

# Parental Engagement and Perception in the Implementation of the Merdeka Curriculum in Early Childhood Education in Indonesia

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.51584/IJRIAS.2025.100700078>

Received: 14 July 2025; Accepted: 20 July 2025; Published: 12 August 2025

## ABSTRACT

The implementation of the Independent Curriculum in early childhood education (ECE) aims to create a flexible, contextual, and child-centered learning environment. This study aims to analyze the effectiveness of three key learning aspects: Direct Experience, Project-Based Learning, and Children's Portfolios, across five ECE institutions implementing the curriculum. A quantitative research approach was applied using n-Gain scores to measure learning improvement, analyzed according to Hake's classification. The findings revealed that the Project-Based Learning aspect achieved the highest average n-Gain score of 0.76 (high category), indicating its strong impact on enhancing children's critical thinking, creativity, and collaboration skills. Conversely, the Children's Portfolio aspect recorded the lowest average n-Gain score of 0.55 (medium category), which was mainly influenced by limitations in documentation tools and low parental engagement. Meanwhile, the Direct Experience aspect demonstrated scores ranging from 0.65 to 0.72, reinforcing constructivist learning principles that emphasize hands-on activities. These results underscore the need for strategic interventions, including optimizing project-based learning practices, strengthening portfolio management systems, and fostering effective school-parent collaboration. The study provides empirical evidence to guide policymakers and educators in advancing curriculum implementation to achieve the Pancasila student profile in early childhood education.

**Keywords:** Independent Curriculum, Early Childhood Education, Project-Based Learning, Parental Involvement, Children's Portfolio

## INTRODUCTION

The subject of Early Childhood Education (ECE) has a strategic role in forming the foundation of child development holistically. The Independent Curriculum in Early Childhood Education is designed to provide flexibility and child-centered learning (Anthon Sope et al., 2024; Nurfadilah et al., 2025; Sari et al., 2025). Early education that is responsive to children's interests and potentials can increase learning motivation and social-emotional readiness (Malaikosa et al., 2025; Mondy et al., 2021; Morkel & McLaughlin, 2015). The government, through Permendikdasmen No. 13/2025, emphasized that curriculum changes emphasize school-parent partnerships (Farantika et al., 2023; Morawska et al., 2019; Murano et al., 2020). In line with that, parental involvement from an early age is very important to support the Independent Curriculum. Therefore, the theoretical framework and concept of parental involvement became the initial basis for this study.

Research by Malaikosa, Yahya, et al., (2025) involving 120 ECE parents showed that 70% of parents expressed satisfaction with the flexibility of the Independent Curriculum, and 65% said the curriculum was more responsive to children's needs. However, 55% of parents expressed concern about teacher readiness (Allen et al., 2022; Jun et al., 2025; Mondy et al., 2021). These findings are an early indication of the importance of teacher training and mentoring interventions. The relationship between parental perception and teacher readiness factors needs to be further analyzed quantitatively. This research is increasingly relevant to the goal of strengthening family-school collaboration.

The model of parental involvement, according to Aini & Adiyanto (2023), includes parenting, communication, volunteering, homeschooling, decision-making, and community collaboration. In the Independent Curriculum,

these six types are very relevant because they support project learning and active parental involvement (Đurišić & Bunijevac, 2017; Milosavljević Đukić et al., 2022; Nurhayati, 2021). Parenting and learning at home help strengthen the context of children's learning outside of school (Adolph & Hoch, 2019; Day et al., 2009; Lynch et al., 2010; Wahyuni & Bee Tin, 2024). Communication and collaboration with the community encourage collective synergy between teachers and parents (B. Haule & Lyamuya, 2024; Darmiany et al., 2022; Graham-Clay, 2024; Wayan Darna et al., 2023). The volunteering and decision-making approach expands the space for parental participation in school policies (Abdullah et al., 2023; B. Haule & Lyamuya, 2024; Wayan Darna et al., 2023).

Parental involvement has proven to significantly increase children's learning motivation and discipline in ECE that implements the Independent Curriculum, which revealed that learning approaches developed in an interactive and participatory manner encourage children's enthusiasm for learning (Graham-Clay, 2024; Mulyati & Eti, 2025; Nurfadilah et al., 2025; Wayan Darna et al., 2023). Other findings from Imara et al. (2025) show that community-based farming projects improve early childhood collaboration and critical thinking skills (Amprazis & Papadopoulou, 2025; Imara et al., 2025; Muñoz-Losa et al., 2025). The synergy between activities at home and school strengthens the value of contextual and practical education. Parents who are actively involved (learning at home, parenting) provide additional stimulus for children's growth and development.

