



Qualitative Study: Comparison of Implementation of Independent Curriculum in Early Childhood Institutions in Sukoharjo District

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DOI: [10.31004/obsesi.v8i5.6158](https://doi.org/10.31004/obsesi.v8i5.6158)

Abstract

This study aims to compare the implementation of the independent curriculum of two institutions in Sukoharjo District, namely TK Teladan and RA STIBA AZKIYAA. The study used a descriptive research approach to analyze the implementation of the independent curriculum at Teladan Kindergarten. Data was collected through observation, interview, and documentation techniques. This research was conducted for 3 months and used the principal and accompanying teacher of class B2 of Teladan Kindergarten and RA STIBA AZKIYA as research informants. The differences researchers found in implementing the independent curriculum in TK Teladan show the full utilization of the independent curriculum. In contrast, RA Stiba Azkiya is still in the process of fully implementing the curriculum. The findings suggest that Teladan Kindergarten's approach, which supports active learning, is highly effective in allowing children to explore and develop discipline and responsibility. However, RA Stiba Azkiya needs further time and support to implement the independent curriculum fully. Evaluations differ, with TK Teladan evaluating after each lesson and RA Stiba Azkiya reporting every 3 to 6 months. Both institutions recommended providing more intensive training and support to teachers to improve the implementation of the self-directed curriculum.

Keywords: *independent curriculum, early childhood education, curriculum implementation*

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Received 4 August 2024, Accepted 19 October 2024, Published 22 October 2024

Introduction

The Indonesian Ministry of Education and Culture created an independent curriculum to replace the 2013 Curriculum. The independent curriculum has diverse intracurricular learning where content will be optimized to give students enough time to explore concepts and strengthen competencies (Purnawanto, 2022). The curriculum in the implementation process guides the learning activities being carried out with students (Hasanah et al., 2022). The curriculum is the basis for achieving educational goals, and effective curriculum management is essential to ensure the achievement of these goals. Independent curriculum management is important because it gives schools freedom and flexibility in developing the curriculum according to local needs, student conditions, and the times (Ansari et al., 2022).

With freedom in curriculum management, schools can adapt learning methods to suit student characteristics and educational development. Flexibility in curriculum management can encourage innovation in education so that schools can create more creative and effective educational programs. Ansari et al. (2022) add that the independent learning curriculum does not peg students' abilities and knowledge only from grades but also looks at how polite and skilled students are in certain fields of knowledge. Children are given the freedom to develop their talents.

One of the districts that has synergized to support the implementation of the independent curriculum is Sukoharjo district. The Sukoharjo District Education and Culture Office recently received an award as a responsive region in data-based planning from the Central Java Province Education Quality Assurance Center. Another effort made by the Sukoharjo District Education and Culture Office is training in Webinars attended by Early Childhood Education School Principals (BBPMP, 2024).

Curriculum development is not only based on changes in the demands of life in society but also needs to be based on the development of concepts in science that require the assistance of experts, both education experts, curriculum experts, and subject/discipline experts (Syaodih et al., 2009: 158). So in c, curriculum development, many parties must participate, including education administrators, education experts who are experts in the curriculum, experts in the field of science, teachers and parents, and community leaders who are continuously involved in curriculum development so that it can run as planned (Syaodih et al., 2009: 115). On the other hand, educational institutions with good curriculum documents sometimes only sometimes produce good curriculum implementation. Vice versa, there is an institution whose curriculum documents are ordinary, but the curriculum implementation is good. This can usually be seen in the curriculum development process.

Contrary to these conditions, Sukoharjo is one of the areas with the best development of PAUD institutions. A total of 264 Early Childhood Education institutions in Sukoharjo are targeted for assistance by the Satu Karsa Karya Foundation (YSKK) to realize child-friendly early childhood education. In addition, to learn independent learning, the head of the office appealed to early childhood education teachers to refrain from giving homework (peer) to children. Teachers are asked to instil the six values in the Pancasila Student Profile. Starting from faith, fear of God, noble character, diversity, cooperation, independence, critical reasoning, and creativity.

Based on observations, several early childhood institutions in Sukoharjo have successfully implemented the Merdeka curriculum, including Teladan Kindergarten. On the other hand, early childhood education institutions have just adopted the independent curriculum. The existence of curriculum differences between institutions and the success of Sukoharjo district in developing early childhood education is one of the things that researchers want to explore more deeply. The government gives each school freedom over its curriculum, but the relevance of school goals to the policy still needs to be determined. (Ashfarina & Soedjarwo, 2023). Another problem is that the existence of curriculum changes seems to encourage schools to immediately implement the new curriculum, even though the facts on the ground are still many early childhood institutions that experience challenges, ranging from the accessibility of early childhood education services, facilities, and infrastructure, to the potential problem of lack of funds for early childhood education operations, curriculum administration that is applied, and the availability of time to plan curriculum development.

