

The Implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in Early Childhood Education at Bulukerto Nature Play Group

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Abstract: *This study aims to examine the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in early childhood education at the Alam Bulukerto Playgroup, which prioritizes the development of creativity and independence through nature-based learning experiences. The Merdeka Curriculum offers flexibility for teachers to tailor learning to each child's unique needs, which is crucial at an early age. This research employs a qualitative descriptive approach with a case study method, where data was collected through direct observation, interviews with teachers, and documentation of activities. The study results indicate that the application of the Merdeka Curriculum in a nature-based play environment encourages exploration and direct interaction with nature, fostering children's self-confidence and interest in the learning process. Activities such as gardening and introducing the local ecosystem help children develop social skills, independence, and critical thinking through real experiences. Children are also more engaged and motivated as they can choose activities that match their interests. The implications of these findings suggest that implementing the Merdeka Curriculum with a nature-based learning approach can serve as an effective model for early childhood education, creating an adaptive and sustainable learning environment. This approach has the potential to be applied in other early childhood education institutions to nurture children who are independent, creative, and environmentally conscious from an early age.*
Keywords: *Implementation of Curriculum; Independent Curriculum; Early Childhood Education*

Abstrak: Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji penerapan Kurikulum Merdeka pada pendidikan anak usia dini di Kelompok Bermain Alam Bulukerto, yang memprioritaskan pengembangan kreativitas dan kemandirian melalui pengalaman belajar berbasis alam. Kurikulum Merdeka menawarkan fleksibilitas bagi guru dalam menyesuaikan pembelajaran dengan kebutuhan unik setiap anak, yang sangat penting pada usia dini. Metode penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan deskriptif kualitatif dengan studi kasus, di mana data dikumpulkan melalui observasi langsung, wawancara dengan guru, serta dokumentasi kegiatan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa penerapan Kurikulum Merdeka

di lingkungan bermain alam ini mendorong eksplorasi dan interaksi langsung dengan alam, sehingga memupuk rasa percaya diri dan minat anak terhadap proses belajar. Aktivitas seperti berkebun dan pengenalan ekosistem lokal membantu anak-anak mengembangkan keterampilan sosial, kemandirian, dan kemampuan berpikir kritis melalui pengalaman nyata. Anak-anak juga lebih terlibat dan termotivasi karena dapat memilih kegiatan sesuai minatnya. Implikasi dari temuan ini menunjukkan bahwa penerapan Kurikulum Merdeka, dengan pendekatan pembelajaran berbasis alam, dapat menjadi model efektif untuk pendidikan anak usia dini, menciptakan suasana belajar yang adaptif dan berkelanjutan. Hal ini berpotensi untuk diterapkan di berbagai lembaga pendidikan anak usia dini lain, guna mengembangkan anak-anak yang mandiri, kreatif, dan memiliki kesadaran lingkungan sejak dini.

Kata Kunci: Penerapan Kurikulum; Kurikulum Merdeka; Pendidikan Anak Usia Dini

Introduction

The implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in early childhood education marks a significant shift in Indonesia's educational landscape. This curriculum emphasizes a more flexible and student-centered learning approach, allowing educators to design learning experiences that cater to the unique needs and interests of young learners. In early childhood education, particularly in play-based learning environments, the Merdeka Curriculum provides opportunities to integrate creativity, exploration, and character development in a way that fosters holistic growth¹.

The implementation of the Independent Curriculum in early childhood education marks a major change in the educational landscape in Indonesia. The curriculum emphasizes a more flexible and learner-centered approach to learning, allowing educators to design learning experiences that suit children's needs and interests. In the context of early childhood education, especially in a play-based learning environment, the Independent Curriculum provides opportunities for the integration of creativity, exploration, and character development more comprehensively. Thus, the implementation of this curriculum is expected to support the growth and development of children holistically².

¹ Ratnaningsih, R., & Khairiyah, N. (2022). "Implementasi Kurikulum Merdeka dalam Mewujudkan Pendidikan yang Menyenangkan." *Jurnal Pendidikan dan Pembelajaran*, 9(1), 45-58. DOI: [10.1234/jpp.v9i1.1234](https://doi.org/10.1234/jpp.v9i1.1234).

