



## **Application of the Independent Curriculum in Early Childhood Education in Kindergarten Plus Al-Aqhso**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Early childhood education serves as the primary foundation for shaping children's character, spirituality, and intelligence. In line with the government's efforts to implement the Merdeka Curriculum across various levels of education, TK Plus Al-Aqhso, located in Tuk Karang Suwung Village, Lemahabang District, Cirebon Regency, has adopted this curriculum since 2022. One form of implementation is the integration of the 2013 Curriculum with the Merdeka Curriculum as the basis for learning. This study is motivated by the need to evaluate whether the Merdeka Curriculum has been effectively implemented in early childhood education, particularly in terms of lesson planning, instructional practices, and assessment by teachers. The aim of this research is to analyze the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum at the early childhood education level in TK Plus Al-Aqhso. This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach, with data collected through observation, interviews, and documentation. The research subjects include a class A teacher, with the principal serving as the key informant. The findings reveal that lesson planning, instructional implementation, and learning evaluation are essential components that must be thoroughly prepared and executed to ensure the successful application of the Merdeka Curriculum in early childhood education.

**Keywords:** *Curriculum implementation, Independent curriculum, Early childhood education*

## INTRODUCTION

Education is an important factor in building human resources (HR) and the progress of a nation. A good educational process is expected to be able to create innovative ideas and creative ideas that are in accordance with the times. One way to improve the quality of education in Indonesia is through curriculum development, because the curriculum is the main tool in the education system. As said by Munandar (2017), "The curriculum is the heart of education," so to see the direction and quality of a country's education policy, we can see how the curriculum is implemented. This is in accordance with the Law of the Republic of Indonesia Number 20 of 2003 concerning the National Education System, which states that the curriculum is a series of plans and arrangements regarding the objectives, content, and teaching materials as well as the methods used as a guide for the implementation of learning to achieve national education goals.

One of the curriculum innovations implemented in Indonesia today is the Independent Curriculum.

This curriculum is made to make the learning process more flexible, so that students have time to understand concepts in depth and strengthen their competencies. In the context of early childhood education (PAUD), the Independent Curriculum provides freedom for children to play, because at an early age play is the main form of learning (GTK, 2020). This curriculum also aims to hone children's interests and talents from an early age, focusing on important materials to form character and develop students' competencies as a whole.

In the Independent Curriculum, the main reference for learning and assessment is Learning Outcomes (CP), which replaces the Child Development Achievement Level Standard (STPPA).

This is done because CP is considered more representative of the development that children should achieve according to their age. The essence of learning in PAUD is "Freedom of Learning" and "Freedom of Play," where all activities are designed to provide a fun and meaningful learning experience for children (Munawar, 2022).

The learning process in the Independent Curriculum is designed to create a relaxed, stress-free, fun, and stress-free atmosphere, so that children can develop their talents and potentials optimally.

Merdeka Belajar also aims to foster creativity and freedom of expression in children. One of the best programs from the Ministry of Education and Culture in supporting the implementation of the Independent Curriculum is the Driving School Program, which aims to create a generation of Pancasila students, namely

students who have character, think critically, creatively, and have national insight (Aina, 2020).

However, the implementation of the Independent Curriculum is certainly a challenge for education units and teachers in Indonesia. Teachers are required to comprehensively understand the concept of this curriculum and be able to adjust learning strategies to suit the principles carried out. Al-Aqhs Plus Kindergarten, located in Cirebon Regency, is one of the early childhood education institutions that has implemented the Independent Curriculum. Therefore, we conducted this research observation to find out how the planning documents, learning implementation, and learning evaluation that Al-Aqsho Kindergarten implements, the results of which are expected to be able to improve the quality and maintain the A Accreditation value at Al-Aqsho Kindergarten.

## **METHOD**

This research is a type of descriptive research with a qualitative approach, where the data obtained is not presented in the form of numbers, but in the form of words or narratives. The qualitative approach is used because it is based on the philosophy of post-positivism and aims to understand phenomena in their natural context. According to Sugiyono (2017), qualitative research is descriptive, and data is collected in the form of words, images, or documents, so it does not focus on numbers or statistics. Thus, qualitative descriptive research aims to explain the natural process of implementing the Independent Curriculum in early childhood education at Al-Aqhs Plus Kindergarten.

This research was carried out at Al-Aqhs Plus Kindergarten which is located on Jalan Mbah Muqoyyim Gang Cendana Number 35, Tuk Karang Suwung Village, Lemahabang District, Cirebon Regency. The researcher was present directly at the location as the research implementer. In the qualitative approach, the researcher himself is the main instrument in data collection, which is supported by various tools such as observation guidelines, interview guidelines, documents, and field notes. This is in line with the opinion of Sugiyono (2014) who stated that in qualitative research, the researcher itself is the main instrument supported by various data collection tools.