Understanding the comparative implementation of the Independent Curriculum in two different PAUD institutions can provide valuable insights into the challenges and successes in implementing a learning approach that focuses more on child development. Based on initial observations in this study, there are differences in the management of the implementation of the independent curriculum in two early childhood education institutions in Sukoharjo Regency, namely in TK Teladan and RA STIBA AZKIYA. The implementation of the independent curriculum in TK Teladan shows the full utilization of the independent

curriculum. In contrast, in RA Stiba Azkiya it is still in the process of implementing the curriculum in full. This shows that the approach taken by TK Teladan supports active learning that allows children to explore and develop discipline and responsibility. However, RA Stiba Azkiya needs more time and support to fully implement the independent curriculum. Based on the problems found, the researcher is interested in conducting research related to how to implement the independent curriculum in the two early childhood education institutions.

Methodology

This research uses qualitative research to understand the phenomena of research subjects, such as behaviour, perceptions, motivations, actions, and others (Moleong, 2019). The qualitative research approach used is a descriptive approach that aims to explain the implementation of the independent curriculum in two early childhood institutions, namely TK Teladan and RA STIBA AZKIYA. Descriptive research is a study that seeks to find facts with the right interpretation (Whitney, 1938). To obtain research data, researchers also involve research informants. Informants are competent sources of information relevant to research (Sugiono, 2016). This study used the principal and accompanying teacher of class B2 at Teladan Kindergarten and RA STIBA AZKIYA as research informants. Data collection becomes a follow-up activity after the researcher determines the research informant, which includes recording events or information from part or all of the population that will support or support research. (Surahman et al., 2016).

The data on implementing the independent curriculum at Teladan Kindergarten and RA Stiba Azkiya were obtained using observation, interview, and documentation techniques. In qualitative research, findings or data can be declared valid if there is no difference between what the researcher reports and what actually happens to the object under study, often referred to as triangulation. The triangulation method's function is to understand social phenomena and psychological construction, but using more than one measuring instrument is required. Data triangulation in this study was carried out by comparing information obtained from interviews with the principal and class teachers of TK Teladan and RA STIBA AZKIYA with related documents and observations of implementation in the field. After data triangulation was carried out, data analysis was carried out using three activities, namely data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions related to differences in the implementation of the independent curriculum starting from planning, implementation, to evaluation activities and also with influencing factors both in TK Teladan and RA STIBA AZKIYA.

The reason the researcher conducted the research at TK Teladan and RA STIBA AZKIYA was because there were differences in the implementation of the independent curriculum at TK Teladan and RA STIBA AZKIYA. The implementation of the independent curriculum at TK Teladan showed the full utilization of the independent curriculum. In contrast, at RA Stiba Azkiya it was still in the process of implementing the curriculum fully. The research findings showed that TK Teladan's approach supports active learning, which allows children to explore and develop discipline and responsibility. However, RA Stiba Azkiya needs more time and support to fully implement the independent curriculum. Both institutions recommend providing more intensive training and support to teachers to improve the implementation of the independent curriculum.

Result and Discussion

Planning

The independent curriculum is intended to create a good educational environment so that teachers and students can adapt to the times that continue to undergo technological transformation (Priantini et al., 2022). Planning an independent curriculum involves several important steps to ensure that the curriculum developed can provide learning experiences based on the independent curriculum's principles. The concept of "free learning" is one of the

characteristics of the independent curriculum so that in its implementation, the independent curriculum does not use a "drilling" system such as memorization or doing tasks using children's worksheets (Ngaisah et al., 2023). The following is an overview of the independent curriculum planning in Stiba Azkiya's exemplary kindergarten and RA

Independent Curriculum Planning at Teladan Kindergarten

One of the concepts of implementing the independent curriculum is implementing a project-based learning process. The resulting project is part of the learning planning process, which begins when determining topics and concept maps and implementing learning that involves children contributing their ideas and ideas. Children are involved in deciding what they will learn according to the topic. According to an interview with the head of Teladan Kindergarten, the planning stage of project-based learning begins with compiling the subject matter at the beginning of the semester. The results of the learning evaluation at the end of the semester become the basis for planning the next semester's activities. The topic design may change during the lesson. If the child is not interested, the topic can be replaced with something else that interests the child.

