

## ISLAMIC RELIGIOUS EDUCATION LEARNING MODEL WITHIN THE INDEPENDENT CURRICULUM FRAMEWORK

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### ABSTRACT

This study aims to describe the application of the Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning model based on the Independent Curriculum in Aisyiyah 11 Musi Rawas Kindergarten, South Sumatra. The Independent Curriculum is a new policy in the Indonesian education system that provides freedom for educators to design learning that suits the needs and potential of students. At the Kindergarten (TK) level, implementing the Independent Curriculum is expected to foster children's character, faith, and devotion early on through a fun approach and activating children's participation. This study uses a qualitative descriptive method with a case study approach to explore the PAI learning model by the principles of the Independent Curriculum applied in Aisyiyah 11 Kindergarten. Data were collected through observations, interviews, and documentation involving teachers, the school principal, and parents. The study results show that implementing the Independent Curriculum-based PAI learning model at Aisyiyah 11 Musi Rawas Kindergarten refers to the Play-Based Learning Model with the principles of the Independent Curriculum, which is more flexible and focuses on developing students' potential. Learning is carried out with a fun approach based on the needs and interests of children, providing room for creativity. Teachers use story, game, and theme-based methods to instill Islamic religious values in children.

Keywords: *Learning Model, Islamic Religious Education, Independent Curriculum*

### INTRODUCTION

The curriculum has a very important role in achieving educational goals, both in general education and religious education (Isnaeni, 2023; Nurhalizah, 2020). Law 20 of 2003, concerning curriculum, aims to improve the quality of education. Many initiatives have been, are underway, and will be carried out, including structuring national education system regulations and other laws (Sihotang H, 2020). The Ministry of Education, Culture, Research and Technology has officially enacted the latest Independent Learning or Independent Curriculum, which will be implemented in the 2022/2023 academic year (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2022). In its implementation, the Independent Curriculum prioritizes differentiated learning where content is arranged more optimally so that students can explore concepts and deepen their competencies. This curriculum aims to provide flexibility for educators and educational units to design curriculum and learning according to learning needs, student characteristics, and focus on developing students' character and competencies through a variety of relevant and contextual learning activities (Arsyad & Fahira, 2023b; Indriani et al., 2023; Suryana & Sukadari, 2024).

As a Muslim-majority nation, Indonesia is committed to integrating religious values in education. Along with the development of the education system in Indonesia, one of the significant innovations implemented is the Independent Curriculum, which aims to provide educators with freedom and flexibility to develop a teaching and learning process that is more adaptive and based on students' needs. This curriculum also prioritizes learning that provides services to develop competencies, skills, and good character. (Eliwatis et al., 2024).

At the early childhood education level, such as Kindergarten (TK), learning Islamic Religious Education (PAI) is very important so that children from an early age can understand religious values that teach ethics, morality, and good social life. Therefore, implementing the Independent Curriculum in kindergarten, especially in PAI learning, is relevant to adapt to the needs of the increasingly developing and dynamic times. (Manora et al., 2023). One of the educational institutions that implements the Independent Curriculum in PAI learning is Aisyiyah 11 Kindergarten in Musi Rawas Regency, South Sumatra. Aisyiyah 11 Kindergarten is one of the educational institutions that focuses on providing Islamic education to children from an early age with a more modern and relevant approach. The Independent Curriculum provides freedom for educators to choose and arrange learning materials according to the potential and needs of students, which also applies to Islamic Religious Education learning.

To carry out the learning process effectively in the independent curriculum, a learning framework that is structured in a systematic and planned manner is needed. Various learning models are generally used in the learning development process. However, each program has a specific learning model favored as the main approach. (Arsyad & Fahira, 2023b). Religious education in Indonesia not only plays a role in instilling religious values in students but also serves to build good moral character. From an early age, children must be taught to know and understand their religious teachings to have a correct outlook on life and live a good social life in society. At the early childhood education stage (PAUD), Islamic religious learning is not only limited to religious theories, but also to the formation of good morals and behavior. Therefore, the religious education that children receive must include three important aspects, namely cognitive (knowledge), affective (feelings or attitudes), and psychomotor (skills). With a balanced approach between these three aspects, it is hoped that children can grow up to be religious, intelligent, and noble personalities. (Hayati et al., 2020a; Husnaini et al., 2020; Noor et al., 2023).

