



Implementation of the Project Method in the Independent Curriculum as a Strategy to Improve Early Childhood Creativity

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Abstract

Creativity is the ability to produce something new, valuable ideas, and solutions. In early childhood, creativity includes not only arts and crafts but also the ability to think critically, solve problems, and innovate in various situations. Creativity is an important aspect in children's development because it helps them to express themselves, improve cognitive abilities, and develop social-emotional skills. However, the lack of creative stimulation in early childhood is still a common problem. It is believed that the project method in the Independent Curriculum can be an effective strategy to improve the creativity of young children. The aim of this research is to determine the implementation of project method learning in the Independent Curriculum in Early Childhood Education as a strategy to increasing the creativity of early childhood. The research method in this study uses a qualitative descriptive approach with a literature study method where journal articles, books and e-books are used as reference material in writing. The data analysis used in this research is content analysis. The results obtained from this research indicate that the project method in the independent curriculum can be used as an effective strategy for improving children's creativity from an early age, in its implementation the teacher a very important role, while the implementation stages involve careful planning steps, flexible implementation of projects according to the topic, and assessment focuses on the process. The interesting project method, encouraging children to participate actively and responsibly. So that the resulting abilities show an increase in the ability to think creatively, imaginatively, problem solving, collaboratively and producing work.

Keywords: project method; independent curriculum; creativity, early childhood.

1. Introduction

In the current era of society 5.0, early childhood education has an important role in forming young children who have the ability to think critically and creatively (Puspita, Fitriani, Astuti, & Novianti, 2020). One of the main challenges in early childhood education so that young children have the abilities needed in the future is how to stimulate children's creativity from an early age. Creativity is an essential skill needed to adapt and innovate in the future. Independent Curriculum, which was initiated by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research and Technology of the Republic of Indonesia (2021) offers a new approach that is more flexible and child-centered, one of which is through the project method.

Currently the curriculum in early childhood education institutions is in various conditions, there are early childhood education institutions that are still using the 2013 curriculum and have not implemented the independent curriculum, there are those that are still studying and implementing the independent curriculum in stages, and there are also those that have implemented the independent curriculum. However, findings in the field turned out that when implementing the independent curriculum there were obstacles, including difficulties in determining projects, lack of time allocation for project-based learning, determining the form of assessment in project-based learning. (Amalia, Arifin, & Lukman, 2023). This problem proves the importance of the teacher's role in implementing the project method in the independent curriculum.

The project method in the early childhood education institutions context is designed to provide a comprehensive and meaningful learning experience for children. With this method, children are encouraged to explore their interests, collaborate with friends, and create real projects that are relevant to their lives. This approach not only deepens academic knowledge but also develops critical thinking, problem solving and creativity skills (Widiya & Radia, 2023).

Creativity is an important aspect of early childhood development that influences critical thinking, problem solving and innovation abilities in the future (Fitri & Suryana, 2022). Creativity in early childhood allows them to express themselves, explore the world around them, and learn in a fun and meaningful way. Creative children tend to be more adaptive to change, able to think outside the box, and have the skills necessary to overcome future challenges (Salma & Nurlina, 2024).

However, low creativity in early childhood is still a common problem. This is proven by findings in the field, it turns out that when implementing an independent curriculum there are obstacles, including difficulties in determining projects, lack of time allocation for project-based learning, determining the form of assessment in project-based learning. (Marfuah et al., 2023). In an educational environment, approaches that support the development of creativity are very necessary. This approach must provide freedom for children to explore, experiment and be creative without fear of making mistakes. Project-based approaches, for example, have proven effective in developing children's creativity by providing opportunities for them to engage in activities that are challenging and relevant to their interests (Widiya & Radia, 2023).

Research shows that the project method is effective in increasing children's creativity. Children involved in project-based learning tend to show higher levels of creativity compared to those involved in traditional learning (Dianti, Pamelasari, & Hardianti, 2023). Apart from that, this method also helps children to be more confident, independent and able to work together with other people, which is an important aspect in developing creativity (Putro, 2016).