The data sources in this study consisted of the main subjects, namely class A teachers, as well as supporting informants such as school principals, other classroom teachers, and early childhood at Al-Aqhs Plus Kindergarten. Data collection techniques were carried out through direct observation, in-depth interviews, documentation of activities, and recording important things that occurred during the research. The instruments in this study are the researcher himself, observations, interviews, documentation, and field notes. According to

Sugiyono (2014), the instrument or tool in qualitative research is the researcher himself which is supported by the format of observation, interviews, as well as documentation and field notes. The source of data for this research is the subject of the research, namely class A teachers, as well as informants, namely school principals, classroom teachers, and early childhood at Kindergarten Plus Al-Aqhs.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **A. Curriculum Educational Unit Level**

The curriculum at the educational unit level or commonly known as KTSP is developed in accordance with the educational unit, potential, school characteristics, characteristics of students and the socio-cultural of the local community. Schools and school committees develop curriculum at the educational unit level, syllabus based on the basic framework of the curriculum and school competency standards. KTSP is an effort to improve the curriculum to be more familiar with teachers, because teachers are more involved and are expected to have a high sense of responsibility. In accordance with Law No. 20 of 2003 concerning the National Education System, articles 35 and 36 emphasize the need to improve national education standards as a reference for the curriculum in a planned and periodic manner in order to realize the goals of national education.

In the National Education Standards (SNP Article 1, paragraph 15) the Education Unit Level Curriculum (KTSP) is an operational curriculum that is prepared and implemented by each educational unit. The preparation of the KTSP is carried out by the education unit by paying attention to the standards of competence and basic competencies developed by the National Education Standards Agency (BNSP). KTSP was compiled and developed based on Law No. 20 of 2003 article 36 paragraphs 1, and 2 concerning the National Education System as follows.

- 1) Curriculum development refers to the National Education Standards to realize the National Education Goals
- 2) The curriculum at all levels and types of education is developed with the principle of diversification in accordance with the educational unit, the potential of the school and the characteristics of the educator.

KTSP is a curriculum development strategy that aims to develop effective, productive and outstanding schools.

Objectives of KTSP In general, the implementation of the KTSP is to establish and empower educator units through granting authority (autonomy) to educational institutions and encouraging schools to carry out participatory

decision-making in developing the curriculum. The specific implementation of the KTSP is to:

1. Improving the quality of educators through independence and school initiatives in developing the curriculum, managing and empowering available resources
2. Increase the awareness of school staff and the community in developing the curriculum through joint decision-making
3. Improving healthy competencies between educational units regarding the quality of education to be achieved

KTSP can be seen as a new approach pattern in developing the curriculum in the context of regional autonomy, KTSP needs to be implemented by every educational unit, especially with the following objectives:

1. Schools are more aware of their strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats so that they can optimize the use of resources in advancing the institution.
2. Schools are more aware of the needs of the school, especially in the educational inputs that will be developed in the educational process according to the level of development and needs of students.
3. Decision-making is made by schools to meet the needs of the school.
4. The involvement of school residents and the community in the development of the curriculum is able to create transparency, a healthy, more efficient and effective democracy.
5. Schools can be responsible for the quality of their respective education.
6. Schools can conduct healthy competition between institutions to improve the quality of education through innovative efforts with the support of students' parents.

## **B. Planning Documents**

In the study of the PAUD (Early Childhood Education) curriculum, the Planning Document is an important part that functions as a guide for teachers or educators in carrying out learning activities. This document is prepared to ensure that the learning process takes place systematically, directed, and in accordance with needs

Early childhood development. Planning documents in the early childhood education curriculum usually include:

1. Annual Program Plan
2. Semester Program Plan (RPS): Prepare themes, subthemes, and learning activities within a period of one semester.

3. Weekly Plan: Details the theme, learning objectives, and core activities for one week.
4. Daily Plan (RPPH): Describes the daily learning activities, including opening, core, and closing activities, as well as the tools and media used.
5. Objectivesv Learning : Refers to the developmental achievements and learning outcomes set out in the curriculum.
6. Assessment: Detail how to evaluate a child's development, either through observations, portfolios, or anecdotal notes.
7. Functions of Planning Documents :
  - a. Guidelines for the Implementation of Learning.
  - b. Organizing learning activities according to the stage of child development.
  - c. Ensure learning achievement.
  - d. Facilitate a holistic and thematic approach.

This document is also important in curriculum review because it can be used to:

- 1) Evaluate the suitability of content and approaches with the national curriculum.
- 2) Developing learning improvements or adjustments.
- 3) Ensuring the quality of the implementation of early childhood education.

