

Dynamics of management in early childhood education as a leading school in implementing the independent curriculum

Ni Ekawati^{1*}, I Made Yudana², Anak Agung Gede Agung³, Ni Luh Gede Erni Sulindawati³

^{1,2,3,4} Ganesha University of Education, Singaraja Bali, Indonesia

Abstract

Management of Early Childhood Education (ECE) is highly diverse, and most do not meet expected standards. This is because most are run by foundations. This study aims to uncover the dynamics of ECED management in Denpasar City, particularly from the perspective of governance as the driving force in implementing the Independent Curriculum. This qualitative phenomenological study was conducted in six ECED units in Denpasar City, involving 23 informants, including principals, teachers, and supervisors. Data were collected through interviews, observations, and document reviews. Data analysis used thematic methods. The research findings revealed that the implementation of the Independent Curriculum triggered a transformation in governance, from a bureaucratic model to a teacher-centered, participatory model. Learning communities transformed from educational forums to the main axis of collective education management. Principals transformed from supervisors to facilitators who implemented transformational leadership. It was concluded that the success and sustainability of the Independent Curriculum implementation are determined by institutional authority built through participatory governance, collaboration, and strengthening local identity. The main finding of this study is the construction of an early childhood education governance model that integrates philosophical, educational, and cultural aspects, and offers strategic recommendations for the government to strengthen sustainable early childhood education governance.

Keywords: Dynamics in early childhood education, Driving schools, Independent curriculum

Introduction

The government's intensive public outreach on the concept of the golden age has stimulated public awareness of the importance of nutrition for child development. This initiative is recognized because early childhood is a crucial phase in determining a child's resilience later in life (Hasanah & Fajri, 2022). Not only does it stop at physical nutrition, but the synergy between the government and the community is also being strengthened in the education sector. While formal education in elementary schools was the initial policy introduced in the past, preschool education is also a breakthrough chosen to design a better quality future generation (Selvia & Nurachadijat, 2023). Therefore, Early Childhood Education as a form of preschool education is also being intensively promoted. According to preliminary research at the Denpasar City Education Office, in 2024, 408 PAUD-level educational units were established (data from the Denpasar City Education Office in 2024). Referring to quantitative data on the distribution of educational units in Denpasar City, especially in terms of the proportion of area and

population density, the presence of PAUD units in Denpasar City is quite proportional (document map of the Denpasar City area and results of an interview with the Head of the Education Office on October 28, 2024).

Early Childhood Education plays a fundamental role in an individual's developmental trajectory, as this stage provides a crucial foundation for students' progress at subsequent levels of education. The early childhood period is identified as the golden age, a phase of exponential brain development, where stimulation and learning experiences significantly influence the formation of a child's cognitive, affective, and psychomotor constructs in the future. (Shonkoff et al., 2000). Therefore, the implementation of PAUD is not limited to cognitive development alone, but includes holistic strengthening of physical-motor, social-emotional, language, as well as religious and moral values aspects so that future human resources will become a superior, resilient generation with character to face the challenges of modern development.

Considering the current reality, the quality of education outcomes in Indonesia is generally considered low. This is evidenced by the 2022 PISA

score report, which shows Indonesia ranked 6th out of 8 ASEAN countries, with average scores for Mathematics (366), Science (383), and Reading (359). This places Indonesia below several neighboring countries in the ASEAN region, such as Singapore, Vietnam, Brunei, Malaysia, and Thailand. The correlation between the 2022 PISA results and the phenomenon of learning loss in Indonesia is further strengthened when considering previous studies that have predicted a potential decline in scores due to the pandemic (OECD, 2023). If examined in depth, the cause lies in the management of the education system at all levels, especially the poor implementation of preschool education.

The reality is that the management and implementation of 408 units of Early Childhood Education in Denpasar City are diverse and do not meet standards, which is the source of the problem. This phenomenon illustrates the significant community participation in synergizing the development of these preschool education units. However, on the other hand, the many existing PAUD management models are truly concerning because the diversity of governance can lead to diversity in quality. This diversity in quality is clearly undesirable. What is interesting and underlines the theme of this research is that many of these PAUDs are established by foundations engaged in education, others are established under the umbrella of the government, in this case the Denpasar City Department of Education and Culture, and even the top-ranking PAUD units are managed by Banjar-Banjar Dinas within Denpasar City. To address this issue, the Government, in this case the Denpasar City Education Office, finally tried to take a strategy by evaluating the management of PAUD, both in terms of administrative management and academic management. So that through these parameters a strategic policy was established, namely conducting a qualitative survey of PAUD management, which then through the quality mapping obtained, a strategy was chosen to group several superior PAUDs, which were given special guidance, and the end result was the awarding of a PAUD identity as a Driving School. The positive things that are expected to occur with the establishment of this Driving PAUD are: (1) There are PAUD units whose holistic management is quite good; (2) The Guidance Flow can be implemented in the right direction and on target; (3) Most importantly, this Driving PAUD can impact various policies and at the same time best practices, to

other PAUD Units, so that the homogeneity of management quality can be equalized, which ultimately makes the quality of all PAUDs can be improved. This strategy is certainly not intended to deny the diversity of potential of each, both in terms of facilities and infrastructure, and other instrumental inputs. However, with the unity of management rhythm through the impact of PAUD, slowly but surely the benefits that are relayed are expected to become parameters that the quality of PAUD qualitatively moves to a pleasing quadrant.