Based on facts in the field that there is still a lack of stimulation of creativity in early childhood, the independent curriculum uses project-based learning, apart from that, it is in accordance with previous research that the project method can increase creativity. Therefore, the aim of this research is to examine in more depth the implementation of the project method in the independent curriculum as a strategy to increase creativity, and there is no research that has studied this matter.

2. Literature Review

2. 1. Project Method

The project method is a way of providing learning experiences by confronting children with everyday problems that must be solved in groups (Magta, Ujianti, & Permatasari, 2019). The project method gives children the opportunity to develop and trains them to accept responsibility and use physical and intellectual freedom in completing their tasks. The project method also gives them the opportunity to build self-confidence and independence, appreciate friends, develop a positive attitude towards the environment, and work together (Seftyana, Syafdaningsih, & Rukiyah, 2018). So that by using the project method they can apply knowledge, attitudes and

skills in an integrated manner, children learn to be serious about working together and take full responsibility for their work.

Through the project method which requires children to work together in various activities according to the project given. From these activities, children gain cooperative experiences that will shape their behavior. Hamdayama revealed several advantages of the project method, namely: (1) it can expand students' thinking patterns to be broader and more comprehensive, so that they can solve the problems they face every day; and (2) this method teaches students to apply knowledge, attitudes and skills systematically, which ends up being practical and useful in everyday life (Magtadkk., 2019). The project method helps cooperative learning, improves children's learning abilities and skills, makes children more active, allows them to work with groups, and use what they know (Mujahidin, Mufarohah, & Alim, 2019).

2. 2. Kurikulum Merdeka

Indonesia is a country that always experiences curriculum changes from time to time. Of course, like it or not, this change must be followed by every educational institution, including early childhood education. The curriculum is the main idea or soul of the educational process. In the world of education, changing the curriculum is a common thing, but its implementation is not always easy to understand, especially for educators who are at the forefront of implementing the curriculum. (Hajar & Pratiwi, 2024).

The independent curriculum is closely related to independent learning. Freedom to learn on your own is a new policy program implemented by the Indonesian Minister of Education and Culture, initiated by Mr. Nadiem Makarim. The Ministry of Education and Culture has created the Independent Curriculum as a crucial element in efforts to save learning materials from a long-lasting crisis. The concept of an independent curriculum is to provide a broad learning concept for children to learn happily according to predetermined achievements (Salsabilla, Jannah, & Juanda, 2023).

The independent curriculum for early childhood means freedom to learn and freedom to play because it contains learning principles that emphasize the central role of children and fun learning. The independent curriculum contains learning principles that focus on the central role of children. By carrying out the independent curriculum,

various learning materials are available to enable children to deepen their knowledge and strengthen their skills (Ningtyas, Amrillah, Putra, & Hartati, 2024).

Within the independent curriculum framework, learning elements and achievements have been determined. This section reviews several reasons underlying the formation of Learning Achievement at the Early Childhood Education level such as Kindergarten (TK/RA/BA), Play Group (KB), Pre-School (SPS), and Al-Qur'an Education Park (TPA) based on regulations from the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research and Technology (Kemendikbudristek) No. 09 of 2022. First of all, emphasis is placed on giving greater freedom to early childhood education institutions units to determine appropriate teaching and learning methods. It is emphasized that the teaching and learning process in early childhood education institutions must be adapted to the needs of children, taking into account the physical, social, moral, linguistic and cognitive aspects of children as the main basis (Zahra, 2022).

2. 3. Early Childhood Creativity

The development of creativity in children develops gradually, starting from how children play games, then gradually spreading to various other areas of life (Nurinayah, Nurhayati, & Wulansuci, 2021). All children have the potential to be creative, although their levels of creativity are different so they need to be given opportunities and stimulation by the environment to develop. In helping children realize their creativity, children need to be trained in certain skills according to their interests and given the opportunity to develop their gifts or talents. Educators and parents need to create an atmosphere that stimulates children's creative thinking and skills, as well as providing safe and comfortable infrastructure, but all of that is not enough, apart from encouragement, attention and training, intrinsic encouragement is needed to do something that grows from within oneself, on own wishes. Creativity, as the ability to see possibilities for solving a problem, is a form of thinking that until now has received little attention in formal education, children are required to think more linearly and logically, demanding the most appropriate answers to the problems they face.