Teacher readiness is an important factor in the successful implementation of the Independent Curriculum in ECE. The results of mixed methods conducted in Serang by teacher readiness research show that 94% of teachers are declared ready to implement this curriculum (Indra Daulay & Fauzidin, 2023; Indrawati et al., 2024; Jannah & Rasyid, 2023; Saabighoot et al., 2024). However, in field observations, 68% of teachers still have difficulty understanding and implementing the curriculum effectively (Netri & Mursid, 2024; Pudyaningtyas et al., 2025; Tunas et al., 2024). The main problems include the lack of mastery of teaching modules and learning media as well as the support of school organizations (Khoirunisa et al., 2024; Nurhafidhah et al., 2024; Panjaitan et al., 2024a). This creates a gap between flexible policies and classroom practices. Therefore, intensive training and mentoring are an urgent need.

The challenges of implementing the Independent Curriculum include limited learning media, access to technology, and variability of parental participation based on socioeconomic background. The availability of adequate learning media plays an essential role in optimizing early childhood learning activities; however, several studies reveal that many schools have not yet provided sufficient media to support innovative learning processes, which may hinder the effectiveness of Kurikulum Merdeka (Indra Daulay & Fauzidin, 2023; Jannah & Rasyid, 2023; Mulyati & Eti, 2025; Tunas et al., 2024). The availability of digital devices and the internet at home also affects the involvement of learning at home (Hidayatullah & Saud, 2020; Muslimin & Indrawati, 2024; Panjaitan et al., 2024b; Qualter, 2024a). Variations in parental participation are found in low-income communities, where engagement tends to be low (Goulet et al., 2024; McWayne et al., 2016; Wang et al., 2024; Yaqoob et al., 2025). To answer that, an inclusive community-based approach needs to be developed (Kim et al., 2023; Yaqoob et al., 2025).

The quantitative approach in this study facilitates objective measurement of parental perception and involvement. The Likert survey allows for the precise assessment of the scale of perception (positive and negative) and engagement (learning at home, communication, etc.) (Coats, 2014; Qualter, 2024b; Schueler et al., 2017). A quantitative advantage is its ability to reach many respondents efficiently (Sunarso et al., 2024; Wildmon et al., 2024). The purposive sampling technique helps to select parents who meet the criteria for being involved in early childhood education to implement the Independent Curriculum (Malaikosa, Yahya, et al., 2025; Sunarso et al., 2024; Wildmon et al., 2024). Thus, the data collected is valid and relevant to the context of the implementation.

The stage of descriptive and inferential statistical analysis is essential to understand the relationship between the variables of perception and parental involvement. Descriptive analysis allows an overview of the frequency of positive perceptions, concerns, and forms of engagement (Imara et al., 2025; Netri & Mursid, 2024; Tunas et al., 2024). Correlation and regression analysis can examine the relationship between positive perception and learning at home or communication engagement (Indrawati et al., 2024; Jannah & Rasyid, 2023; Netri &

Mursid, 2024; Pudyaningtyas et al., 2025). The ttest test or ANOVA may be used to compare engagement in a group of parents with different socioeconomic backgrounds (Aini & Adiyanto, 2023; Đurišić & Bunijevac, 2017; Milosavljević Đukić et al., 2022; Nurhayati, 2021). The statistical findings will strengthen policy recommendations.

The results of the survey will reveal parents' perceptions of the aspects of flexibility, responsiveness, and teacher readiness empirically. The results of a previous study show that 70% of parents are satisfied with the flexibility of Kurikulum Merdeka, and 65% state that the curriculum is responsive to children's needs (Aini & Adiyanto, 2023; Indra Daulay & Fauzidin, 2023; Mulyati & Eti, 2025; Tunas et al., 2024). Accompanied by teacher readiness data (only 45% feel teachers are ready), this survey will validate previous concerns (Jannah & Rasyid, 2023; Netri & Mursid, 2024; Nurhafidhah et al., 2024). If engagement such as "learning at home" is highly correlated positively with respondents' perceptions, then recommendations to expand the program become relevant. Results presentation graphics can make it easier for readers to understand relationship patterns.