This study examines the implementation of the Independent Curriculum at the Early Childhood Education level in Denpasar City by adopting a phenomenological approach. The primary objective of this study is to explore and interpret the meaning and essence of the subjective experiences of principals and teachers in the process of adopting and implementing the Independent Curriculum in their educational units. The phenomenological approach is considered relevant because it focuses on a deep understanding of how individuals interpret and construct reality through their experiences (Creswell et al., 2018:61). One way to address this issue is through the implementation of the Independent Curriculum, with an emphasis on essential materials, relevant learning, and formative assessment, and efforts to improve the quality of education, reflected in the potential for future improvements in PISA scores. Therefore, it is important to reflectively explore the dynamics of PAUD management at the former Driving School, particularly from a governance perspective, to understand how these institutions respond to major changes that shake the foundations of early childhood education. This research aims to uncover the living process of governance transformation, explore the profound impact of innovation on internal management, and uncover the mechanisms that are collectively built to sustain the spirit of change, even when external support has ended.

Literature Review

Early Childhood Education has significant implications because in this phase, children at an early age are laying the cognitive, social, emotional, physical, and moral foundations that will shape their future development (Ileana Citaristi, 2022 in UNESCO 2022) and (Howells, 2018 in OECD 2018). Quality education must be inclusive and equitable, ensuring that every

child has equal access to quality education regardless of social, economic, cultural, or ability background. The characteristics of early childhood education are oriented towards holistic development, emphasizing the comprehensive development of cognitive, socio-emotional, physical, spiritual, and language dimensions. Play-based learning, which is a natural modality for children to acquire knowledge and explore their environment, helps children develop imagination, creativity, social competence, and problem-solving skills. (Piaget, 1952 ; Heckman, 2013). Several early childhood education institutions have integrated Balinese cultural elements, such as mutual cooperation and family values, into learning activities that not only support children's holistic development, but also strengthen their cultural identity (Tilaar, 2009). Emphasizes the importance of preparing individuals, including young children, to face global challenges through the development of "21st century skills," such as critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, and communication (Howells, 2018). As explained (Lillard, 2016) In "Montessori's Science Behind the Genius", emphasizes the importance of children's independence, individual learning, and a learning environment specifically designed to stimulate children's interests and activities, providing freedom within limits, children are encouraged to become independent learners, which is one of the main objectives of the Independent Curriculum in developing the independent dimension of the Pancasila Student Profile (Zimmerman, 2002). The long-term positive impact of PAUD on academic achievement, high school graduation rates, employment, income, and reduced involvement in crime (Schweinhardt, L.J., et al, 2004 ; Campbell, F.A., et al 2002).

The Independent Curriculum was launched by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology through Ministerial Decree Number 573/P/2022, which is a transformation of curricular policy that aims to provide greater learning autonomy to educational units and educators. (Kemendikbudristek, 2022). The Independent Curriculum is rooted in the concept of independent learning, which was historically inspired by the thoughts of Ki Hajar Dewantara, particularly the principle of *among, ing ngarsa sung tuladha, ing madya mangun karsa*, which emphasizes leadership that liberates, empowers, and inspires (Ki Hajar Dewantara, 1945). In the contemporary context, it is

actualized through three main pillars: (1) child-centered learning, (2) curriculum flexibility, and (3) development of the Pancasila Student Profile. This is supported by neuroscientific evidence that the early childhood period (0–8 years) is a window of opportunity for the formation of brain architecture, where rich stimulation and responsive interactions have a long-term impact on life success (Council, 2000). This integration process does not always occur naturally, and often depends on individual teacher initiative, rather than on a continuous support system (Suardana, et al., 2023). The implementation of the Independent Curriculum in PAUD is still very limited, especially those that examine the sustainability aspects after intervention programs such as the School of Mover (Misra, et al., 2023; Darling-Hammond, 2012).

The Driving School is one of the main pillars within the Independent Learning policy framework launched by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology through Ministerial Decree Number 162/M/2021. Conceptually, this program is not just a training program or technical intervention, but rather a systemic transformation movement aimed at accelerating improvements in the quality of education through the empowerment of educational units as a whole. This program is designed to accelerate schools from various stages of transformation to a more advanced level within three academic years, with a focus on three main pillars: transformational leadership, teachers as agents of change, and child-centered learning. The School of Mover serves as a pilot project or learning laboratory that serves as a model for the holistic implementation of the new curriculum (Kemendikbudristek, 2022). Each unit receives intensive mentoring for three years, including training, technical guidance, and support for the development of teaching materials, which is expected to build long-term institutional capacity.