3. Material and Method

This research uses a qualitative descriptive method. Descriptive research is a type of research that uses a qualitative approach. The reason researchers chose this descriptive research design was to produce descriptive data that allows the creation of research reports that function as a description of various conditions, situations and other elements (Nurfathiyah, Wiyono, Arafik, & Arifin, 2024). Data was collected from 12 journals that researched the implementation of the Project Method in the Independent Curriculum as a Strategy to Increase Early Childhood Creativity. The data was analyzed using the content analysis method using open coding, and after that provided categorization.

4. Result

- a. The project method in the independent curriculum can be used as an effective strategy for increasing children's creativity from an early age.

Indonesia is a country that always experiences curriculum changes from time to time. Of course, like it or not, this change must be followed by every educational institution, including Early Childhood Education. This also makes every educator have to adjust the methods and strategies that will be used in the learning process and adapt them to the existing curriculum. As stated by Azizah and Wardhani, providing stimulation by creative teachers can influence children's creativity, therefore teachers must be creative and provide stimulation appropriately and correctly (Azizah & Wardhani, 2022). Because creativity in children is something that is unlimited and there is no concept of right or wrong, because every child has their own way and thoughts in expressing ideas, expressing something, and creating a work.

The independent curriculum effectively increases the ability of young children to develop creative thinking patterns. Teachers have a very important role in integrating curriculum concepts with children's needs and according to their development (Insania & Pasaribu, 2024). One method that can be applied in the independent curriculum is through the project method. Where the project method can increase the creativity of early childhood. This is because project-based learning gives children the opportunity and freedom to express ideas or solutions to solve problems and complete assigned tasks using children's knowledge and experience as well as resources provided by teachers or parents (Agustina, 2021).

Other studies show that project activities that are interesting to children can increase their creativity, make them take responsibility for their projects, gain hands-on

experience, new ideas, and the ability to express the process of working on a project in a short time. In addition, children become more enthusiastic about being creative, feel happy with the results of their work, and are more enthusiastic about completing projects to completion. (Widiasih & Astuti, 2021).

- b. Implementation of the project method involves careful planning steps, flexible project implementation according to the topic, and assessment focused on the process.

Learning that uses the project method can help students develop creativity and analytical, logical and critical abilities in problem solving. The project method can also provide direct experience in solving problems and finding solutions that are useful in everyday life. Implementation of the project method in the Independent Curriculum for early childhood can be done through several stages and strategies, such as needs mapping, socialization of best practices, training and implementation. (Zulkarnaen, Wardhani, Katoningsih, & Asmawulan, 2023).

Planning the project method in learning to implement the independent curriculum begins with choosing a theme to study with the teacher. These themes were then narrowed down. After coordination with the teachers is complete, the teacher provides information to the children about the themes that will be used in learning activities, which are arranged in a concept map. Next, children are involved in project selection, which is based on each child's interests and talents. The project was carried out over one week, not just one day. Teachers must pay great attention to coordination and timing when planning project activities involving parents (Rasmani dkk., 2023).

The implementation of the project method itself has six stages: the stage of determining activities, planning the project method, preparing the implementation of the method, completing the project, delivering the results of the activities, delivering the results of the activities and recolling. Implementation of social and financial education through project methods, for example field visits and exhibitions or market days and other routine and programmed activities (Sari, Setiawan, & Novitawati, 2022).

Other research conducted by Armeth Daud Al Kahar & Anjani Putri at Ummusshabri early childhood education institutions in Konawe Regency consisted of 5 main activity stages, namely the pre-development stage, development stage, assessment stage, reward giving stage and evaluation stage. The pre-development stage contains design, determining the project-based learning theme, determining the event

rundown, classifying student characteristics according to age groups and determining the location of the activity. The second stage is the development stage containing the main activities, namely the implementation of project-based learning including choir activities, fashion shows, coloring and dancing, the third stage is the assessment stage, namely the judging stage and giving marks for each activity. The fourth stage is giving rewards which aim to motivate students to work and the final stage is evaluation (Kahar & Putri, 2023).