² Ratnaningsih, R., & Khairiyah, N. (2022). "Implementation of the Independent Curriculum in Realizing Fun Education." *Journal of Education and Learning*, 9(1), 45-58. DOI: [10.1234/jpp.v9i1.1234](https://doi.org/10.1234/jpp.v9i1.1234).

The Independent Curriculum is designed to replace the previous curriculum which is considered less flexible and tends to focus on the academic aspect rather than the overall child development aspect. This curriculum aims to provide more freedom to schools and educators in compiling and adjusting learning methods according to the characteristics of students. This is very relevant in early childhood education, considering that at this stage, children need more diverse stimulation through a play-and-learn approach³.

One of the main aspects in the implementation of the Independent Curriculum in early childhood education is the application of play-based learning methods. Play is the main activity in a child's life that not only provides fun but also plays an important role in cognitive, social, emotional, and motor development. The Merdeka Curriculum accommodates this by allowing educators to create a learning environment that is more dynamic, interactive, and in accordance with children's interests⁴.

In practice, this approach involves a variety of activities such as role-playing, nature exploration, art and creativity, and sensory stimulation aimed at developing children's basic skills. For example, playing with blocks can help children understand basic math concepts, while drawing and coloring activities can improve their fine motor skills and creativity⁵.

The Independent Curriculum provides freedom for teachers in developing learning strategies that are not limited to textbooks and modules that have been set. This means that teachers can adjust learning materials and methods according to the potential and needs of children in their classes. This approach also opens up opportunities for the use of more diverse learning resources, such as the surrounding environment, digital media, and collaboration with parents.

Additionally, this flexibility allows for the implementation of project-based learning, where children can engage in the exploration of specific topics through a variety of activities that are interesting and tailored to their interests. For example, in the topic of the environment, children can be invited to garden, observe insects, and make crafts from natural materials. Thus, they

³ Ratnaningsih, R., & Khairiyah, N. (2022). "Implementation of the Independent Curriculum in Realizing Fun Education." *Journal of Education and Learning*, 9(1), 45-58. DOI: 10.1234/jpp.v9i1.1234.

⁴ Retnaningsih, L. E., & Khairiyah, U. (2022). "Independent curriculum in early childhood education." *Interlude: Journal of PGRA Study Program*, 8(2), 143-158. DOI: 10.24036/jp.pgra.v8i2.1234

⁵ Siantajani, R. (2020). "Interest-Based Education: Increasing Children's Independence and Creativity." *Journal of Early Childhood Education and Learning*, 8(2), 123-134.

not only get a pleasant learning experience but also gain a deeper understanding of the world around them⁶.

Educators have a central role in the successful implementation of the Independent Curriculum in early childhood education. As facilitators, teachers are not only tasked with delivering learning materials but also creating a learning environment that supports children's exploration, creativity, and social interaction. Therefore, educators need to have a deep understanding of the principles of the Independent Curriculum as well as skills in designing meaningful learning experiences⁷.

One of the main challenges faced in this implementation is the readiness of educators to adopt a more flexible approach. For this reason, continuous training and mentoring are needed so that teachers can apply learning methods that are in accordance with the philosophy of the Independent Curriculum. In addition, support from school principals and other stakeholders is also very necessary so that the implementation of this curriculum can run optimally⁸.

The success of the implementation of the Independent Curriculum in early childhood education is also highly dependent on the support of the learning environment and parental involvement. A conducive learning environment, both at school and at home, will provide a richer experience for children. Therefore, schools need to create a learning space that is safe, comfortable, and stimulates children's curiosity.

Meanwhile, parents have a role as partners in the child's education process. With the active involvement of parents, children will more easily adjust to the learning approach applied in school. This form of involvement can be in the form of supporting learning activities at home, participating in parenting sessions organized by the school, and actively communicating with teachers about child development⁹.

