessment. The indicators of independence that will be observed are: 1). Able to carry out their activities independently even though they are still under the supervision of an adult; 2). Have the ability to make decisions without influence from others; 3). Can relate well to others; 4). Have the ability to act in accordance with what is believed; and 5). Have the ability to find and get his needs without the help of others. The data collection techniques used were observation, interviews and documentation. Data analysis using Interactive Model data analysis techniques from Miles and Huberman is data reduction, data presentation and data verification.

Results and Discussion

Research Results

This research was conducted at RA Lestari Padang Sidempuan for five months, starting from January to May 2025, using a qualitative approach. The main purpose of this study is to understand and describe in depth how the application of the central learning model, especially the block center, can increase the independence of early childhood in group B. The data collection process involves observation of children's behavior during the learning process, interviews with educators including classroom teachers, center teachers, and school principals, as well as documentation in the form of weekly learning implementation plans (RPPM). daily plan (RPPH), results of child assessments, and documentation of daily activities in the learning

environment.

The centered learning model used in this context places children as active subjects in the learning process. Children are given the widest possible opportunity to explore, choose activities they are interested in, and complete tasks based on hands-on experience. Teachers play the role of facilitators who not only direct, but also create a conducive learning atmosphere, safe, and stimulate children's independence and creativity. Learning at the block center is specifically designed to stimulate children's ability to build simple structures or shapes using blocks of various sizes and colors, which requires motor coordination, logical thinking, and cooperation between friends.

The main findings of this study show that most of the children involved in block center activities experience significant development in various dimensions of independence. Children show the ability to complete various daily activities independently without direct help from the teacher. They are used to taking their own game tools, arranging them as they wish, and tidying up them again after use. Not only in the context of play, but also in other routines such as eating, tidying up study supplies, and maintaining personal hygiene, children show a marked increase in independence.

Furthermore, children also show the ability to make decisions independently. In the process of playing, they are able to determine the type of building that you want to make, choose the appropriate blocks, and arrange the layout of the building independently. When faced with challenges, such as collapsed buildings or inappropriate tools, they try to find solutions on their own without immediately asking for help from teachers. This attitude shows that children are starting to get used to managing problems independently, thinking critically, and acting based on personal understanding that continues to develop through direct experience.

Children's ability to interact socially has also increased as part of the learning process oriented to group activities. Children are able to work together in small teams, share roles and tasks, and establish healthy and effective communication with peers. They begin to understand the importance of cooperation, respect the opinions of others, and show empathy for friends who are struggling. The center environment gives children the space to learn to be part of a small community, where they learn to adjust, convey ideas, and resolve conflicts in positive and independent ways. In terms of character development and moral values, children begin to show awareness in carrying out the rules and acting based on the values that have been taught. For example, they consciously return toys to their original place, admit mistakes without being reprimanded, and show an honest and responsible attitude towards the items used. Values such as discipline, responsibility, and honesty begin to grow through real practice experienced in learning activities.

Children begin to understand the consequences of their actions, which indicates that the process of internalizing values is taking place naturally.

In addition, children's ability to meet their own needs seems to be developing. Children are able to take the initiative in preparing play tools, choosing the materials needed for activities, and completing tasks to the end with little or no help from the teacher. In some cases, children even help their friends who are having difficulties. This shows that children not only develop individually, but also begin to understand their role in the wider social environment.

This whole process shows that the central learning model, especially through the approach of playing in the block center, is able to create a learning environment that is encourage the growth of overall independence. An environment that gives children the freedom to explore and create makes them feel that they have room to grow, develop their potential, and become confident and responsible individuals.

The application of centered learning that is carried out in a consistent, structured, and child-centered manner has been proven to support the achievement of non-cognitive

developmental aspects significantly. Children not only gain an understanding of certain concepts, but also gain important emotional and social experiences in the process of character formation. Teachers as facilitators play an important role in observing, taking notes, and providing constructive feedback during the activity.