The discussion of the survey results will link between positive perceptions of the Independent Curriculum and real forms of parental involvement. For example, parents who are aware of the benefits of flexibility will be more likely to be active in providing projects at home (learning at home and communication) (Aini & Adiyanto, 2023; Jannah & Rasyid, 2023; Mondì et al., 2021; Sunarso et al., 2024). On the other hand, parents who do not understand the purpose of the curriculum (Saabighoot et al., 2024) may tend to be passive. The discussion will explore additional variables such as parents' educational background or access to technology. It is also necessary to consider moderation by teacher readiness if teachers are not prepared, even if parents are active, implementation is still not optimal.

From a policy perspective, the results of this study will provide the basis for practical recommendations for strengthening parental involvement in the Independent Curriculum in PAUD. Recommendations can be in the form of parenting training, efficient communication modules between teachers and parents, and volunteering programs in schools (Aini & Adiyanto, 2023; Milosavljević Đukić et al., 2022; Mondì et al., 2021). The government and institutions need to provide guidance and digital resources so that parents with limited access can still be involved (Anthon Sope et al., 2024; Farantika et al., 2023; Sunarso et al., 2024; Wildmon et al., 2024). Local communities can also be mobilized to provide informal learning spaces (Ainurrifqi, 2024; Coats, 2014; Pudyaningtyas et al., 2025; Sunarso et al., 2024).

The academic implications of this research include the enrichment of the literature on parental involvement and adaptive curriculum in early childhood education. This study bridges the gap between the theory of the engagement model (Khoirunisa et al., 2024; Nurhafidhah et al., 2024), and parental perceptions (Imara et al., 2025; Malaikosa, Yahya, et al., 2025). The study also adds quantitative empirical evidence on the relationship between positive perceptions and specific forms of engagement. In addition, community-based approaches and active parental involvement strengthen the literature on inclusive and adaptive education (Amprazis & Papadopoulou, 2025; Muñoz-Losa et al., 2025; Sunarso et al., 2024).

As a constructive critique, this study also pays attention to methodological and contextual limitations. The use of purposive sampling may result in a more proactive respondent bias-; this needs to be anticipated by adding sociodemographic-based stratified sampling (Aini & Adiyanto, 2023; Đurišić & Bunijevac, 2017; Frey, 2022; Merz et al., 2016). Questionnaire instruments need to be statistically tested for validity and reliability (Landry et al., 2017; Nurfadilah et al., 2025; Sari et al., 2025). The limitation of generalization of results also arises because the research was conducted in a specific area; further studies in different regions are needed (Anthon Sope et al., 2024; Frey, 2022; Milosavljević Đukić et al., 2022).

Strategic recommendations include strengthening coaching-based teacher training, providing contextual learning media, and improving inclusive two-way communication. Teacher training should focus on the preparation of modules, the use of local media, and authentic assessment strategies (Abdullah et al., 2023; Darmiany et al., 2022; Wahyuni & Bee Tin, 2024). Schools and communities need to provide digital platforms for parents with limited access to stay involved (Malaikosa, Kartika, et al., 2025; McWayne et al., 2016; Sunarso et al., 2024).

Local and central governments need to develop policies that strengthen family-school partnerships. These policies can include parent orientation programs, digital-based periodic communication, and involvement in school decision-making (Muslimin & Indrawati, 2024; Netri & Mursid, 2024; Tunas et al., 2024; Wang et al., 2024). Social inclusion programs and technology subsidies can also be expanded so that all parents can participate equally (Indra Daulay & Fauzidin, 2023; Indrawati et al., 2024; Saabighoot et al., 2024).

The advanced research space can reach longitudinal aspects on child development and the impact of parental involvement. Long-term experimental studies can assess the effectiveness of certain types of involvement (parenting vs community collaboration) on socialemotional and academic outcomes (B. Haule & Lyamuya, 2024; Darmiany et al., 2022; Graham-Clay, 2024; Saabighoot et al., 2024). Cross-regional comparative research is also essential to look at differences based on cultural and socioeconomic contexts (Malaikosa, Yahya, et al., 2025; Morkel & McLaughlin, 2015).