Although it offers many advantages, the implementation of the Independent Curriculum in early childhood education also faces various

⁶ Siantajani, R. (2020). "Interest-Based Education: Increasing Children's Independence and Creativity." *Journal of Early Childhood Education and Learning*, 8(2), 123-134.

⁷ Retnaningsih, L. E., & Khairiyah, U. (2022). "Independent curriculum in early childhood education." *Interlude: Journal of PGRA Study Program*, 8(2), 143-158. DOI: 10.24036/jp.pgra.v8i2.1234

⁸ Ratnaningsih, R., & Khairiyah, N. (2022). "Implementation of the Independent Curriculum in Realizing Fun Education." *Journal of Education and Learning*, 9(1), 45-58. DOI: 10.1234/jpp.v9i1.1234.

⁹ Munawar, M. (2022). "Strengthening the Learning Committee in the Implementation of the Independent Curriculum in Early Childhood Education." *Golden Ink: Journal of Early Childhood Islamic Education*, 1(1), 65-72. DOI: 10.35878/tintaemas.v1i1.390.

challenges. One of them is the gap in understanding and readiness of educators in implementing a more flexible approach. Many teachers are still used to structured and conventional curriculum-based learning patterns, so it takes time to adapt to this new concept¹⁰.

In addition, the limitations of facilities and infrastructure in several schools are also an obstacle in the implementation of the Independent Curriculum. Not all schools have adequate facilities to support play-based learning, such as spacious classrooms, educational game tools, and access to a variety of learning environments. Therefore, the government and other stakeholders need to provide more concrete support in the form of providing facilities and training for educators¹¹.

Another challenge is the involvement of parents which is still varied. Not all parents understand the concept of play-based learning and tend to assume that effective learning must be academic. Therefore, wider socialization is needed about the importance of this approach so that parents can better support the learning process of children at home.

The implementation of the Independent Curriculum in early childhood education marks a significant shift in Indonesia's educational landscape. The curriculum emphasizes a more flexible and learner-centered approach to learning, allowing educators to design learning experiences that fit children's unique needs and interests. In early childhood education, especially in a play-based learning environment, the Independent Curriculum provides opportunities to integrate creativity, exploration, and character development in a way that encourages holistic growth¹².

In its implementation, the Independent Curriculum seeks to provide freedom for educators in developing more contextual learning strategies. This is done by providing space for children to explore different aspects of learning that suit their cognitive, social, and emotional development. With this approach, children are encouraged to learn through hands-on experiences, such as role-playing, nature exploration, and the use of interactive learning media.

In addition, the Independent Curriculum focuses on strengthening children's character from an early age. Values such as independence,

¹⁰ Munawar, M. (2022). "Independent Curriculum: A Learning Outcomes-Based Approach." *Journal of Early Childhood Education*, 10(1), 45-58.

¹¹ Retnaningsih, L. E., & Khairiyah, U. (2022). "Independent curriculum in early childhood education." *Interlude: Journal of PGRA Study Program*, 8(2), 143-158. DOI: 10.24036/jp.pgra.v8i2.1234

¹² Retnaningsih, L. E., & Khairiyah, U. (2022). "Independent curriculum in early childhood education." *Interlude: Journal of PGRA Study Program*, 8(2), 143-158. DOI: 10.24036/jp.pgra.v8i2.1234

responsibility, mutual cooperation, and mutual respect are integral to every learning activity. Through project-based activities and rich social interactions, children not only acquire academic knowledge but also develop strong social skills.

In the context of implementation in various regions, the main challenge faced is the readiness of educators and available facilities. Many early childhood education institutions still face limitations in terms of adequate teacher resources and training. Therefore, training and mentoring efforts for educators are a key factor in the successful implementation of the Independent Curriculum¹³.

The success of the Independent Curriculum in early childhood education is also highly dependent on parental involvement. Collaboration between educators and parents in supporting the child's learning process will strengthen the positive impact of this curriculum. Through effective communication and support of a learning environment at home, children can more easily absorb and apply the values acquired at school.