Independent curriculum planning at RA STIBA AZKIYA

Unlike the planning carried out at Teladan Kindergarten. At RA STIBA AZKIYA, the curriculum is deliberately prepared by a curriculum team consisting of teachers, principals and foundations, and school administrators. Furthermore, training activities are carried out for curriculum team members. The most important thing in planning an independent curriculum in kindergarten is understanding learning outcomes. Learning outcomes provide developmentally appropriate direction for each aspect of child development, as described in the Learning and Assessment Guidebook. Learning outcomes are expected competencies while learning objectives are descriptions of competency achievement. Creating a learning objective pathway is the next step in learning planning after establishing the learning objectives in the Children's Center.

Designing lesson plans and assessments is the final step in learning planning at RA STIBA AZKIYA. Lesson plans are created to help teachers carry out the learning process. The flow of educators' learning objectives is the basis of the design of this lesson plan. Teachers make lesson plans and teaching modules a week before class starts to carry out the learning process. The lesson plans direct the one-day learning process, and the teaching modules direct centre activities for two to three meetings.

Implementation

The curriculum will only be achieved if it is completed after being developed. The optimally designed curriculum must be implemented and have learning results. The following explains the implementation of the independent curriculum at Teladan Kindergarten and RA Stiba Azkiya.

Implementation of the independent curriculum at Teladan Kindergarten

The implementation of independent curriculum planning is realized in Teladan Kindergarten using a project-based approach; in its implementation, children are free to choose the activities they want by dividing tasks with their friends so that collaboration is not only with the teacher but also with their friends.

Children become active learners and function as the centre of project-based learning. Children should always be actively involved in the process, from planning to evaluation. Freedom to play and learn must be maintained. The interview with the Head of Teladan Kindergarten shows that children's freedom is crucial in the project learning process. Even if the child's work does not meet the teacher's expectations, the child's finding the right answer is the most important. Project learning begins with determining the topic, identifying the

child's interests, finding activities that match the child's interests, providing tools and materials, and then doing and reflecting. In addition, based on the findings of an interview with one of the Teladan Kindergarten educators, project learning is implemented according to the child's wishes. In implementing project-based learning, the teacher serves as a facilitator who provides various teaching materials, such as loose parts or other media, such as folding paper.

Implementation of Independent Curriculum at RA Stiba Azkiya

Implementing the independent curriculum at RA Stiba Azkiya is still in the process of adaptation by both teachers and students. According to the teacher of B2, learning is only partially child-centred. The facts on the ground reveal that the teacher still dominates learning activities. At RA Stiba Azkiya, teachers are constantly preoccupied with the goals they want to achieve. For example, they want to make a rabbit house today, and the children have to make it themselves, not others. This doesn't seem right; it can make children's ideas and ideas not broad, giving them the opportunity if there are children who want to make something different but still directed, as discussed earlier in the theory chapter on learner-learning approaches.

Evaluation

The last step in curriculum management is evaluation. Evaluation is done by comparing the plan with the target that has been achieved. Gronlund (1998) describes evaluation as a systematic process for collecting, analyzing, and interpreting data or information to assess learners' learning objectives. This concept shows how important evaluation is because it makes it possible to evaluate the level of success of an effort or program. The following is an evaluation of curriculum implementation at Teladan Kindergarten and RA Stiba Azkiya.

Implementation of Evaluation in Teladan Kindergarten

The curriculum evaluation is implemented at Teladan Kindergarten at the end of project learning with a joint reflection between the teacher and the child. In this reflection process, children are again asked to express their opinions about the learning done for one week. Based on the results of interviews with B1 class teachers, it is known that evaluation is carried out by reflecting and using several assessment techniques. The assessment techniques used are anecdotal notes, observations, and work results. The assessment results that have been carried out will then be included in the liaison book, an online platform that parents can access at any time. The liaison book contains all the assessments that the child has.

Implementation of Evaluation in Stiba Azkiya

RA Stiba Azkia assesses with two types, namely formative assessment and summative assessment. Some assessments appear when teachers carry out learning, including assessment of work, anecdotal notes and teacher notes. Evaluation of work for children's activities that produce work, anecdotal notes for evaluation of child development, and teacher notes for assessment in the classroom. This formative assessment is carried out at the beginning of learning to determine students' learning readiness. But it is also done when learning is taking place.