Thus, it can be concluded that the implementation of the center learning model at RA Lestari Padang Sidempuan has succeeded in creating a learning atmosphere conducive to the development of early childhood independence. The results of this study show that the center approach, especially in activities at the block center, is very effective in honing children's ability to act independently, make decisions, establish healthy social relationships, and be responsible for their choices and actions. These findings are expected to be a reference for other early childhood education institutions in implementing similar learning strategies to support children's growth and development optimally, not only academically, but also socially and emotionally.

Discussion

The findings of this study show that the use of the central learning model, especially in activities at the block center, has a positive impact on increasing early childhood independence in RA Lestari Padang Sidempuan. These results reinforce the understanding that independence does not appear suddenly, but rather needs to be cultivated through experiences designed in such a way that children have space to explore, make decisions, and take responsibility for their actions. In this case, learning approaches that provide both freedom and responsibility, such as the central model, have proven to be effective in supporting the process. Children involved in the center's learning activities are not only trained to follow instructions, but are also actively invited to choose, manage, and complete their own tasks. This is in line with the theory of education that emphasizes that children are active learners, and the learning process will be more meaningful if children are directly involved in the experiences they are living. This study shows that when children are given the trust to manage their learning activities, such as determining the type of building they want to build or how to construct it, they show the ability to act independently and confidently.

Improving children's independent ability to complete daily activities, such as preparing toys, cleaning toys, and carrying out tasks without direct guidance from the teacher, shows that center-based learning provides an actual space for children to form independent habits. In this context, children not only develop physical and intellectual skills, but also experience character formation, especially in terms of responsibility and decision-making. Teachers in this model act as companions and observers, not the center of attention, so that children are given a wide space to learn actively.

In terms of social relationships, centered learning also encourages children to interact healthily with peers. In the process of completing projects together, children learn to work in teams, convey ideas, and appreciate friends' ideas. Children begin to show the ability to resolve minor conflicts without adult intervention. This shows that central learning also develops the social and emotional aspects of children, not only cognitive aspects.

In addition, activities that are carried out repeatedly and consistently during learning make children familiar with the applicable rules and norms. For example, children are accustomed to returning the tool to its place, asking permission before using something, and admitting mistakes made. These attitudes show that moral values and discipline are beginning to be embedded in children. The centered learning model allows these values to grow naturally through daily habits carried out in a fun and non-patronizing atmosphere.

The ability of children to meet their own needs, both in terms of preparing for learning needs and solving simple problems, shows an increase in self-awareness and a sense of responsibility. Children can recognize when they need help and when they can accomplish

things independently. This learning pattern provides a strong foundation for the development of children's autonomy in the future.

Overall, child-centered learning through a centered approach has succeeded in creating a learning environment that not only stimulates cognitive aspects, but also supports the strengthening of children's character and social abilities. Teachers who act as facilitators create an atmosphere that provides space for children to learn from experiences, not just passively receive material. In other words, the learning process becomes more contextual, fun, and has a long-term impact on children's development.

Through this study, it can be concluded that central learning makes an important contribution in shaping children's independence from an early age. These findings support the view that an approach that gives children directed freedom, accompanied by consistent guidance, is capable of forming individuals who are confident, responsible, and ready to face developmental challenges at the next stage. Therefore, this approach is worth considering for widespread adoption in early childhood education practices.

Conclusion

Based on the results of research that has been carried out at RA Lestari Padang Sidempuan, it can be concluded that the implementation of the center learning model, especially through activities at the block center, is actually able to encourage the growth of independence in early childhood. Through an approach that places children as active subjects in the learning process, children are given space to explore, choose, and complete tasks independently. This process allows children to experience firsthand learning situations that foster confidence, responsibility, and decision-making skills.

The development of independence achieved by children can be seen in various forms, ranging from the skill of completing activities without the help of teachers, courage in making choices, the ability to build healthy social relationships, to maturity attitude in carrying out values such as discipline and responsibility. Children are also able to meet their needs independently, both in the context of learning and daily activities.

The centered learning model has been proven to be able to create an environment conducive to children's character growth and autonomy from an early age. Teachers act as companions and facilitators who provide support without compromising the child's freedom space. Therefore, this approach is worthy of being used as an effective learning strategy and can be widely applied in early childhood education institutions to build a strong character foundation and independence from an early age.

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