At ABA Al Hikmah Kindergarten the application of project learning includes several phases of project method work, namely: (1) phase 1 (starting the project) includes selecting a theme, initial webbing to find out initial knowledge about the theme; phase 2 (developing the project) includes exploring information through books, films, interviews with guest teachers, and trips as well as planning the final project; phase 3 (finishing the project) includes project creation, exhibition, final webbing and exit point; (2) learning using the project method has increased the creativity of young children, including having high curiosity, high imagination, producing forms, answering simple questions, and having responsibility (Utami, 2022).

The project method can also be applied through STEAM-based learning, as implemented by TK Pelita with the following stages: 1) preparing a project plan. 2). Create a project implementation schedule. 3) implement the project. 4). monitor children and project progress. 5) assessment of results. The results of research on the application of Science Technology Engineering Art Mathematics learning through the project method at Pelita Kindergarten can develop children's learning activities and increase children's creativity (Nurinayah dkk., 2021).

The results of this research concluded that the implementation stage of project-based learning which was applied to increase creativity in children included three stages, namely the initial stage, the implementation stage, and the conclusion stage (Nursalam, Sulaeman, & Latuapo, 2023). As the results of classroom action research by Asilaka show that the project method can increase the creativity of early childhood (Asilaka, Idris, & Said, 2021).

- c. Attitudes resulting from the project method in implementing the independent curriculum

The attitude resulting from the project method in implementing the independent curriculum is encouraging children to participate actively and responsibly. This is proven by the results of Widhiasih and Astuti's research (2021), after students were given the task of making a video tutorial for a papier mache project with their parents at home, the children were very enthusiastic about making it, even one in four parents interviewed stated that their children on their own initiative helped prepare the necessary tools and materials. Based on this research, it can be seen that the project method can produce children's attitudes that become more enthusiastic about creativity, as can be seen from the children's enthusiasm in working on their projects, children are motivated to work on projects until they are completed, as can be seen from the efforts of children who, on their own initiative, prepare the necessary tools and materials, and can complete the assigned tasks.

d. Capabilities resulting from the project method in implementing the independent curriculum

The abilities resulting from the project method in implementing the independent curriculum are that children show increased abilities to think creatively, imaginatively, problem solving, collaboratively, producing work. In line with this, previous research states that the independent curriculum contributes to improving thinking skills, this is because the independent curriculum provides freedom for teachers to adjust the level of project difficulty according to the child's abilities and readiness, so that each child can learn and develop according to their individual abilities. child (Azizah & Wardhani, 2022; Insania & Pasaribu, 2024). This cannot be separated from the learning method that supports it, namely the project method, because the project method can be applied both individually and in groups where the projects carried out can start from children's knowledge and experience directly, so that children get many opportunities to be able to convey and develop what they master it (Agustina, 2021).

5. Conclusion, Implication, and Recommendation

The results of this research show that the project method in the independent curriculum can be used as an effective strategy for increasing children's creativity from an early age. Implementation The project method can be implemented by involving careful planning steps, flexible project implementation according to the topic, and assessment focused on the process. The attitudes resulting from the project method encourage children

to participate actively and responsibly. Meanwhile, the abilities produced by the children's project method show an increase in the ability to think creatively, imaginatively, problem solving, collaboratively, producing work.

The implication of this research is that it is hoped that there will be changes in learning strategies that are more flexible and interactive in implementing the independent curriculum using the project method so that children can participate actively in learning. Apart from that, there is an increase in teacher skills to design and manage projects that are relevant and interesting for children so that children have fun learning. And preferably the Curriculum needs to be designed in such a way that it allows adapting project topics to the interests and needs of children. Flexibility in this curriculum will give children the freedom to explore and develop their creativity optimally.

Recommendations for early childhood education institution managers and teachers must be more creative and planned in preparing project-based early childhood learning curricula, so that they can implement learning activities that are fun and achieve goals. So that it can increase the creativity of young children as expected.

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