At Kindergarten Aisyiyah 11 Musi Rawas, Islamic education is taught interestingly and adapted to the stage of development of children who are still at an early age. Religious education in kindergarten is carried out in various interactive ways, such as storytelling, singing, role-

playing, and so on. This approach is very much in line with the characteristics of the Independent Curriculum, which prioritizes activity-based learning that is fun and does not seem formal or monotonous.

Using learning models in the teaching and learning process in the independent curriculum aims to make the learning process effective and efficient. (Dewi et al., 2024a; Suharyat et al., 2023). There are several recommended learning models for the implementation of the Independent Curriculum, namely: Project-Based Learning Model, Problem-Based Learning Model, Inquiry-Based Learning Model, Discovery Learning Model, and Cooperative Learning Model (Affandy et al., 2024; Arsyad & Fahira, 2023b; Gillies, 2023a). In implementing the independent curriculum, the use of learning models in Islamic Religious Education materials in early childhood plays a significant role in strengthening the positive character of students from the negative influence of the surrounding environment. This can be done by developing cultural values and Eastern customs in students, which are certainly in harmony with Islamic teachings. Thus, it is hoped that it can form moral character in students, so that they become better individuals (Noor et al., 2023). However, the curriculum used in general is still centered on teachers through an instructional approach without considering the needs of students (Ngaisah et al., 2023).

From the results of the observations made by the author and through interviews with the Principal and teachers, it can be seen that Aisyiyah 11 Musi Rawas Kindergarten is one of the implementing schools of the Driving School Program, which is required to implement an independent curriculum, including Islamic Religious Education materials. The PAI curriculum in kindergarten should focus on introducing fundamental Islamic values that are simple and easy for children to accept, such as cleanliness, prayer, and good behavior, not on memorizing Qur'anic verses or complex religious concepts. This study will examine the extent to which the independent curriculum-based PAI learning model applied in Aisyiyah 11 Musi Rawas Kindergarten is based on the principles of early childhood education and can accommodate the developmental needs of children. This study aims to describe applying the Islamic Religious Education learning model based on the independent curriculum in Kindergarten Aisyiyah 11 Musi Rawas.

## METHODOLOGY

This study uses a qualitative approach that does not use numerical data, but describes phenomena based on the results of observations, interviews, documentation, and field records collected directly by researchers at the location. The researcher describes the symptoms and events that arise naturally according to the current context (Scott, 2005). This research aims to

provide an in-depth overview of the learning process based on the Independent Curriculum in the context of Islamic Religious Education at Kindergarten Aisyiyah 11 Musi Rawas. The type of research used is a case study, where the researcher intensively explores one specific case in applying the PAI learning model by school principals and teachers in the educational unit. This case study provides a holistic understanding of the dynamics of curriculum implementation and the direct involvement of teachers and students in a real context. The research subjects include the principal and teachers of Aisyiyah 11 Musi Rawas Kindergarten, who have an important role in the design and implementation of learning.

The research location is at Aisyiyah 11 Musi Rawas Kindergarten, which is in Sumber Jaya Village, Sumber Harta District, Musi Rawas Regency, South Sumatra. The researcher chose this location because the school is an implementer of the Driving School Program that has adopted the Independent Curriculum and has high accessibility and relevance to the focus of the study. Data were collected through non-participant observation, where researchers observed the learning process without being directly involved in learners' activities. Observations were made during implementing Islamic Religious Education learning based on the Independent Curriculum. All observations were recorded in the form of field notes for further analysis.

In addition to observation, the researcher used structured interview techniques with children, teachers, and parents to obtain data systematically. The questions are structured based on pre-designed grids, so the information collected corresponds to the focus of the research. This method was chosen so that researchers can manage data more effectively. Documentation is an additional technique to obtain data from written sources such as books, archives, photos of activities, and learning documents. The data from the documentation reinforces the validity of the findings and provides additional context for the observed learning process.