This teacher note assessment has several indicators, such as gymnastic activities, daily prayers, pre-writing, pre-reading, drawing and colouring, and closing prayers. Assessment indicators can provide information about students' strengths, areas that need improvement, ways to improve writing and reading, and the quality of reading for which feedback is given. A summative assessment at RA Stiba Azkiya is in the form of a report card or learning outcome report, which includes a report on learning achievements and information on children's growth and development. Summative assessment at RA Stiba Azkiya uses observation and

performance techniques (practice, producing work products). Assessment results are given periodically, namely every quarter and semester.

The following table presents a more concise comparison of the implementation of the two early childhood education institutions.

Table 1. A comparison of the implementation of the independent curriculum in Teladan Kindergarten and RA Stiba Azkiya

Model Kindergarten	RA Stiba Azkiya
Planning	
The planning process at Exemplary Kindergarten begins by compiling lesson materials at the beginning of the semester, with topics that can change during the lesson if the child is not interested. Evaluation of learning at the end of the semester becomes the basis for planning activities for the next semester.	The curriculum is prepared by a team of teachers, school principals, foundations, and school administrators. The planning process involves training activities for curriculum team members. Learning plans and assessments are the final steps in planning, with creating a Learning Implementation Plan (RPP) and teaching modules a week before class starts. The two institutions also differ in terms of decision-making regarding learning topics.
If the child is not interested in the determined learning topic, the decision to change it can be made.	Decisions about learning objectives and plans are guided by predetermined learning outcomes, which are the competencies children are expected to achieve.
At Exemplary Kindergarten, children determine learning topics and contribute ideas and concepts in the project-based learning process.	The learning process is more directed by the teacher, who uses lesson plans and teaching modules as a guide, although it is still based on learning outcomes appropriate to the child's developmental age.
Implementation	
Uses a project-based approach, where children choose their activities and collaborate with friends.	Still, learning must be completely child-centred in the adaptation process, and teachers still dominate learning activities.
Teachers act as facilitators who provide teaching materials and support children's learning processes.	Teachers are busy with goals they want to achieve, such as making a rabbit house, which children must make themselves.
Children become active learners and function as learning centres, involved from planning to evaluation.	Children are still in the adaptation process and need to be fully actively involved in learning.
Evaluation	
Evaluation is carried out at the end of project learning with joint reflection between the teacher and the children.	Carry out two types of assessments, namely formative assessments and summative assessments.
Using assessment techniques such as anecdotal notes, observations, and work results.	Formative assessments are carried out at the beginning and during learning to determine students' learning readiness. The summative assessment uses observation and performance techniques (practice, producing work products).
The assessment results are entered into a contact book that parents can access.	Assessment results are provided periodically every quarter and semester.

Discussion

Based on a comparison of the curriculum implementation at Teladan Kindergarten, it is known that Teladan Kindergarten has fully utilized the independent curriculum. One of them can be seen in the application of a project-based approach to learning. This condition is based on the opinion of Nursalam et al. (2023), who state that the independent curriculum contains the concept of child-centred learning. Implementing the Project Based Learning model is one of the priority programs in the independent curriculum (Shalehah, 2023). Strategi pembelajaran berbasis proyek berfokus pada pembelajaran aktif, memberikan kesempatan anak bereksplorasi melalui serangkaian langkah langkah yang dikemas guru dalam kegiatan (Robbaniyah, 2020). The project-based learning strategy, with its steps, trains children to have a high work ethic to be responsible for the plans made together; project-based learning with targets for a certain period fosters children to have discipline and a sense of responsibility for what children decide (Dewey, 1976).

The selection of topics for the project to be carried out at Teladan Kindergarten is adjusted according to the interests of the children. So, if the child is interested in the planned topic at a certain time, the learning topic will stay the same. This is to the objectives of the independent curriculum, which expects more independent learning (Umami, 2022). More freedom means that students can choose according to their interests and talents, educators teach according to the stages of development and developmental achievements of children, and education units are free to develop and manage their curriculum and learning according to the characteristics of the education unit and the characteristics of their students (Daulay & Fauziddin, 2023). Unlike the case with Telaadan Kindergarten, in RA Stiba AZKIYA, the curriculum was developed by a development team, which then became a compass for implementing learning for the next year. This is the view of Purnawanto (2022).