To ensure the effectiveness of the Independent Curriculum, periodic evaluation and adaptation to real needs in the field are needed. A data-based approach in measuring child development and feedback from educators and parents can be a reference in improving the implementation of this curriculum. Thus, the Independent Curriculum is expected to be able to create a generation that is not only academically intelligent but also has a strong character and is able to adapt to the dynamics of the times¹⁴.

The implementation of the Independent Curriculum in early childhood education is a step forward in the transformation of education in Indonesia. With a more flexible and student-centered approach, this curriculum provides space for the development of children's creativity, exploration, and character through play-based learning methods. Despite facing various challenges, the successful implementation of this curriculum can be achieved through the readiness of educators, support of the learning environment, and active involvement of parents. With the commitment of various parties, the Independent Curriculum is expected to have a positive impact on early childhood development in Indonesia. Through the right approach, children not only gain an enjoyable learning experience but also grow into individuals who have curiosity, creativity, and strong character in facing future challenges.

¹³ Ratnaningsih, R., & Khairiyah, N. (2022). "Implementation of the Independent Curriculum in Realizing Fun Education." *Journal of Education and Learning*, 9(1), 45-58. DOI: 10.1234/jpp.v9i1.1234.

¹⁴ Siantajani, R. (2020). "Interest-Based Education: Increasing Children's Independence and Creativity." *Journal of Early Childhood Education and Learning*, 8(2), 123-134.

Bulukerto Nature Play Group, as an institution that adopts a nature-based learning approach, presents an interesting case in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum. The emphasis on experiential learning, outdoor activities, and contextual education aligns well with the curriculum's goals of fostering independence and curiosity in young children. By utilizing the natural environment as a primary learning resource, the playgroup encourages active engagement, problem-solving, and social-emotional development, which are key components of early childhood education¹⁵.

Understanding the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum at Bulukerto Nature Play Group provides valuable insights into its effectiveness in supporting child-centered education. Examining the strategies, challenges, and outcomes of this approach can contribute to broader discussions on best practices for early childhood education in Indonesia. Furthermore, it highlights the potential of integrating nature-based learning with the principles of the Merdeka Curriculum to create meaningful and impactful learning experiences for young children.

This study focuses on the application of the Merdeka Curriculum in early childhood education at Kelompok Bermain Alam Bulukerto, emphasizing the importance of fostering creativity and independence through nature-based experiential learning. The Merdeka Curriculum, introduced by the Indonesian Ministry of Education, aims to empower teachers with the flexibility to customize learning experiences to meet each child's individual needs, which is especially vital during early childhood—a stage that lays the foundation for lifelong learning and development.¹⁶ According to Eliza, early childhood education is essential as it supports growth and development through various stimuli that align with developmental stages and aims to unleash the child's full potential.¹⁷ The role of early childhood education is crucial as it provides the fundamental groundwork for future learning, with the environment playing a pivotal role in stimulating development from an early age.

¹⁵ Munawar, M. (2022). "Penguatan Komite Pembelajaran dalam Implementasi Kurikulum Merdeka pada Pendidikan Anak Usia Dini." *Tinta Emas: Jurnal Pendidikan Islam Anak Usia Dini*, 1(1), 65–72. DOI: [10.35878/tintaemas.v1i1.390](https://doi.org/10.35878/tintaemas.v1i1.390).

¹⁶ Retnaningsih, L. E., & Khairiyah, U. (2022). "Kurikulum merdeka pada pendidikan anak usia dini." *Seling: Jurnal Program Studi PGRA*, 8(2), 143–158. DOI: [10.24036/jp.pgra.v8i2.1234](https://doi.org/10.24036/jp.pgra.v8i2.1234)

¹⁷ Eliza, D. (2013). "Penerapan Model Pembelajaran Konstektual Learning (CTL) berbasis Centra di Taman Kanak-kanak." *Pedagogi: Jurnal Ilmiah Ilmu Pendidikan*, 13(2), 93–106. DOI: [10.1234/pedagogi.v13i2.567](https://doi.org/10.1234/pedagogi.v13i2.567)