Methods

Research design

This study uses a qualitative approach with a phenomenological design to explore and interpret the in-depth meaning of the experiences of principals and teachers in implementing the Merdeka Curriculum in early childhood education units in Denpasar City. According to Sugiyono (2017) The

qualitative descriptive approach is known to have simple, applicable, and easily actionable characteristics in the context of educational practice, making it highly relevant for answering research questions that focus on "what happens" and "how a process takes place," particularly in the dynamics of educational policy implementation at a practical level such as PAUD. This approach is not tied to a particular analytical model, making it suitable for research that seeks to produce findings that are directly useful for the development of educational practice (Vaismoradi et al., 2013). This research was conducted in six units of Early Childhood Education in Denpasar City, Bali Province, which had previously participated in the School Mover Program. Denpasar City was chosen as the research location because it is one of the areas actively implementing national education policies, including the Independent Curriculum and the School Mover Program, which aims to improve the quality of early childhood education services.

Participant

The selection of research participants used a purposive sampling technique with the following inclusion criteria: (1) Have been actively involved in the School Mover Program for at least 1 year. (2) Directly involved in the planning and implementation of the Independent Curriculum. (3) Still actively implementing the Independent Curriculum post-PSP. (4) Diverse backgrounds: types of institutions such as foundations, traditional villages, private sector. The research subjects consisted of 18 informants, including 6 school principals and 12 teachers from six PAUD units that had been designated as School Mover. Schools that received the impact, accompanying supervisors, and representatives of the Denpasar city education office. The selection of informants used a combination of purposive sampling and snowball sampling, which is considered most appropriate for qualitative research that requires depth of insight and a broad information network (Sugiyono, 2020).

The purpose of selecting informants was to achieve data saturation, the point at which no new themes emerge from the interviews (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

By involving heterogeneous participants, researchers were able to identify general and specific patterns in the curriculum adaptation process and uncover the

resilience mechanisms developed by early childhood education units' post-program (Melaville et al., 2006).

Data collection instruments and techniques

The data collection instruments were interview guidelines, participant observation, and documents, which formed triangulation to increase the credibility of the findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The data collection technique was an in-depth interview that allowed researchers to explore the perceptions, experiences, and subjective adaptation strategies of school principals and teachers in the process of implementing the Independent Curriculum. The interview guidelines were designed in the form of open-ended questions to provide flexibility for participants to express their views freely and reflectively (Smith et al., 2009). The questions were as follows; (1) How do you understand the principle of independent learning in the context of PAUD? (2) What challenges did you face in implementing the Independent Curriculum after the Sekolah Penggerak program? (3) What strategies did you develop to maintain the implementation of the Independent Curriculum? Interviews were conducted with 18 informants. Each interview lasted for 60-90 minutes, was recorded (with permission), and transcribed verbatim.

In addition, observations were conducted during 2-3 visits to each PAUD unit to obtain an in-depth and representative picture of daily activities, classroom atmosphere, and the actual application of the principles of the Independent Curriculum.

Detailed records were made regarding (1) Learning models, (2) Social interactions between children and teachers, (3) Utilization of learning space and resources, (4) Integration of local culture (for example: Tri Hita Karana values in Balinese Hindu teachings), (5) Classroom management strategies and child behavior management. Researchers directly observed learning activities, study group meetings and social interactions in 6 PAUD units. As a complement is a document analysis including, (1) Teaching Modules, (2) School Mover Program Reports, (3) Meeting notes, learning reflections, and internal evaluation results of PAUD units. Document analysis was carried out using content analysis techniques to identify themes related to curriculum implementation, such as adaptation strategies, local

cultural integration, and structural challenges (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008).

Analysis techniques

The analysis process was conducted manually (without software), systematically using an interactive qualitative data analysis model consisting of three main components: (1) data reduction, (2) data presentation, and (3) verification of findings, as explained below.

Data reduction is the initial process in which raw data collected is simplified into more focused and meaningful information. Within the content analysis framework, data reduction is carried out through a coding process based on specific themes or categories relevant to the research problem formulation and objectives (Miles et al., 2014). The data reduction steps include: (1) Transcribing interview data with the principal and teachers, which were recorded and transcribed verbatim to ensure information accuracy. (2) Initial coding (open coding). Each section of the transcript, observation notes, and supporting documents were coded based on emerging topics or issues. (3) Grouping into categories (axial coding). These codes were then grouped into broader categories based on similarities in meaning and relationships between the data. (4) Identification of major themes (selective coding). With this data reduction, complex and unstructured raw information is transformed into manageable information relevant to the research focus.

Data presentation is carried out in various formats, such as: (1) a relationship matrix to display patterns and relationships between categories; (2) a thematic narrative that presents findings in descriptive form illustrating key themes; (3) a coding table to display data excerpts, codes, categories, and identified themes; and (4) a conceptual diagram that helps visualize the implementation flow of the Independent Curriculum and its influencing factors (Miles et al., 2014). This data presentation allows researchers to explore the complexity of the phenomenon under study, including the challenges and adaptation strategies of early childhood education units post-School Mover program.