In contrast, in the independent curriculum, teachers can create, select, and modify available teaching modules according to the learners' context, characteristics, and needs. The syllabus and lesson plans are still being made. They are developed according to the process standards or Circular Letter Number 14 of 2019 concerning the Simplification of Learning Implementation Plans.

In project-based learning activities carried out at Teladan Kindergarten, teachers carry out several stages, namely opening with questions that trigger students to be able to express their opinions, project implementation, then children's presentations in public and then the last is reflection. This is by the syntax of the project-based approach proposed by the teacher (Ariyana et al., 2018; Gerhana et al., 2017) where project learning begins with Asking Fundamental Questions; 2) Designing a Product Plan; 3) Developing a Manufacturing Schedule; 4) Monitoring liveliness and development and 5) Evaluating the experience. The knowledge gained from the results of doing it yourself makes children able to remember the experience, build a deeper understanding, foster curiosity, and get their own appreciation for children. Thus, the problem-based learning approach can renew early childhood education by emphasizing teacher-centred learning activities (Sari, 2018).

Implementing learning in RA Stiba Azkiya still needs to be fully child-centred. So, the characteristics of the independent curriculum, which are flexible and adjusting to developments and conditions, have yet to run optimally. Teachers still need time to learn and adapt to independent curriculum learning. However, curriculum implementation must also pay attention to teacher capabilities. Although it is still in the process of fully implementing the independent curriculum, according to Rahmi & Chairul (2021), teachers must continue to educate and teach in the right way and always pay attention to the development of students, especially in kindergarten where children are student subjects who have special characteristics, both intellectual development, social development, and language development.

After the learning activity ends, the teacher at Teladan Kindergarten evaluates at the end of the lesson. This is in line with the theory presented by (Robbaniyah, 2020) that project learning begins with determining the project, and then the last is evaluation. According to Kinasih et al. (2018), assessment of the learning process and the results of learning activities is one process used to systematically, measurably, and continuously review information. Evaluation is a process of collecting and processing data to determine the level of achievement of a child's development. Teladan Kindergarten has used three assessment formats to assess children's developmental achievements: anecdotal records, observation, and work results. Using this assessment format depends on the activities carried out. According to the opinion of Yulia Yeni & Zulminiati (2023), independent curriculum assessment can be carried out during the learning process and the third at the end of learning. The assessment results of children's developmental achievements at Teladan Kindergarten will be reported to parents later through a liaison book.

In contrast to Teladan Kindergarten, the assessment conducted at RA Stiba AZKIYA is reported once every three months and once every six months. This aligns with the view (Prihantoro, 2021) that early childhood education assessment is classified into formative and summative. Both summative and formative evaluations are important. With formative evaluation, stages of program development can be improved, and program improvement leads to future program feasibility; in summative evaluation, activities are focused on achievement standards, which only emphasize results.

Based on the comparison of curriculum implementation in Teladan Kindergarten and RA Stiba Azkiya, it can be concluded that Teladan Kindergarten has fully used the independent curriculum, as seen from the application of a project-based approach, one of the priority programs. This is to the objectives of the independent curriculum, which expects more independent learning, where children can choose according to their interests and talents. However, RA Stiba Azkiya is still in the process of fully implementing the independent curriculum, with teachers still needing time to learn and adjust to the learning concept. Evaluation is also done differently, where TK Teladan conducts evaluations after each lesson, while RA Stiba Azkiya reports evaluations every 3 and 6 months. Thus, this difference in the implementation of the independent curriculum shows that each educational institution has different challenges and adaptation processes in implementing a learning approach that focuses more on child development.

Conclusion

The implementation of the independent curriculum in Teladan Kindergarten has been fully implemented using the Project Based Learning approach which is supported and supported by the availability of adequate facilities and infrastructure as well as cooperation between educators, schools, and parents. The implementation of the independent curriculum continues to be strengthened by ensuring that the project-based approach remains the main focus of learning. In addition, increasing collaboration between teachers, parents, and children in the learning process can further strengthen the effectiveness of the independent curriculum in Teladan Kindergarten. The independent curriculum at RA Stiba Azkiya is still in the process of implementing the curriculum, teachers still need time to adjust. There is a need for more intensive training and support for teachers at RA STIBA AZKIYA in understanding and implementing a more independent learning concept. In addition, regular monitoring and evaluation must ensure that the independent curriculum's adaptation process runs well and optimally. Suggestions for further research activities can be carried out continuous and more intensive training and mentoring for the two institutions in implementing the independent curriculum so that maximum learning implementation is achieved and in accordance with the development achievements of students.

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