The data analysis in this study follows the Miles and Huberman model (Miles & A.M, 1992), which includes three main stages: data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawn. Data reduction is done by sorting and selecting important information from interviews, observations, and documentation results. The data that has been reduced is arranged logically and systematically in the form of descriptions to facilitate interpretation. Concluding is carried out by connecting data to find meaning and answer the formulation of the problem. The validity test of the data was carried out through triangulation of sources, techniques, and time. Source triangulation is carried out by comparing data from children, teachers, and parents. The triangulation technique uses observation, interviews, and documentation on the same object. Time triangulation is done by collecting data at different times to ensure the consistency of the

findings. This entire process ensures that the data obtained is credible and scientifically accountable.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### PAI Learning Model at Aisiyah 11 Musi Rawas Kindergarten

Aisiyah 11 Musi Rawas Kindergarten has implemented the Islamic Religious Education (PAI) learning model based on the Independent Curriculum through a play approach at the stage of early childhood development. This research reveals that the learning process occurs in the classroom and involves outdoor activities that facilitate children's spiritual experiences more naturally. School principals, teachers, and parents have relatively aligned views on the success and challenges of implementing this curriculum.

The principal, Mrs. Rovianti, said in an interview on October 17, 2024, that:

"The application of the PAI Learning Concept at Kindergarten Aisiyah 11 Musi Rawas is based on the Independent Curriculum, by applying the Play-Based Learning model. This concept is excellent to be applied at our kindergarten, because the learning process is not only carried out in the classroom. We can collaborate, elaborate, and create outside the classroom. In this case, teachers are motivators, facilitators, and mediators so that students can develop their talents and interests in learning."

The statement reinforces that teachers are given the freedom to act as facilitators who adapt the learning process to the needs and interests of the child, as affirmed in Vygotsky's theory of the Proximal Development Zone (ZPD) (Vygotsky, 1978), which places the teacher as a companion in building the child's learning experience.

Classroom teachers also reinforced these findings through in-depth interviews. Mrs. S stated that:

According to Mrs. S conveyed that,

"In Aisiyah 11 Kindergarten, the implementation of the Independent Curriculum-based learning model prioritizes freedom of learning for children according to their developmental stages. In class, I try to make learning fun and not seem overwhelming. We focus on experiential learning, where children are invited to learn through games, art, and hands-on activities. We allow children to choose activities they are interested in, so they feel more engaged and motivated.

According to Mrs. R, she conveyed that,

"The implementation of the independent curriculum by using the Play-Based Learning Model model at Aisiyah 11 Musi Rawas Kindergarten, according to the needs of children, here children are given the breadth to explore according to their talents and abilities, but teachers still do not understand the concept of the proper independent curriculum, so there is still a lot to learn so that the implementation of the independent curriculum is under the actual concept"

The quote shows that implementing the differentiation approach to learning is already

underway, but teachers' conceptual understanding still needs to be strengthened. This shows the importance of continuous training to deepen teachers' understanding of the philosophy of the Independent Curriculum. Parental support for the implementation of the curriculum is also firm. Mrs. Lisda Andriyani, a parent of one of the students, said:

Mrs. Lisda Andriyani, as the guardian of Z, said that,

"Since implementing the Independent Curriculum, I have seen a positive change in how my children learn. Previously, my son often felt burdened with many structured and rigid tasks. However, with this more flexible approach, he is happier and more active in participating in school activities. My child now talks more often about fun learning experiences, such as play activities integrated with learning, art, and group projects. I feel like my son has become more creative and confident."

According to Mrs. M, as the guardian of S, she said that,

"I feel more involved. The school invited us to collaborate, not just receive child development reports. We are often informed about the activities carried out at school and how we can support them at home. For example, my child was free to choose the activities he liked at school, and we were encouraged to discuss those options at home. We are also invited to understand children's development holistically, from an academic perspective, socially, and emotionally. This helps us as parents to support his learning process."

The findings reinforce the literature on the importance of *a family-centered learning* approach in early childhood education, where parental involvement contributes significantly to a child's social and emotional development.

Overall, the PAI learning model applied at Aisyiyah 11 Musi Rawas Kindergarten has met the principles of the Independent Curriculum, which emphasizes flexibility, active involvement of children, and holistic character development. Children learn through fun and meaningful activities, such as worship simulations, storytelling of prophets, and Islamic-themed group projects. Teachers integrate cognitive, affective, and psychomotor aspects in a deep learning unit.

However, optimizing the implementation of this model still faces several challenges. Intensive teacher training, the provision of varied learning media, and strengthening collaboration between schools and parents are needed. These three aspects will ensure that an Islamic value-based approach can be carried out consistently within a modern pedagogical framework that prioritizes children as the center of learning.