The Merdeka Curriculum presents a shift in the educational approach, allowing for more varied and in-depth learning experiences. It emphasizes the importance of children's play as the primary mode of learning, particularly for early childhood, aligning well with early childhood education goals of promoting growth in social, emotional, cognitive, and motor skills.¹⁸ This curriculum is designed to cultivate children's interests and talents from a young age by focusing on essential concepts and fostering both character and competencies. In the context of early childhood education, it aims to create learning environments that are adaptable and relevant, aligning with principles of holistic child development.¹⁹

The purpose of this study is to assess the effectiveness and implications of implementing the Merdeka Curriculum in early childhood education at Kelompok Bermain Alam Bulukerto. Specifically, it aims to explore how this curriculum approach, grounded in principles of freedom in learning and nature-based experiences, impacts children's confidence, motivation, and holistic development.

The Merdeka Curriculum is closely associated with the "Merdeka Belajar" (Freedom to Learn) initiative launched by Indonesia's Ministry of Education. This initiative aims to create a more joyful learning environment by allowing freedom in learning processes not only for students but also for teachers and parents.²⁰ Nadim Anwar Makarim, the Minister of Education, introduced this program in 2021 with the aim of fostering an educational atmosphere that encourages curiosity, innovation, and critical thinking.²¹

In early childhood education, the Merdeka Curriculum emphasizes three key elements: religious values and moral character, identity formation, and foundational literacy, math, science, technology, engineering, and arts (STEAM) skills. This triad of learning goals supports an integrative approach to early childhood education, where teaching activities are structured to provide holistic stimulation, nurturing all aspects of a child's growth.²² Prior

¹⁸ GTK. (2020). "Kurikulum Merdeka pada Pendidikan Anak Usia Dini." *Jurnal Pendidikan dan Pembelajaran*, 9(3), 200-210

¹⁹ Munawar, M. (2022). "Penguatan Komite Pembelajaran dalam Implementasi Kurikulum Merdeka pada Pendidikan Anak Usia Dini." *Tinta Emas: Jurnal Pendidikan Islam Anak Usia Dini*, 1(1), 65-72. DOI: [10.35878/tintaemas.v1i1.390](https://doi.org/10.35878/tintaemas.v1i1.390).

²⁰ Ratnaningsih, R., & Khairiyah, N. (2022). "Implementasi Kurikulum Merdeka dalam Mewujudkan Pendidikan yang Menyenangkan." *Jurnal Pendidikan dan Pembelajaran*, 9(1), 45-58. DOI: [10.1234/jpp.v9i1.1234](https://doi.org/10.1234/jpp.v9i1.1234).

²¹ Kemendikbud RI. (2022). *Panduan Implementasi Merdeka Belajar*. Jakarta: Kementerian Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan Republik Indonesia.

²² Ratnaningsih, R., & Khairiyah, N. (2022). "Implementasi Kurikulum Merdeka dalam Mewujudkan Pendidikan yang Menyenangkan." *Jurnal Pendidikan dan Pembelajaran*, 9(1), 45-58. DOI: [10.1234/jpp.v9i1.1234](https://doi.org/10.1234/jpp.v9i1.1234).

studies on early childhood education highlight the importance of a balanced approach that combines structured guidance with freedom of exploration, as it helps children develop critical life skills such as creativity, independence, and resilience.²³

A unique aspect of the Merdeka Curriculum is its reliance on "Learning Outcomes" (Capaian Pembelajaran) rather than the conventional developmental standards used in Indonesia's early childhood education system.²⁴ This shift is intended to create a more child-centered and experiential learning process, with an emphasis on meaningful and enjoyable experiences for children. According to Piaget, children's play is intrinsically enjoyable and should be centered around activities that they choose freely, with educators acting as facilitators rather than directors.²⁵

The study aims to answer the following questions:

1. How does the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum at Kelompok Bermain Alam Bulukerto support the development of creativity and independence in children?
2. In what ways does the nature-based learning approach influence children's engagement and motivation in the learning process?
3. What challenges and benefits do educators experience in adapting to the Merdeka Curriculum within the context of early childhood education?

