

Research Article

Implementation of the Arts Center Approach in Increasing Early Childhood Creativity in Integrative Holistic Early Childhood Education

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Abstract: This study aims to describe the implementation of the art center approach in increasing early childhood creativity in Integrative Holistic Early Childhood Education. The art center approach is one of the child-centered learning strategies, by providing freedom of expression through art activities such as drawing, painting, dancing, and playing music. This study uses a qualitative method with a descriptive approach. The research subjects consist of teachers and children aged 4–6 years in Integrative Holistic Early Childhood Education. Data was collected through observation, interviews, and documentation, then analyzed with stages of data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawn. The results of the study show that the implementation of the art center approach in Integrative Holistic PAUD is able to foster aspects of children's creativity, including the ability to imagine, experiment with art media, and express ideas originally. In addition, the role of teachers as facilitators is very important in providing stimulation, a supportive environment, and appreciation of children's work. In conclusion, the art center approach is effective in developing early childhood creativity if applied consistently, with the support of facilities, media, and mentoring that are appropriate to the stage of child development.

Keywords: Art Center Approach; Child Creativity; Child Development; Integrative Holistic PAUD; Qualitative Research.

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1. Introduction

Early Childhood Education (PAUD) is a fundamental stage in forming the basis of personality, character, and overall development of children's potential. Early childhood is known as the *golden age*, which is a period when all aspects of child development experience very rapid growth (Suyadi, 2017). Therefore, education at this stage needs to be designed with a holistic, integrative, and child-centered approach. In this context, play activities are the main means in the early childhood learning process because through play, children learn naturally and meaningfully (Mayke S. Tedjasaputra, 2015).

One approach that emphasizes active, creative, and fun learning is the center approach, in which there is an art center. The art center is a place for children to channel their imagination and expression through drawing, dancing, playing music, shaping and various other creative activities (Moeslichatoen, 2004). Through these activities, children learn to develop aesthetic sensitivity, fine motor skills, divergent thinking skills, and confidence in their work (Craft, 2005).

The art center approach not only serves as a means of developing artistic skills, but also plays an important role in fostering early childhood creativity. Creativity is the ability to produce new ideas, innovative solutions, or original products, which are born from the

process of free and open thinking (Munandar, 2012). In the context of learning in early childhood education, creativity is an important aspect because it encourages children to dare to experiment, imagine, and express themselves without fear of being wrong (Suyadi & Ulfah, 2013).

Furthermore, the implementation of Integrative Holistic Early Childhood Education (HI) requires synergy between aspects of education, health, nutrition, parenting, and child protection (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2014). Within this framework, art center activities play a role as part of the whole child development service. Through integrated art activities, children not only develop creativity, but also social, emotional, spiritual, and cognitive skills in a balanced manner (Yuliani Nurani Sujiono, 2018).

However, the implementation of the art center approach in several PAUD institutions still faces various obstacles. These challenges include the lack of teachers' understanding of effective art learning strategies, limited media and supporting facilities, and the lack of optimal integration of art activities in daily activity plans (Rachmawati & Kurniati, 2010). Therefore, this study is important to describe the implementation of the art center approach in increasing early childhood creativity in Integrative Holistic Early Childhood Education, as well as identifying supporting and inhibiting factors for its implementation.

2. Introduction or Related Works or Literature Review

Integrative Holistic Early Childhood Education (PAUD) Concept

Integrative Holistic Early Childhood Education (PAUD) is an educational service that integrates various aspects of child development, including education, health, nutrition, nurturing, and protection, so that children can grow and develop optimally (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2014). This approach is based on the paradigm that children are whole individuals who have multidimensional needs and must be met comprehensively through cross-sector collaboration (Sujiono, 2018).

In the context of learning in Integrative Holistic Early Childhood Education, the learning approach is directed to provide stimulation that covers all aspects of child development—physical, cognitive, social, emotional, and spiritual—in a balanced manner (Suyadi, 2017). Therefore, applied learning must be child-centered, experience-based, and foster curiosity and creativity. One of the approaches that supports this principle is center-based learning.

A Centered Approach in Early Childhood Learning

The center approach is one of the learning models in PAUD that is oriented towards play while learning activities. This model was developed based on *the High Scope theory* and the principle *of learning by doing* from Jean Piaget and John Dewey, which emphasized that children learn best through direct experience and exploration of the environment (Moeslichatoen, 2004).

In center-based learning, children are placed as active subjects, while teachers play the role of facilitators and motivators (Suyadi & Ulfah, 2013). Centers in PAUD are usually divided based on the type of activity, such as role-playing centers, natural materials centers, block centers, preparation centers, music centers, and art centers.

Activities at the center provide opportunities for children to experiment, socialize, and develop logical and creative thinking skills (Tedjasaputra, 2015). Teachers in the centered approach not only teach concepts, but also stimulate children to think critically, express opinions, and solve problems through real experiences (Rozana, S. 2021).