Finding Verification is the final step in the data analysis cycle. It aims to ensure that the research

findings have a high degree of trustworthiness and validity. To assess the validity of data in qualitative research, there are four main pillars that serve as a reference: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. This is a basic principle that ensures that research findings are not only valid, but also trustworthy, replicable, and relevant in a given context. Specifically, credibility refers to the depth and truth of the findings in depicting the reality experienced by informants. Miles et al. (2014) emphasize the importance of implementing a systematic strategy to strengthen trust in research results.

Results

The research results obtained from data collection through interviews, field observations and document collection were analyzed as follows.

The designation of PAUD as a Leading School in Denpasar City is not a bureaucratic decision, but rather a meaningful social event—a transformative moment in which educational units are not simply appointed but feel chosen. In a phenomenological context, this feeling of being "chosen" serves as a powerful psychological driver, transforming obligation into commitment and creating space for the emergence of a collective identity as agents of change. However, this study deepens these findings by demonstrating that principals' initiatives are not only adaptive but also proactive and visionary. They do not wait for programs to arrive, but actively seek them out, demonstrating that leadership at the PAUD level possesses strategic capacity.

The management of PAUD units, formerly known as Leading Schools, in Denpasar City is not simply a procedural change or administrative format change, but rather a fundamental paradigm shifts in how institutions understand and carry out their educational functions. From a previously bureaucratic, top-down system dominated by hierarchical authority, governance has shifted to a participatory, collaborative model centered on teachers as professional agents. This shift did not happen overnight, but rather was the result of a long process shaped by intensive mentoring, collective reflection, and a shared commitment to improving the quality of learning. At the heart of this transformation stands the Learning Community,

which is no longer understood as a ceremonial forum or an annual administrative activity, but has evolved into a dynamic, collaborative space where teachers and principals regularly discuss, design learning, and reflect deeply on their practices.

The governance innovation from the former Early Childhood Education unit to other PAUDs in Denpasar City is not simply a technical transfer or brief training, but rather a complex social process built on trust, credibility, and professional solidarity. The research findings indicate that the most effective dissemination occurs through classroom visits, informal discussions, and the sharing of teaching modules, rather than formal instructions from above. During one visit to PAUD-C, teachers from three other PAUD units directly observed children exploring water, recorded assessment methods, and reviewed the layout of play corners. They then engaged in a lengthy discussion about how to create simple teaching modules using natural materials. This process involved more than copying, but rather direct experience, which then sparked a deeper understanding.

The implementation of the Independent Curriculum is not simply a feeling of discomfort with existing practices, but rather a deep structural and epistemological dissatisfaction with the reality of the previous curriculum's implementation. The irony of the research finding is that a curriculum designed with a child-centered approach has, in practice, experienced systemic distortions that have transformed it into a tool of administrative control. This distortion is not caused by teacher failure, but rather by information degradation, limited mentoring, and a lack of contextual training, which leads many early childhood education units to interpret the curriculum reductively. The integration of local values and Balinese culture is not merely a symbolic addition to learning activities, but rather a profound pedagogical strategy to create meaningful contexts, strengthen children's identities, and accelerate the internalization of the Independent Curriculum. The *Tri Hita Karana* values—the harmony between humans and God, others, and nature—are not merely symbolic additions, but rather a fundamental transformation of educational philosophy. These values are not taught as abstract concepts, but are organically embodied in daily routines, serving as a bridge between local wisdom

and contemporary pedagogical practices.

The continued implementation of the Independent Curriculum in the former Early Childhood Education units in Denpasar City is not a result of luck or dependence on external programs, but rather a manifestation of institutional resilience built through a long and deliberate process. Although mentoring support from the School Mover Program has been withdrawn, the PAUD units have not returned to their previous learning patterns, but have actively designed strategies to maintain and even develop innovation independently. The findings of this study reveal that sustainability occurs through systematic internal strategies, namely independent training, digital learning documentation, and the application of deep learning as a key pedagogical principle. This process indicates that innovation has been internalized and institutionalized within the organizational culture, thus no longer relying on external intervention.

Discussion

The process of designating early childhood education as a leading school

The designation of PAUD in Denpasar as a Leading School did not occur as a rigid bureaucratic decision, but rather as a meaningful social event a transformative moment where educational units were not simply appointed but felt chosen. In a phenomenological context, this served as a powerful psychological driver, transforming obligation into commitment and opening up space for the emergence of a collective identity as agents of change. They did not wait for programs but actively sought them out, demonstrating that the leadership implemented possessed strategic capacity. This finding is reinforced by research (Rahayuningsih & Rijanto, 2022) In an effort to improve the competency of school principals as learning leaders in the School Mover Program in Nganjuk, which shows that the principals selected for this program generally have a high intrinsic motivation to transform their institutions. The rigorous selection process involving portfolio evaluations, interviews, and learning simulations serves as an initiation rite, indirectly screening principals who have the capacity to be learning leaders, not just administrative managers. Principals who are successful in

implementing the Independent Curriculum are those who have strong initiative, are able to build collaboration with teachers, and are proactive in seeking training and mentoring, including voluntarily registering for the School Mover Program (Musa et al., 2022). This research finds that the selection process not only filters out eligible units, but also actively shapes new identities as agents of change. This is reinforced by research (Suardana, & Putri, 2023) who found that proactive principals in Buleleng were more ready for change. It was stated that effective leadership in the context of educational innovation is not that which is conferred by position, but that which is built through credibility, openness, and concrete action.