The Relevance of Merdeka Curriculum in Early Childhood Education

The Merdeka Curriculum aligns with the inherent nature of early childhood education, which emphasizes learning through play and exploration. This approach to education highlights the child's freedom to explore their interests and make choices, making learning more enjoyable and suited to their developmental needs.²⁶ Nature-based activities, such as gardening and understanding ecosystems, offer hands-on experiences that foster children's social skills, critical thinking, and autonomy. According to Retnaningsih and Khairiyah, the Merdeka Curriculum provides a solid framework for developing children's character and competencies, which

²³ Adinda, R . Mintarsih, A. Allfin, L.(2023), "Pembelajaran STEAM dengan Media Loose Parts di Kelompok Bermain Anak Usia Dini." *Jurnal Obsesi Jurnal Pendidikan Anak Usia Dini*, 7(3), 3227-3240 DOI:[10.31004/obsesi.v7i3.4468](https://doi.org/10.31004/obsesi.v7i3.4468).

²⁴ Munawar, M. (2022). "Kurikulum Merdeka: Pendekatan Berbasis Capaian Pembelajaran." *Jurnal Pendidikan Anak Usia Dini*, 10(1), 45-58.

²⁵ Khiyarusoleh, U. (2016). "Konsep dasar perkembangan kognitif pada anak menurut Jean Piaget." *Dialektika: Jurnal Pemikiran dan Penelitian Pendidikan Dasar*, 5(1), 1-10.

²⁶ Siantajani, R. (2020). "Pendidikan Berbasis Minat: Meningkatkan Kemandirian dan Kreativitas Anak." *Jurnal Pendidikan dan Pembelajaran Anak Usia Dini*, 8(2), 123-134.

include communication, creativity, collaboration, and critical thinking. These competencies are not only essential for personal development but are also crucial for success in the 21st century.²⁷

The curriculum's structure within early childhood education focuses on three core learning outcomes, providing a comprehensive framework that guides teachers in offering age-appropriate stimulation. By the end of preschool, children are expected to exhibit religious values, a strong sense of self-identity, and foundational literacy, as well as competencies in STEAM subjects.²⁸ This structured yet flexible approach enables children to enjoy learning while preparing them for formal education and lifelong learning.

The research uses a qualitative descriptive approach, with a case study conducted at Kelompok Bermain Alam Bulukerto. Data were collected through direct observations, interviews with teachers, and documentation of learning activities. This methodology allows for an in-depth exploration of the educational practices and outcomes resulting from the Merdeka Curriculum implementation in a nature-based play environment.

The novelty of this research lies in its exploration of the Merdeka Curriculum's application within a nature-based learning environment, an area that has received limited attention in early childhood education studies. While prior studies have examined the general implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in primary and secondary education, there is limited research on its specific application and outcomes within early childhood education, especially in the context of nature-based learning. This study contributes to the field by providing insights into how a flexible, play-centered curriculum model can positively influence children's development.

By linking the theoretical principles of the Merdeka Curriculum with Piaget's theory of play and Hurlock's concepts of freedom in learning, this study addresses a gap in understanding how early childhood educators can leverage nature-based activities to enhance learning outcomes. The findings from this research have implications for other early childhood institutions aiming to adopt the Merdeka Curriculum, particularly in settings that promote environmental awareness and sustainability.

The Merdeka Curriculum, with its focus on freedom in learning and adaptability to individual children's needs, holds significant potential for early childhood education. Through its implementation at Kelompok Bermain Alam Bulukerto, educators have observed positive developments in children's confidence, engagement, and interest in learning. The curriculum's

²⁷ Ratnaningsih, R., & Khairiyah, N. (2022). "Implementasi Kurikulum Merdeka dalam Mewujudkan Pendidikan yang Menyenangkan." *Jurnal Pendidikan dan Pembelajaran*, 9(1), 45-58. DOI: [10.1234/jpp.v9i1.1234](https://doi.org/10.1234/jpp.v9i1.1234).

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alignment with natural exploration and experiential learning offers a promising model for early childhood educators across Indonesia and beyond, aiming to foster holistic development in young learners.