Art Center as a Media for Developing Children's Creativity

Art centers have an important role in personality formation and early childhood creativity development. Through art activities, children can express their emotions, ideas, and imagination freely. Art also provides an aesthetic experience that enriches sense of taste and enhances divergent thinking skills (Craft, 2005).

According to Munandar (2012), creativity is the ability to produce something new, both in the form of ideas and real products, as a result of a combination of imaginative thinking and action. In the context of early childhood education, creativity is not only related to the results of work, but also the thinking process and the way children express themselves (Panggabean, H.S 2018).

Activities at art centers, such as drawing, painting, dancing, playing musical instruments, or making works from natural materials, are able to develop fine motor skills, hand-eye coordination, and children's confidence (Yuliani Nurani Sujiono, 2018). In addition, art activities also encourage children to work together, share ideas, and appreciate the work of

others, all of which contribute to children's social and emotional development (Rachmawati & Kurniati, 2010).

Early Childhood Creativity

Creativity in early childhood is one of the main indicators of healthy cognitive and emotional development. Torrance (1974) states that creativity is the ability to think *fluently*, flexibly, originally, and elaborate. In early childhood education, these four aspects can be developed through exploratory and imaginative activities in an open learning environment.

Munandar (2012) emphasized that a learning environment that supports creativity must provide opportunities for children to ask questions, try, and discover. Teachers act as facilitators who create learning situations that encourage children's curiosity and courage in expressing themselves.

Art activities that are integrated into daily learning are a concrete form of the environment that supports creativity. Children are given space to think freely without fear of making mistakes, explore materials and media, and find new ways of working. This is in line with the principles of Integrative Holistic Early Childhood Education which emphasizes the development of children's potential as a whole, including creative potential which is the foundation for future learning (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2014).

Implementation of the Art Center Approach in Integrative Holistic Early Childhood Education

The implementation of art centers in Integrative Holistic PAUD needs to be designed systematically to support all aspects of child development. Teachers must be able to prepare a conducive learning environment, provide diverse art media, and provide opportunities for children to express themselves freely (Rachmawati & Kurniati, 2010).

In practice, art center activities must be integrated with aspects of character, spirituality, and social education. For example, painting activities can be associated with environmental themes, Islamic values, or mutual cooperation activities. This integration reflects the essence of holistic education, which is to grow children as creative, faithful, moral, and caring individuals (Suyadi, 2017).

Thus, the art center approach is not only a means of aesthetic development, but also a learning strategy that shapes children's personalities as a whole and with character (Parapat, A 2018).

3. Materials and Methods

This study uses a qualitative approach with a descriptive type of research. This approach was chosen because it aims to deeply understand the process of implementing the art center approach in increasing early childhood creativity in Integrative Holistic Early Childhood Education. The qualitative approach allows researchers to explore the meanings, values, and real practices that occur in the early childhood learning environment (Creswell, 2014).

Through this approach, researchers play a role as the main instrument that conducts observation, interviews, and documentation of learning activities in art centers.

Data Collection Techniques

To obtain accurate and in-depth data, three main data collection techniques are used:

Participatory Observation: Conducted to directly observe learning activities at the art center, including the interaction between teachers and children, the media used, the form of art activities, and children's creative expression during the activity.

In-Depth Interview: Interviews were conducted with the center's teachers, principals, and several parents to obtain information about the implementation strategy, objectives, and impact of art center activities on children's creativity development.

Documentation: Includes data collection in the form of Daily Learning Implementation Plans (RPPH), photos of activities, children's artworks, and other supporting documents.

Data Analysis Techniques

Data analysis was carried out interactively following the model of Miles and Huberman (1994) which includes three main stages:

Data Reduction – selecting, focusing, and simplifying data relevant to the focus of the research.

Data Presentation – organize data into narrative form, matrices, or tables for easy understanding.

Conclusion Drawing and Verification – formulating findings based on the data that has been analyzed and verifying their validity through *member checks* and *data triangulation*.

Data Validity

To maintain the validity of the data, the researchers used several techniques, namely:
 Triangulation of sources (teachers, principals, parents),
 Triangulation methods (observation, interviews, documentation), and
 Member checks with informants to ensure that the data and interpretation of the researcher are in accordance with the reality in the field (Moleong, 2017).

4. Results and Discussion

Result

Overview of the Implementation of the Art Center in Integrative Holistic Early Childhood Education

Based on the results of observations and interviews, art center activities at Integrative Holistic PAUD are carried out twice a week with a duration of about 60–90 minutes per meeting. The art center is one of children's favorite activities because it provides a space for free and fun expression. The teacher prepares various art media such as crayons, watercolors, colored paper, natural materials (leaves, sand, grains), and simple musical instruments.

Each activity begins with perception, opens with a song or applause, followed by core activities such as drawing, painting, or making collages, then ends with a brief reflection. The teacher plays the role of a facilitator who gives light direction, but allows the child to create independently.