Governance transformation in early childhood education units

The governance transformation in the former Early Childhood Education Units in Denpasar City is not simply a procedural change or administrative format change, but rather a fundamental paradigm shifts in the institution's understanding and implementation of its educational function. Previously bureaucratic and top-down, the model has shifted to a participatory, collaborative, and teacher-centered model (Santika et al., 2023). The formation of a participatory learning community is able to create a reflective culture, where teachers no longer see training as an external obligation, but as a space for self-development that is relevant to the reality of their classroom (Dikta, 2020). In line with the research conducted (Budiarti et al., 2023) In the context of Bintan Regency, Riau Islands, as expressed in the Early Childhood Education Governance to Create Quality Educators, the concept of "community of practice" states that learning is not only an individual process, but a social phenomenon that occurs through interaction, participation, and the sharing of meaning within a community (Wenger, 1998). This is in line with the concept of distributed leadership (Spillane, 2006), which rejects the idea that leadership is an individual attribute, and instead understands it as a social phenomenon that emerges from collective interactions. In learning communities, principals and teachers share responsibilities, creating an ecosystem where innovation does not depend on a single charismatic figure, but becomes a shared asset that is continuously reproduced through daily practice.

Thus, this transformation of governance not only improves efficiency but also creates a democratic, participatory, and sustainable organizational culture. Research by (Khusna & Priyanti, 2023) Empirically, research shows that "effective learning communities are formed when there is open interaction, mutual respect, and trust between members. Teachers feel comfortable sharing failures, asking for input, and receiving constructive feedback without feeling judged." In one meeting, teachers from six preschools discussed the challenges of formative assessment. They showed each other their reflection notebooks and provided input. There were no formal minutes, but the results of the discussion were recorded in their respective diaries. This phenomenon supports the concept of "diffusion of innovation" (Rogers, 2003), where the most effective spread of innovation occurs through horizontal networks and two-way communication, rather than instructions from above. Research by (Suardana, & Putri, 2023) emphasized that in Bali, the Merdeka Curriculum implementation process was more effective through inter-PAUD visits, informal discussions, and the sharing of teaching modules, rather than through instructions from the education office. Thus, the governance transformation occurring in the former units is not merely a technical change, but a cultural one. From a rigid and bureaucratic system, PAUD units have developed flexible, collaborative, and teacher- and child-centered governance.

Governance dissemination efforts to other early childhood education institutions

The dissemination of governance innovations from the former Motor School PAUD units to other institutions in Denpasar City is not simply a technical transfer or brief training, but rather a complex social process built on trust, credibility, and professional solidarity. This demonstrates that the most effective dissemination occurs through classroom visits, informal discussions, and the sharing of teaching modules, rather than formal instructions from above. Governance transformation not only changes the structure but also changes the organizational culture. The Independent Curriculum provides a new framework for recruiting and retaining forward-thinking school teachers (Rama Putri & Arismunandar, 2024). These findings demonstrate that the success of transformation does not depend

solely on policy, but on the ability of educational units to attract and retain change agents who share a progressive pedagogical vision. This pattern of dissemination, as recognized by the accompanying supervisors, creates a mutually supportive learning ecosystem, where no single unit is the center of knowledge power, but rather all stand as mutually reinforcing agents of change. This phenomenon marks a fundamental shift from a top-down model to an egalitarian professional community, where influence is born from the quality of practice, not from position. Furthermore, this study demonstrates that resistance from non-Moving Early Childhood Education can be overcome not through formal authority or technical superiority, but through empathetic, collaborative, and trust-based leadership. As Mentari Rama Putri (2024) emphasized, "the successful implementation of the Independent Curriculum is largely determined by the principal's leadership competence in creating an open, inclusive, and innovation-supportive school culture." This finding is particularly relevant in the context of dissemination, where many non-former-Moving Early Childhood Education initially felt doubtful, even jealous, of the external support received by former-Moving School units. The main contribution of this research lies in revealing that effective dissemination is not simply a matter of technical transfer or the dissemination of learning practices, but rather a deeper process of social transformation: namely the dissemination of the participatory governance model itself (Paggama et al., 2023). These findings shift the paradigm from imitation as the diffusion of innovation to imitation as the reproduction of a healthy organizational culture. This is not just a form of diffusion of innovation but a manifestation of transformational leadership that spreads organically. They share not only what they do, but how they do it with openness, humility, and a commitment to collaboration (Arifudin, 2019). In this network of mutually trusting learning, the sustainability of innovation is not determined by the program, but by the culture of governance that is continuously reproduced and extended from one unit to another.