Overall, parental involvement and perception are two aspects that affect each other and greatly determine the success of the implementation of the Independent Curriculum at the PAUD level. The quantitative approach provides objective and representative measurements of these variables (Malaikosa, Kartika, et al., 2025; Morawska et al., 2019; Prime et al., 2023; Sunarso et al., 2024). The findings show a positive correlation between inclusive perceptions of curriculum flexibility and real parental engagement rates. However, teacher readiness is still a central issue that must be overcome through training and institutional support. Thus, the results of this research are expected to be a real contribution in formulating a more targeted implementation strategy.

Table 1. N-Gain Analysis Results

| School           | Live Experience | Category | Learning Projects | Category | Children's Portfolio | Category |
|------------------|-----------------|----------|-------------------|----------|----------------------|----------|
| KB And Taqwa     | 0.72            | Tall     | 0.85              | Tall     | 0.60                 | Keep     |
| KB Lab School    | 0.70            | Tall     | 0.80              | Tall     | 0.58                 | Keep     |
| PAUD Graha Karno | 0.65            | Keep     | 0.75              | Tall     | 0.55                 | Keep     |
| KB Nada Ashobah  | 0.68            | Keep     | 0.72              | Tall     | 0.50                 | Keep     |
| KB Al Ibrah      | 0.66            | Keep     | 0.70              | Tall     | 0.52                 | Keep     |

The results showed that there was a variation in n-Gain achievement in the three learning aspects measured, namely Direct Experience, Learning Projects, and Children's Portfolio, in five ECE schools implementing the Independent Curriculum. Overall, the Learning Project aspect had the highest average n-Gain value, which was 0.76, classified as high according to Hake's classification. These findings indicate that the application of project-based learning methods can have a significant impact on improving early childhood skills. In contrast, the Children's Portfolio aspect shows the lowest n-Gain achievement, with an average of 0.55, which is in the medium category. This condition is consistent with previous research, which stated that the main obstacles in portfolio implementation are limited documentation media and lack of parental involvement. Thus, these results confirm the importance of more intensive strategies to strengthen the role of parents and teachers in the management of evidence of child development (Aini & Adiyanto, 2023; Judd et al., 2021; Landry et al., 2017; Malaikosa, Kartika, et al., 2025).

The Live Experience aspect shows n-Gain achievements ranging from 0.65 to 0.72, the majority of which are in the medium to high category. These results indicate that children's involvement in concrete activities can significantly improve cognitive, social, and motor skills. This approach aligns with constructivist learning theory, which emphasizes the importance of hands-on experience in building children's understanding and strengthening connections with their environment. The flexibility provided by the Independent Curriculum allows teachers to design contextual activities that enhance the effectiveness of this strategy. However, its success depends on adequate facility support and active parental involvement in facilitating learning experiences at home (Aini & Adiyanto, 2023; Allen et al., 2022; Merz et al., 2016).

The Learning Project occupies the highest position in the results of this study, with the highest n-Gain achievement of 0.85 in KB At Taqwa. This advantage can be explained by the characteristics of project-based



learning that encourage children to solve problems, work collaboratively, and integrate various skills in a single activity. Such an approach is considered effective in improving children's critical thinking and creativity while also enhancing learning outcomes when supported by parental involvement in home projects. The Independent Curriculum that prioritizes differentiation and contextual learning further strengthens the relevance of this method in ECE. Therefore, the Learning Project becomes a strategic model to optimize the achievement of the Pancasila student profile competencies (Goulet et al., 2024; Hidayatullah & Saud, 2020; Ogundari, 2023; Qualter, 2024a).

The Children's Portfolio has the lowest achievement with an average n-Gain of 0.55 which is in the medium category, so it requires special attention. One of the causative factors is the limitation of teachers in systematically documenting child development (Amprazis & Papadopoulou, 2025; Mulyati & Eti, 2025; Muñoz-Losa et al., 2025). In addition, the low digital literacy of parents in some schools hinders the optimization of technology-based portfolios (Abdullah et al., 2023; Darmiany et al., 2022; Wayan Darna et al., 2023). The success of portfolios in early childhood education relies heavily on effective communication between schools and parents (Phillips et al., 2024). The importance of teacher training to utilize portfolios as an authentic assessment tool and the need to strengthen policies and technical training so that the portfolio serves as a developmental monitoring instrument rather than an administrative formality have been emphasized in previous research (Malaikosa, Kartika, et al., 2025; Phillips et al., 2024; Sunarso et al., 2024).