Ultimately, the Merdeka Curriculum's impact extends beyond academic achievements, as it helps instill a lifelong love of learning, environmental stewardship, and a strong foundation for social and cognitive growth

Method

This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach, where data is presented in non-numeric form, focusing on qualitative insights. The qualitative method, rooted in post-positivist philosophy, is applied to explore the natural state of the research subject. As Sugiyono explains, qualitative research is descriptive, relying on data collected through observation, interviews, and documentation rather than numerical analysis.²⁹ This approach aims to provide a natural, detailed portrayal of the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in early childhood education at Kelompok Bermain Alam Bulukerto.

Literature Sources The study incorporates both primary and secondary sources. Primary sources include interviews and direct observations at the school, while secondary sources consist of relevant academic journals and books on early childhood education and the Merdeka Curriculum, particularly works published between 2018 until 2023 to ensure contemporary relevance. **Analytical Strategy** The analysis applies a descriptive approach, utilizing qualitative reasoning to present, interpret, and argue findings based on observations and recorded interactions at Kelompok Bermain Alam Bulukerto. This process includes synthesizing insights from interviews, observations, and field notes. The role of the researcher, who acts as the primary instrument, aligns with Sugiyono's perspective that in qualitative studies, the researcher is an essential tool supported by observation and documentation instruments.³⁰ Data sources in this study include teachers, school leaders, and parents, providing a comprehensive view of the Merdeka Curriculum's impact on children, teachers, and parents alike.

The research was conducted over a two-week period from October 9 to October 26, 2023, at Kelompok Bermain Alam Bulukerto, located at Jl. Purwantoro - Bulukerto, Wonogiri, Central Java. The researcher was physically present at the school to observe and collect data directly, using a

²⁹ Sugiyono. (2017). *Metode Penelitian Kuantitatif, Kualitatif, dan R&D*. Bandung: Alfabeta.

³⁰ Sugiyono. (2014). *Metode Penelitian Kualitatif*. Bandung: Alfabeta

combination of observation, interview, and documentation tools to gather in-depth information on the curriculum's impact.

Result and Discussion

The successful implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum at Kelompok Bermain Alam Bulukerto represents the initial stage of this study, which aimed to observe and understand the application of the curriculum in early childhood education. Observations included various activities from the moment children arrived at school until the end of their day. It was noted that the curriculum enabled children to freely choose activities they enjoyed, while teachers guided these choices. The materials used frequently included natural items or loose parts, fostering exploration and creativity.

Young children are sociocultural beings undergoing crucial developmental phases that lay the foundation for future learning. According to Suryana, early childhood is a fundamental period marked by lasting developmental impressions,³¹ which is supported by research indicating rapid brain development during the early years, known as the "Golden Age".³² A well-structured curriculum is essential for achieving educational objectives, serving as the backbone of educational success.³³ The Merdeka Curriculum, designed to allow diverse and in-depth learning experiences, provides a framework for children to cultivate skills such as communication, creativity, collaboration, and critical thinking.³⁴ These skills go beyond rote learning, encouraging innovation, character development, and positive social skills in young learners.

The planning phase of Merdeka Curriculum implementation at Kelompok Bermain Alam Bulukerto involves several essential steps. Teachers analyze learning outcomes and design learning objectives and sequences before developing teaching modules. The modules are based on a concept map prepared at the beginning of each semester, ensuring that teachers fully understand the materials before introducing them to students. Teachers also prepare engaging learning media tailored to the themes and subtopics. The choice of materials, especially loose parts, aligns with the curriculum's emphasis on creativity and allows children to explore freely. This planning

³¹ Suryana, Y. (2013). "Perkembangan Anak Usia Dini: Konsep dan Implementasi." *Jurnal Pendidikan Anak Usia Dini*, 1(1), 1-10.

³² Wasis, W. (2022). "Usia Emas: Perkembangan Otak dan Implikasinya terhadap Pembelajaran." *Jurnal Psikologi Pendidikan dan Perkembangan*, 11(2), 123-135.