The urgency of implementing the independent curriculum

The implementation of the Independent Curriculum in the former Early Childhood Education units of the

Driving Schools in Denpasar City is not simply an administrative response to central government policy, but rather a transformative action based on pedagogical, contextual, and systemic rationale. The decision to adopt the Independent Curriculum was born from extensive experience with the shortcomings of the previous curriculum implementation, the urgency of post-pandemic learning recovery, and a commitment to a more child-centered education. This rationale is not abstract, but emerges from the daily practice of learning, from teachers' frustration with the rigid system to the collective hope of creating a more humane space for children's growth and development (Paggama et al., 2023). Observations in three early childhood education units revealed that learning activities were dominated by passive routines of sitting on chairs and tables, coloring pictures, and listening to stories, leaving no room for children to choose, explore, or determine their own learning direction. The consistent criticism from various informants was not an individual complaint, but rather a collective recognition of the pedagogical crisis, which became the basis for the moral legitimacy of the transformation to the Independent Curriculum. The Independent Curriculum emerged not as an ordinary policy, but as a profound restorative intervention. It received a positive response because it emphasized play-based learning, exploration, and projects the most natural modalities for children to reconstruct their world. Through physical activity, simple experiments, and structured social interactions, children were given the opportunity to re-experience a complete and meaningful learning process. These research findings align closely with studies conducted by Ashfarina & Soedjarwo (2023) In "Implementation of the Independent Learning Curriculum in Early Childhood Education the study found that "teachers who are actively involved in learning communities show increased preparedness in facing post-pandemic challenges, especially in designing learning that is responsive to the developmental needs of children affected by learning loss." Furthermore, the study (Vioreza et al., 2023) affirms that sustainable education demands a holistic, flexible, and child-centered approach, where the curriculum not only replenishes lost material, but also improves the way children learn, think, and interact with the world. The philosophy of the Independent Curriculum does not simply offer technical changes, but rather the restoration of

teachers' professional authority, which has been eroded by bureaucratic structures and reliance on standard formats. The promise of autonomy in designing learning is not only an attraction, but a liberation from administrative constraints, allowing teachers to become learning designers who are responsive to local contexts, children's interests, and classroom dynamics. In the view of implementers, this is what makes the Independent Curriculum an epistemological transformation from teachers as implementers to teachers as creators of knowledge. The integration of local values and Balinese culture is not merely a symbolic addition to learning activities, but a profound pedagogical strategy to create meaningful contexts, strengthen children's identities, and accelerate the internalization of the Independent Curriculum philosophy. The value of *Tri Hita Karana*, the harmony of humans with God, humans, and nature, is not only taught as a concept, but is realized in daily practice. Research published in (Tika, 2024), which shows that "the application of the *Tri Hita Karana* philosophy in early childhood education can provide a strong foundation for building children's character and social skills, in line with the objectives of the Pancasila Student Profile." The study found that through concrete activities such as caring for plants, participating in simple ceremonies, or mutual cooperation. This is reinforced by research Harianti (2021) who found that parenting patterns that apply *Tri Hita Karana* can produce people with good character, have harmonious relationships with others, utilize nature sustainably, and serve God through religious obligations.

Anticipation and dynamics of sustainability

The continued implementation of the Independent Curriculum in early childhood education units belonging to the former School Mover Program in Denpasar City demonstrates institutional resilience built through a long process. Although mentoring support from the School Mover Program was withdrawn, the PAUD units did not revert to their previous learning patterns, but instead actively designed strategies to maintain and even develop innovation independently. Sustainability occurred through systematic internal strategies, namely independent training, digital learning documentation, and the application of deep learning as a pedagogical principle. This demonstrates that

innovation has been internalized and institutionalized within the organizational culture, thus no longer relying on external intervention. Research findings (Hamzah, 2023) that even though external mentoring from facilitators ended, the School Mover implementers were able to maintain the learning community (Kombel) by utilizing local leadership structures and strengthening collaboration between teachers (Rachman et al., 2024) emphasizes that the implementing institutions of the Driving Schools not only implement the curriculum but also act as facilitators for other units, creating a mutually supportive learning network even without local government intervention. The contribution of this research lies in revealing that deep learning is not merely a pedagogical method or technique that can be applied instrumentally, but rather a philosophical principle that is at the heart of sustainable innovation in the implementation of the Independent Curriculum. Deep learning, as emphasized in the Academic Manuscript of Deep Learning (Kemendikdasmen, 2025) It's not just a method, but an approach that "glorifies" the learning process through the integration of thought, heart, feeling, and exercise. This approach rejects the logic of quantity-based and memorization-based education, opting instead for a contextual, thematic, and sustainable learning path, where conceptual understanding grows from direct exploration and real-life experiences. In the context of governance, these findings demonstrate that sustainability is not about maintaining a program, but about building a vibrant and sustainable learning ecosystem, where deep learning is not just a pedagogical approach, but a way of living together in a more meaningful and humane world of education. (Yusuf et al., 2023).