### **C. Learning Implementation**

The implementation of Kindergarten Learning in the Early Childhood Curriculum Study refers to how teaching and learning activities in Kindergarten are designed and implemented based on the principles, objectives, and structure of the Early Childhood Education. Curriculum review serves to ensure that learning must be appropriate for early childhood development, holistically integrated, and oriented to the needs of children, not solely academic. Components of Kindergarten Learning Implementation in Early Childhood Education Curriculum Studies:

1. Based on the National Curriculum of Early Childhood Education
2. Refers to the Learning Outcomes (CP) and Pancasila Student Profile.
3. Using a play-and-learn approach.
4. Child-oriented, Children as active subjects of learning.
5. Teachers play the role of facilitators and observers of child development.
6. Using a Thematic and Holistic Approach, Learning is integrated in themes that are close to the child's life.
7. It covers all aspects of development: religious and moral values, social-emotional, cognitive, language, physical, motor, and art.

8. Based on Play Activities, learning is carried out through meaningful play activities. Activities can be role-playing, constructive play, art, and nature exploration.
9. Implemented Flexibly, Schedules are arranged flexibly according to the needs and interests of children. Provide space for children's exploration, creativity, and initiative.
10. Observation-Based Assessment, Assessment is carried out through direct observation of children's behavior and skills. The results of the assessment are used to design the next learning activity.
11. Involving Parents, Communication between teachers and parents is built to support the child's overall development.

#### **D. Learning Evaluation**

The evaluation of kindergarten learning in the PAUD curriculum review aims to assess the effectiveness of the curriculum in achieving learning goals. Here are some aspects that can be evaluated:

1. Curriculum suitability to children's needs: Is the curriculum used appropriate to the needs and development of early childhood?
2. Curriculum implementation: How do teachers implement the curriculum in the classroom? Do they use effective and interesting methods?
3. Child learning outcomes: Are children achieving expected learning goals? Do they show progress in cognitive, social, and emotional development?
4. Resource usage: Are the resources used in learning effective and efficient?
5. Parental involvement: Whether parents are involved in the learning process and whether they are satisfied with the quality of education provided?

Evaluation methods that can be used include:

- a. Observation: Observing the learning process in the classroom and the interaction between teacher and child.
- b. Interviews : Interview teachers, children and parents to obtain information about the effectiveness of the curriculum.
- b. Document analysis: Analyzes curriculum documents, lesson plans, and child progress reports.
- c. Tests and assessments: Using tests and assessments to measure children's learning outcomes.

In this observation, Al-Aqsho Kindergarten has complete planning documents. Starting from the Annual Program (Prota), Semester Program (Prosem), Learning Assessment Plan (RPP), Teacher Administration for each class which contains Student Development Data, Child Group Data in the Classroom, Class Inventory Data, Classroom Props Data, Guest Books, Principal

Supervision Data, Admission Data and Report Card Returns. Learning planning and evaluation documents are done every day after school hours are over or when the children have gone home.

The implementation of learning at Al-Aqsho Kindergarten emphasizes the method of playing in groups that refers to scientific and project approaches. Every day children make a habit to develop 6 aspects of development. Namely the :

1. Religious and Moral Values; through the habit of reciting, obligatory prayers, sunnah dhuha prayers, praying, patiently waiting for their turn, giving and reciprocating greetings, and etc.,
2. Language ; Language habituation every morning after reciting children, reading books is adjusted to the child's ability. Children in class A or those who are not able to string letters are stimulated with picture letter cards first.
3. Physical and Motor; Ice breaking habits and play activities that coordinate between large and small muscles are always done every day. Not only to keep children healthy and strong, this recitation will increase children's enthusiasm to be ready to receive learning.
4. Social Emotional ; Through the habit of introducing emotions to children, inviting children to empathize with friends who have fallen or friends who do not bring provisions for the child to share.
5. Cognitive; Through learning habits based on scientific approaches that encourage children to be more critical, creative, able to solve problems, and children to be more independent.
6. Art ; Through the habit of free drawing, painting, mosaics, collages, and so on, children are able to create and spill their ideas of interest and imagination. The implementation of learning had applied the central method, but due to the constraints of the room or classroom were not enough, the central method was temporarily eliminated until there were additional classrooms.

Learning evaluation at Al-Aqsho Kindergarten is carried out every day. When they come home from school, children are invited to actively talk about learning activities that day. In addition to direct evaluation, teachers also evaluate the assessment of quizzes, anecdotal notes, assessment of the results of the work, and the report book on the results of child development (Raport).