### **Challenges in the Application of the Play-Based Learning Model in PAI Learning**

Implementing the Play-Based Learning model in Islamic Religious Education (PAI) at TK Aisyiyah 11 Musi Rawas has opened opportunities for holistic child development, yet several challenges remain in practice. Teachers, as the main agents of curriculum

transformation, encounter difficulties aligning pedagogical methods with the fundamental principles of the Independent Curriculum. These challenges arise from shifting paradigms in early childhood education, variation in student development, and schools' limited capacity in terms of resources and infrastructure.

The Independent Curriculum requires shifting from content-driven instruction to competency-based and differentiated learning. In this context, PAI teachers are expected to design learning experiences that integrate Islamic values in meaningful and developmentally appropriate ways. However, the findings from the field indicate that many teachers still struggle to internalize and operationalize these principles fully. One teacher stated in an interview, *“Teachers still do not fully understand the concept of the proper independent curriculum, so there is still a lot to learn.”*

This statement reflects the need for continuous professional development, echoing the views of (Arsyad & Fahira, 2023), who emphasize that curriculum success depends on teachers' capacity to transform learning design based on student readiness and learning profiles. The complexity of designing PAI learning in a play-based format also lies in the need for contextual, engaging, and spiritually grounded materials. According to the constructivist theory of Vygotsky (Vygotsky, 1978), learning is most effective when children interact socially and engage in tasks slightly above their current competence, assisted by more knowledgeable others. Teachers, therefore, need support in developing learning materials that scaffold religious understanding while maintaining the joyful and spontaneous nature of early childhood education. This aligns with findings by (Hayati et al., 2020), who highlight the importance of cultural and value-based education in character formation during early years.

In line with Piaget's developmental theory, preoperational (ages 4–6) children learn best through concrete experiences and symbolic play. However, in the current implementation at Aisyiyah 11, teachers are burdened with the dual responsibility of content delivery and material creation, which limits their time and energy to plan innovative and child-centered PAI activities. The lack of ready-to-use Islamic-themed play-based resources also hinders the consistent application of experiential learning methods, as noted by Noor et al. (2023) in their study on curriculum application in Islamic education.

Another challenge involves integrating assessment practices. The Independent Curriculum encourages holistic and authentic assessment approaches, yet many teachers rely on conventional checklists and knowledge-based evaluation. (Dewi et al., 2024b) Argue that even progressive curriculum designs risk being implemented traditionally without adequate guidance. In response to this, establishing a curriculum development team at the school level

may enable collaborative material design, workload distribution, and shared reflection practices among educators.

Furthermore, parental involvement is critical in reinforcing PAI learning outside the classroom. Interview findings show that parents at Aisiyah 11 positively respond to the shift in learning approaches. However, there is a need to formalize parent-school collaboration to support consistent religious value transmission at home. According to (Gillies, 2023) Cooperative engagement between families and educators enhances the sustainability of inquiry-based and value-driven learning programs.

In conclusion, factors such as teacher competency gaps, material limitations, and insufficient pedagogical support challenge the implementation of the play-based learning model in PAI at Aisiyah 11 Musi Rawas Kindergarten. Nevertheless, these challenges are not insurmountable. The school can overcome these barriers with targeted teacher training, structured material development, strategic time management, and active parental involvement. Embedding theories of child development and constructivist pedagogy into teacher practice will further enhance the effectiveness of PAI learning in achieving its spiritual and moral objectives.

## CONCLUSION

The PAI learning model, based on the Independent Curriculum at Kindergarten Aisiyah 11 Musi Rawas, refers to the Play-Based Learning Model with the principles of the Independent Curriculum that are more flexible and focus on developing students' potential. Learning is carried out with a fun approach based on the needs and interests of children, providing room for creativity. PAI learning at Aisiyah 11 Kindergarten is applied holistically, which includes learning faith, morals, worship, and Islamic values adapted to children's age development. This model also integrates PAI materials with daily activities and interesting games to improve children's understanding of Islamic religious values. In this PAI learning model, there is active involvement from parents in supporting the learning process. Learning programs are not only carried out in schools, but also involve the surrounding community.

In the context of the Independent Curriculum. The infrastructure and facilities at Aisiyah 11 Kindergarten support implementing the Independent Curriculum-based PAI learning model, such as comfortable classrooms, relevant teaching materials, and learning facilities that support interactive activities, such as teaching aids and digital media. However, to increase effectiveness, schools need to increase the number of digital-based learning resources and develop outdoor facilities that can support experiential learning.



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