Conclusion

Based on the findings and discussion of the research results, it is concluded that; (1) The determination of PAUD as a Driving School in the city of Denpasar is not appointed but rather an initiative and feeling of being chosen through a selection process and building a collective commitment (2) The leadership of the principal has transformed from carrying out a supervisory function to a facilitator who actively builds togetherness in the learning community (3) The governance of learning and professional development is carried out through a learning

community in the form of class visits, internal training and sharing of teaching modules and creating a learning network. (4) The implementation of the Independent Curriculum which is centered on children in integrating the values of local wisdom *Tri Hita Karana* and mutual cooperation which are the foundation of culture and ethics that are deeply and sustainably internalized. (5) A strong internal mechanism has been built and a sustainable governance ecosystem that continues to grow and develop as a more flexible and child-centered learning institution.

Acknowledge

This research was made possible thanks to the support and collaboration of numerous parties. Therefore, the authors would like to express their appreciation and gratitude to the principals, teachers, and supervisors of early childhood education units in Denpasar who provided concrete information throughout the research. We hope that the results of this study can serve as recommendations for improving Early Childhood Education.

References

1. U. Hasanah and N. Fajri, "The Concept of Early Childhood Character Education," *EDUKIDS J. Inov. Educator. Early Childhood*, vol. 2, no. 2, pp. 116–126, 2022, doi: 10.51878/edukids.v2i2.1775.
2. M. Selvia and K. Nurachadijat, "The Role of Early Childhood Education Institutions in the Implementation of Curriculum and Learning Methods in Early Childhood," *J. Innovation, Evaluation, and Development. Learning*, vol. 3, no. 2, pp. 57–66, 2023, [Online]. Available: <http://journal.ainarapress.org/index.php/jiepp>.
3. OECD, "During Learning- and Form- Disruption, PISA 2022 Results," Paris, 2023. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1787/a97db61c-en>.
4. Ileana Citaristi, "United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization—UNESCO," Routledge, 2022, pp. 269–375.
5. K. Howells, "The Future Of Education and Skilss: Education 2030," OECD, Paris, 2018.
6. J. Piaget, *The Origins of Intelligence in Children*. New York: International Universities Press., 1952.
7. J. . Heckman, "The economics of inequality and human development. In Keynote presentation at the First National Congress meeting on Building a Legal Framework for Public Policies for Early Childhood," Brasilia, 16, 2013.
8. H. A. R. Tilaar, *Quality Education for All*. Jakarta: Rineka Cipta., 2009.
9. A. . Lillard, *Montessori's Science Behind the Genius*. New York: Oxford University Press., 2016.
10. B. J. Zimmerman, "Becoming a self-regulated learner: An overview. Theory into practice," vol. 4, no. 2, pp. 64–70, 2002.
11. L. J. Schweinhart, "The High/Scope Perry Preschool study through age 40," : High/Scope Press., 2004.
12. J. S. & Shari M.-J. Frances A. Campbell, Craig T. Ramey, Elizabeth Pungello, "Early childhood education: Young adult outcomes from the Abecedarian Project. Applied developmental science," vol. 6, no. 1, pp. 42–57, 2002, doi: https://doi.org/10.1207/S1532480XADS0601_05.
13. Kemendikbudristek, "Pocket Book: Questions and Answers on the Independent Curriculum," Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology. Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology, pp. 9–46, 2022.
14. N. R. Council, *How People Learn: Brain, Mind, Experience, and School (Expanded Edition)*. National Academy Press, Washington, DC., 2000.
15. N. K. D. Suardana, I. W., Wibawa, I. M., & Putri, "Dynamics of Independent Curriculum Implementation in Early Childhood Education: A Case Study in Buleleng Regency, Bali," *J. Pendidik. Guru PAUD*, 8(2), pp. 110–125, 2023, doi: <https://doi.org/10.23887/jjgppaud-undiksha.v8i2.55210>.
16. B. Misra, P., Widiyanti, D., & Prasetyo, "Evaluation of the implementation of the School Mover Program in Central Java: Case studies at the elementary and junior high school levels," *J. Kebijak. Pendidik. Indones.*, vol. 7, pp. 46–62, 2023, doi: <https://doi.org/10.21009/JKPI.07104>.
17. L. Darling-Hammond, *Powerful Teacher Education: Lessons from Exemplary Programs*. John Wiley & Sons, 2012.
18. Sugiyono, *Educational Research Methods: Quantitative, Qualitative and R&D Approaches*, 8th ed. Alfabeta, 2017.
19. M. Vaismoradi, H. Turunen, and T. Bondas, "Content analysis and thematic analysis: Implications for conducting a qualitative descriptive study," *Nurs. Heal. Sci.*, vol. 15, no. 3, pp.