Analysis between schools showed that KB At Taqwa obtained the highest score in two aspects, namely Direct Experience (0.72) and Learning Project (0.85), while ECE Graha Karno and KB Nada Ashobah were in the medium category in almost all aspects. This variation indicates differences in school managerial capacity, resource availability, and intensity of parental involvement (Malaikosa, Kartika, et al., 2025; Wildmon et al., 2024) shows that the quality of school-parent communication greatly influenced the successful implementation of the Independent Curriculum. KB Lab School, which has a high score in all aspects (average of 0.69), shows that the support of learning facilities and academic culture also strengthens the results of implementation (Phillips et al., 2024; Wildmon et al., 2024). This is in line with the concept of school-family partnership initiated by Epstein (2018) which emphasizes synergy between teachers and parents in supporting children's learning. Thus, this difference in achievement is not only a matter of curriculum, but also of the supporting ecosystem that exists in each school (McWayne et al., 2016).

The results of this study generally support the principles of the Independent Curriculum, which emphasizes child-centered, flexible, and contextual learning. High achievement in the Learning Project aspect proves that when teachers are given the flexibility to design activities according to children's interests, learning outcomes increase significantly (Jannah & Rasyid, 2023; Phillips et al., 2024; Sunarso et al., 2024). However, the findings on low portfolio achievement indicate that there is a gap between policy idealism and practice in the field (Adolph & Hoch, 2019; Aini & Adiyanto, 2023). Previous research highlighted that curriculum flexibility needs to be balanced with adequate technical support and facilities. These findings suggest that implementing the Independent Curriculum in ECE requires a comprehensive approach involving teachers, parents, and school managers (Aini & Adiyanto, 2023; DeRue, 2011; Grashow et al., 2023; Nurhayati, 2021).

The implication of the results of this study is the need for a strategy to strengthen the portfolio aspect through teacher training and digitization of documentation so that the function of authentic assessment runs optimally (Amprazis & Papadopoulou, 2025; Muñoz-Losa et al., 2025; Phillips et al., 2024). In addition, the success of the Learning Project needs to be used as a model of good practice that can be replicated in other schools with the support of the teacher's learning community (Darmiany et al., 2022; Graham-Clay, 2024; Wayan Darna et al., 2023). The importance of parental digital literacy for effective learning partnerships and the need for schools to strengthen communication with parents through various platforms to ensure sustainable family involvement have been widely emphasized (Hidayatullah & Saud, 2020; Jun et al., 2025). The Independent Curriculum will only achieve its goals if there is synergy between policies, teachers, parents, and supporting facilities. Thus, community-based collaborative strategies are the key to improving the quality of early childhood education in the era of the Independent Curriculum (Muslimin & Indrawati, 2024; Phillips et al., 2024).

## CONCLUSIONS

The results of the study show that the implementation of the Independent Curriculum in ECE has a positive impact on improving children's skills through three aspects of learning measured, namely Direct Experience, Learning Projects, and Children's Portfolio. The Learning Project is the most effective aspect with the highest average n-Gain (0.76), which indicates that the project-based approach is able to optimally develop children's creativity, collaboration, and problem-solving skills. The Direct Experience aspect also makes a significant contribution with the achievement of the medium to high category, which confirms the importance of children's involvement in real activities to support meaningful learning. On the other hand, the Children's Portfolio aspect showed the lowest results (average n-Gain 0.55) which was in the medium category, so it required a strengthening strategy, especially related to the use of technology and parental involvement.

The difference in achievement between schools confirms that the success of the implementation of the Independent Curriculum is not only determined by policy, but also by the quality of school management, teacher competence, support facilities, and the level of parental involvement. These findings support the principles of the Independent Curriculum which is child-centered, flexible, and contextual learning, but its implementation still faces challenges in the aspect of authentic assessment through portfolios. Therefore, strengthening strategies need to be focused on developing teacher competencies, parental digital literacy, and the use of effective communication platforms to strengthen school and family partnerships. With a structured collaborative approach, the implementation of the Independent Curriculum in ECE has the potential to realize holistic learning goals that are in accordance with the Pancasila student profile.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The author expressed his gratitude to all parents of ECE students who have participated as respondents in this study. Gratitude was also expressed to the teachers and heads of ECE units who had provided support during the data collection process. Special awards are given to supervisors and fellow academics who have provided input and corrections in the process of preparing this article. Thank you also to the institutions and parties that have directly or indirectly supported the implementation of this research until its completion.

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