The implementation of art center-based learning at this institution follows the principle of active and student-centered learning. Children are free to choose colors, shapes, and materials according to their interests, so they learn to make decisions and express themselves without fear of being wrong.

The results of the observation showed that the children looked enthusiastic, focused, and showed pride in the work they made. The teacher gives positive verbal reinforcement such as "Your idea is great!" or "You are so creative!", which also strengthens the child's confidence.

Increasing Children's Creativity through Arts Center Activities

The results of the documentation of children's work show an increase in divergent thinking skills and originality from week to week. Children begin to dare to combine colors, add unique shapes, and tell stories about the meaning of the pictures they make. Based on the indicators of early childhood creativity according to Torrance (1974), the development that appears to include (Munisa & Syahril A. 2021):

Fluency – Children are able to generate many ideas in a short time. For example, when asked to draw a picture of a house, the child adds a garden, clouds, and pets without instructions from the teacher.

Flexibility – Children are able to use a variety of materials or alternative media, such as making shapes from dried leaves and grains.

Originality – Children show ideas that are different from their peers, such as drawing abstract shapes or giving unconventional colors.

Elaboration – Children begin to detail their work by adding details that describe a certain storyline or feeling.

This development is not only seen in the work, but also in the child's creative behavior, such as asking questions enthusiastically, laughing when discovering new ideas, and working together with friends. According to Munandar (2012), these signs indicate the existence of effective creativity stimulation through art activities.

The Role of Teachers in Implementing the Arts Center Approach

Teachers have an important role as a designer of the learning environment and a facilitator of children's creativity. Based on the interviews, the teacher compiled a Daily Learning Implementation Plan (RPPH) by adjusting the theme, for example "My Environment" or "Universe", and associating it with artistic activities such as drawing landscapes, making collages from natural materials, or dancing to environmentally-themed songs.

The teacher does not judge the work based on the final result, but rather emphasizes the process of exploration and expression of the child. This is in accordance with the opinion of Craft (2005) that learning art at an early age should foster imagination and freedom of thought, not just technical skills.

In addition, teachers apply integrative holistic principles by linking art activities to moral and spiritual aspects. For example, children are invited to be grateful for God's creation through painting the beauty of nature, or are taught the value of mutual cooperation when

making group works. This approach is in line with Suyadi's (2017) view that early childhood education must touch on aspects of spirituality and character values.

Supporting and Inhibiting Factors for the Implementation of the Arts Center

Supporting Factors: Institutional support for center-based activities, including the provision of learning facilities and media. Teacher competence who understands the importance of art in children's development. The involvement of parents who give appreciation for the children's work at home.

Inhibiting Factors: Limitations of varied materials and art tools due to operational costs. The teacher-child ratio is high so that supervision of each child is less than optimal. Some parents are still oriented towards the results of their work, not the learning process.

To overcome these obstacles, teachers make innovations such as using recycled materials as an art medium, forming small groups during activities, and conducting intensive communication with parents about the importance of children's creative processes.

Discussion

The results of this study show that the art center approach contributes significantly to increasing early childhood creativity. Art activities allow children to experiment, imagine, and express themselves freely. This is in line with the findings of Rachmawati & Kurniati (2010) research that art activities have a positive correlation with the development of children's imagination and confidence.

In addition, the implementation of the arts center approach in the context of Integrative Holistic Early Childhood Education supports the development of children as a whole—including cognitive, social, emotional, and spiritual aspects. The integration of Islamic values in art activities also strengthens children's character and instills moral values from an early age (Yuliani Nurani Sujiono, 2018).

This finding confirms the view of Suyadi (2017) that education that is child-centered and based on spiritual values will produce a generation that is creative and moral at the same time. Therefore, the arts center approach can be an effective and relevant learning model in the context of today's early childhood education.

5. Conclusion

Based on the results of the research and discussions that have been conducted, it can be concluded that the art center approach plays a significant role in increasing early childhood creativity in Integrative Holistic Early Childhood Education. Through a variety of artistic activities—such as drawing, painting, dancing, playing music, and making works from natural materials—children gain meaningful, fun, and nurturing learning experiences that foster curiosity and imagination.

The implementation of art centers that are carried out in a planned and child-centered manner is able to develop aspects of creativity such as fluency in thinking, flexibility, originality, and elaboration (Torrance, 1974). Children become more courageous in their opinions, independent in their work, and show unique ideas. In addition, art activities also strengthen the social-emotional, spiritual, and character development of children through values such as cooperation, discipline, and gratitude for God's creation.

The art center approach in Integrative Holistic Early Childhood Education has proven to support the concept of integral education, where learning not only emphasizes cognitive aspects, but also integrates health, nurturing, nutritional, moral, and spiritual aspects. Thus, art learning is an important part of holistic stimulation that helps children grow into creative, characterful, and highly creative individuals.

However, implementation in the field still faces several obstacles, such as limited art media, high teacher-child ratio, and lack of parental understanding of the meaning of art activities. Therefore, institutional support and continuous training for teachers are needed so that art center activities can be implemented optimally.

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