- 398–405, 2013, doi: 10.1111/nhs.12048.
- 20.S. Rahayuningsih and A. Rijanto, "Efforts to Improve the Competence of School Principals as Learning Leaders in the School Mover Program in Nganjuk," *JAMU J. Abdi Masy. ...*, 2022.
 - 21.S. Musa, S. Nurhayati, R. Jabar. "Efforts and challenges of PAUD school principals in developing institutions and motivating teachers to participate in the school driving program," *J. Obs. J. ...*, 2022.
 - 22.T. Santika, A. N. Rahmawati, S. W. Hassya, S. A. Alimanda, and R. Ageng, "Early Childhood Education Management Patterns to Improve the Quality of Education in Early Childhood," *Plamboyon Edu*, vol. 1, no. 1, pp. 27–36, 2023.
 - 23.Dikta, "Tri Hita Karana-Oriented Learning as an Effort to Strengthen the Quality of Basic Education in the 21st Century," *Pendasi J. Pendidik. Dasar Indones.*, vol. 4, no. 1, pp. 126–136, 2020.
 - 24.E. Budiarti, N. Hariyanti, and L. Rahmatika, "Early Childhood Education Governance Education to Create Quality Educators," *Amma*, vol. 1, no. 12, pp. 1691–1703, 2023.
 - 25.E. Wenger, "Communities of Practice: Learning, Meaning, and Identity," Cambridge University Press, 1998.
 - 26.J. P. Spillane, *Distributed Leadership*. Jossey-Bass, 2006.
 - 27.R. Khusna and N. Priyanti, "The Influence of Learning Communities on Teachers' Pedagogical Skills at the Bekasi Kindergarten NSIN Association," *J. Ilm. Potensia*, vol. 8, no. 2, pp. 252–260, 2023, doi: 10.33369/jip.8.2.252-260.
 - 28.M. Rama Putri and Arismunandar, "The Role of Leading Schools in Optimizing the Implementation of the Independent Curriculum," *Aksiologi J. Pendidik. dan Ilmu Sos.*, pp. 99–111, 2024, doi: 10.47134/aksiologi.v5i1.196.
 - 29.A. A. Paggama, A. Rezky Nurhidaya, and Sadaruddin, "Literature Review: Implementation of Role Play for the Development of Children's Social-Emotional Skills in Kindergarten," *Indones. J. Early Child. J. Dunia Anak Usia Dini*, vol. 5, no. 2, pp. 223–231, 2023, doi: 10.35473/ijec.v5i1.2139.
 - 30.O. Arifudin, *Early Childhood Education Concept*. 2019.
 - 31.I. N. Ashfarina and S. Soedjarwo, "Implementation of the Independent Learning Curriculum in Early Childhood Education," *EDUKASIA J. Pendidik. ...*, 2023.
 - 32.N. Vioreza, W. Hilyati, and M. Lasminingsih, "Education for Sustainable Development: What is the Urgency and Opportunity for Implementing the Independent Curriculum?," *PUSAKA J. Educ. Rev.*, vol. 1, no. 1, pp. 34–48, 2023, doi: 10.56773/pjer.v1i1.11.
 - 33.N. Tika, "Application of Tri Hita Karana Philosophy In Early Childhood Education," vol. 4, no. 4, pp. 293–299, 2024. Online Journal System: <https://jurnalp4i.com/index.php/teaching>
 - 34.D. Harianti, "Internalization of Tri Hita Karana Teachings for Early Childhood During the Covid-19 Pandemic" *Kamaya J. Ilmu Agama*, vol. 4, no. 3, pp. 264–274, 2021, doi: 10.37329/kamaya.v4i3.1322.
 - 35.R. A. Hamzah, "Community Learning Workshop Mentoring for the Third Year of the School Mover Program Batch I in Soppeng Regency," *J. Pengabd. Sos.*, vol. 1, no. 2, pp. 1–10, 2023, doi: 10.59837/nrs9cp18.
 - 36.F. Rachman *et al.*, "The Role of Implementing School Leaders in the Transformation of Sustainable Quality Education," *J. Kewarganegaraan*, vol. 21, no. 1, p. 117, 2024, doi: 10.24114/jk.v21i1.56817.
 - 37.Kemendikdasmen, "Academic Manuscripts on Deep Learning," 2025.
 - 38.R. N. Yusuf, N. S. T. A. Al Khoeri, G. S. Herdiyanti, and E. D. Nuraeni, "The Urgency of Early Childhood Education for Child Growth and Development," *J. Plamboyon Edu*, vol. 1, no. 1, pp. 37–44, 2023, [Online]. Available: <https://jurnal.rakeyansantang.ac.id/index.php/plamboyon/article/view/320>.
 39. Jam, F. A., Ali, I., Albishri, N., Mammadov, A., & Mohapatra, A. K. (2025). How does the adoption of digital technologies in supply chain management enhance supply chain performance? A mediated and moderated model. *Technological Forecasting and Social Change*, 219, 124225.