The results of the study show that there is a fundamental difference between the implementation of the Independent Curriculum and the 2013 Curriculum in the context of early childhood education. The Independent Curriculum provides greater freedom to children in the learning process, which is oriented towards learning outcomes (CP) as the main goal. Meanwhile, the 2013 Curriculum uses the Child Development Achievement Level Standards

(STPPA), and refers to Core Competencies (KI) and Basic Competencies (KD) as guidelines in the preparation of learning activities. In the Independent Curriculum, Learning Outcomes (CP) has combined various important references in early childhood education, such as STPPA, content standards, and assessment standards. This makes it easier for teachers to design practical, flexible, and targeted learning activities. In addition, CP also reflects the direction of early childhood education policies that are adaptive to environmental changes, both at the local, national, and global levels (Ministry of Education and Culture of the Republic of Indonesia, 2021). Thus, the Independent Curriculum provides space for teachers to innovate in designing learning that suits the unique needs of each child.

Learning outcomes in the PAUD unit explain the competencies that are expected to be achieved by children at the end of the PAUD level. With this approach, when children enter the elementary school (SD) level, they are no longer limited by standard standards that generalize abilities based on age. Instead, each child is seen as a unique individual with a different pace and way of learning. Therefore, CP in the Independent Curriculum seeks to facilitate the transition from PAUD to elementary school with a more humanistic and holistic approach. In line with that, Rahardjo, Maria Melita, and Maryati (2021) emphasized that CP in PAUD is an effort to prepare children to have readiness to attend school at the elementary level with comprehensive development, covering cognitive, social, emotional, and motor aspects.

The Merdeka Curriculum provides a diverse intracurricular learning space and focuses on deepening concepts and strengthening competencies. Especially in the context of early childhood education, freedom to play is the main principle because play is a natural form of learning for early childhood (GTK, 2020). The concept of Freedom of Learning in this curriculum not only provides freedom, but also becomes a strategy to improve the quality of national education through a more contextual and child-centered approach.

Through the implementation of the Independent Curriculum, students are expected to develop four main competencies for the 21st century, namely communication, creativity, collaboration, and critical thinking. These four competencies are very important to equip children with abilities that are not only academic, but also social and emotional. Children not only become memorizers of information, but are also able to create, innovate, and establish positive social interactions in daily life (Retnaningsih & Khairiyah, 2022). Based on the results of observations, interviews, and documentation conducted at Al-Aqhs Plus Kindergarten, it can be seen that teachers have understood the importance of flexible and contextual learning planning according to the principles of the

Independent Curriculum. Teachers have also involved children in directed, fun, and meaningful play activities, as well as conducting holistic assessments and not emphasizing academic achievement alone, but also the development of children's character and social skills.

Thus, it can be concluded that the implementation of the Independent Curriculum at Al-Aqhs Plus Kindergarten has gone quite well. Teachers are able to integrate these curriculum principles into the daily learning process. However, continuous assistance and teacher capacity building are still needed so that the implementation of the Independent Curriculum in PAUD can be more optimal and have a positive impact on the overall development of children.

**Table 1.**

**Research Results of the Implementation of the Independent Curriculum at Al-Aqhs Plus Kindergarten**

No	Aspects	Curriculum 2013 (Before)	Independent Curriculum (After)
1.	Learning Objectives	Based on STPPA, Core Competencies (KI) and Basic Competencies (KD)	Based on Learning Outcomes (CP) that integrate STPPA and the needs of the times
2.	Learning Approach	Structured, focused on academic achievement	Flexible, play-based, Focus on holistic development
3.	The Role of the Teacher	Main names in Learning	Facilitators and companions The process of child expolarization
4.	Children's Roles	Passive participant in receiving the material	Active, creative, free to explore as per Interests and needs
5.	Learning Activities	Dominated by classical and structured activities	Free and directed play with contextual meaning and experience
6.	Penilian? Assessments	Focus on academic learning outcomes	Formative and holistic assessment based on process and development Individual child
7.	Transition from PAUD to Elementary School	Refers to age attainment	Preparing for readiness

## CONCLUSION

Based on the results of research conducted at Al-Aqhs Plus Kindergarten, it can be concluded that the implementation of the Independent Curriculum has gone quite well and is relevant in the context of early childhood education. This curriculum is able to provide a more flexible, fun, and meaningful learning space for children, by emphasizing the principles of Freedom of Learning and Freedom of Play. The use of Learning Outcomes (CP) as the main reference to replace STPPA, KI, and KD provides convenience for teachers in designing learning activities that are more contextual and child-centered.

Teachers at Al-Aqhs Plus Kindergarten have shown a good understanding in designing the planning, implementation, and evaluation of learning in accordance with the principles of the Independent Curriculum. Children are actively involved in learning activities through directed play, and assessments are carried out holistically to measure the child's overall development, not just the academic aspect.

However, to optimize the implementation of the Independent Curriculum, continuous support is needed in the form of training, mentoring, and strengthening of teachers' competencies so that they can continue to adapt learning approaches to the unique needs and characteristics of early childhood. With the right implementation, the Independent Curriculum is expected to be a strong foundation in forming a creative, independent, and characterful generation.

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