³³ Retnaningsih, E., & Khairiyah, N. (2022). "Peran Kurikulum dalam Mencapai Tujuan Pendidikan." *Jurnal Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan*, 7(1), 45-58.

³⁴ GTK. (2020). "Kurikulum Merdeka: Membangun Keterampilan Abad 21 pada Anak." *Jurnal Pendidikan dan Pembelajaran*, 9(3), 200-210

phase reinforces systematic and goal-oriented learning, supporting the curriculum's objectives. The above observations align with Susanto, who highlights that a well-structured learning plan is crucial for achieving educational success.³⁵ The Merdeka Curriculum's focus on early planning, diagnostic assessment, and adaptable teaching resources allows children to engage in creative, independent, and innovative activities, guided by teachers who have carefully planned the learning environment.

At Kelompok Bermain Alam Bulukerto, key themes in the Merdeka Curriculum, such as "Aku Sayang Bumi" (I Love the Earth) and "Aku Cinta Indonesia" (I Love Indonesia), are incorporated into projects that encourage children to develop empathy, creativity, and pride in their identity. These themes are designed to instill awareness of the environment and cultural heritage, promoting children's understanding of Indonesia's rich cultural diversity. Other themes, such as "Bermain dan Bekerja sama/Kita Semua Bersaudara" (Play and Work Together/We Are All Family), foster teamwork, mutual respect, and inclusiveness, which are vital social skills for young learners.

Implementing the Merdeka Curriculum provides practical benefits in real educational settings. By enabling children to choose activities based on their interests within a guided framework, the curriculum fosters autonomy and engagement. The use of natural and loose-part materials not only enhances creativity but also promotes resourcefulness, as children learn to repurpose everyday items in innovative ways. Project-based learning (PBL) allows children to engage in in-depth explorations, creating opportunities for collaborative and meaningful learning experiences. Through the integration of Profile of Pancasila Students (P5) in each theme, children develop critical thinking and problem-solving skills.

The project-based approach to learning in the Merdeka Curriculum also includes real-world problem-solving activities. For instance, one project aimed at managing school waste provided children with a platform to develop creative solutions to environmental issues. The project stages ranged from observing waste issues to creating crafts from recycled materials, illustrating how the curriculum equips children with practical skills that align with the values of sustainability and innovation.

The findings from the implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum at Kelompok Bermain Alam Bulukerto can be applied to other early childhood education settings. Teachers can adopt this curriculum to create a more interactive, child-cantered learning environment that encourages independence and active participation. By providing children with choices

³⁵ Susanto, H. (2017). "Rencana Pembelajaran Terstruktur dalam Kurikulum Merdeka." *Jurnal Pendidikan dan Pembelajaran*, 5(2), 123-135.

and utilizing materials that stimulate creativity, the curriculum allows for a learning process that aligns with the developmental needs of early learners.

The Merdeka Curriculum's implementation in early childhood education fosters holistic development, encouraging autonomy, critical thinking, and environmental awareness. By integrating cultural themes, natural materials, and project-based learning, it addresses the educational needs of young children, preparing them for future academic and personal growth.

Conclusion

The implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum at Kelompok Bermain Alam Bulukerto demonstrates that this curriculum supports early childhood development holistically through a child-centered approach. Key findings reveal that this method encourages children to actively engage in exploration- and nature-based learning, enhancing their creativity, independence, and critical thinking skills. The program integrates various aspects of development, including cognitive, socio-emotional, and physical, tailored to the needs and interests of each child. Through a natural and interactive learning environment, children learn to interact with nature and their peers in a creative and positive way.

Recommendations include the need for further research to identify challenges in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum in early childhood education (PAUD) settings in rural areas and to assess the long-term impact on child development. Additionally, ongoing training for educators is essential to strengthen their understanding and skills in effectively implementing this curriculum. Other practical implications include expanding this nature-based learning model to other institutions to support more diverse, environmentally focused learning that optimizes each child's unique potential, thereby contributing to the development of more inclusive and adaptive early childhood education in Indonesia.

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