

## The Phenomenon of the Independent Curriculum in Developing Gross Motor Skills in Early Childhood at

TK Swasta Jahari Stabat

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### ABSTRACT

This study examines the implementation of the Independent Curriculum in developing gross motor skills among early childhood learners at TK Swasta Jahari Stabat. Gross motor skills, which involve coordinated body movements using large muscles, are crucial for children's physical and cognitive development. Using a qualitative research method, data were collected through interviews, observations, and documentation with school administrators and teachers. The findings reveal that the Independent Curriculum facilitates active, play-based learning, allowing children to develop motor skills through creative activities such as walking on balance beams, zigzag running, and crawling through obstacles. Compared to the previous curriculum, this approach provides greater flexibility for teachers to design engaging activities suited to children's needs. These results support prior research on the benefits of activity-based learning in early childhood education. The study concludes that the Independent Curriculum significantly enhances gross motor skill development. Future research should explore long-term impacts and additional strategies for optimizing early childhood physical education.

## Introduction

Learning and playing are two essential aspects of early childhood development, particularly in enhancing gross motor skills. According to Musfiroh, early childhood education develops habitual aspects such as social, emotional, independence, moral, and religious values, along with basic skill development in language, cognitive abilities, and motor skills. Beaty (in Khoerunnisa et al., 2023) defines motor skill development as comprising both gross and fine motor skills. Gross motor skills involve the coordinated development of large muscles, enabling children to walk, run, jump, and throw, whereas fine motor skills involve smaller muscle movements requiring precision and practice.

The National Department of Education (in Saripah, 2022) states that motor development involves coordinated physical movements regulated by the nervous system, nerves, and muscles. This process integrates the nervous system, muscles, brain, and spinal cord, with gross motor skills typically developing before fine motor skills (Anggraeni & Na'imah, 2022).

The Independent Curriculum, introduced by the Indonesian Ministry of Education and Culture, has brought significant changes to the education system, particularly in Early Childhood Education (PAUD). One of its key aspects is the development of gross motor skills. According to Hikmah (2020), *Merdeka Belajar* (Independent Learning) for early childhood aims to promote free play, enabling children to develop according to their individual growth levels. *Merdeka Belajar* is

closely associated with *Merdeka Bermain* (Independent Play), which underscores the importance of play as a fundamental learning method for young children (Prameswari, 2020). Through freedom of choice, children can learn independently and develop a sense of responsibility for their actions.

The Independent Curriculum is designed to provide educators with greater flexibility and creativity in holistically developing children's potential. In the Early Childhood Education (PAUD) context, this curriculum emphasizes activity-based learning, allowing children to learn through play and exploration (Hikmah, 2022). By integrating more physical activities and games, the learning process becomes more relevant to children's natural tendencies. Activities such as running, jumping, and climbing are incorporated to develop gross motor skills (Nurani et al., 2020).

Children aged 5-6 years experience rapid developmental growth, which is a critical phase in human development (Nofianti, 2021). Early childhood is a unique stage characterized by distinct growth patterns, including gross and fine motor coordination, intelligence (cognitive, emotional, and spiritual), social-emotional behavior, language, and communication skills (Hurlock, 1978, in Munisa, 2020).

Fundamentally, children learn through play, making play-based learning an essential component of early childhood education. Since young children are naturally active explorers, play-based activities must be structured to support developmental tasks without creating pressure.

The learning process should be child-centered, allowing them to build upon previous knowledge and experiences (Rahman et al., 2023).

Holistic child development encompasses moral and religious values, cognitive abilities, language, social-emotional skills, motor skills, and the arts. Early childhood education plays a crucial role in shaping these aspects, particularly in developing gross motor skills, as observed at TK Swasta Jahari Stabat.

Gross motor skill development is associated with basic coordinated movements, such as running, walking, jumping, hitting, and pulling (Munisa et al., 2024). Enhancing gross motor skills in early childhood is a foundational process that builds competence in complex physical movements. Early motor learning serves as a basis for advanced motor skills later in life. The development of gross motor skills involves physiological and neurological growth and requires sensory stimulation and feedback. Sensory stimulation provides environmental input (such as sound, shape, and texture), while feedback helps children refine movement through bodily sensations and motion control.

The Independent Curriculum is a student-centered educational framework that emphasizes potential development and creativity while granting schools the autonomy to tailor learning experiences to local needs and culture. This curriculum allows schools to integrate local wisdom and cultural elements into lesson planning, providing greater participation for both teachers and students in the learning process. The implementation of the Independent Curriculum in early childhood

education (PAUD) is particularly interesting for research, especially regarding play-based learning as an effective instructional method (Rozana et al., 2024).

The Independent Curriculum promotes flexibility in learning, aligning with the principle that children learn best through direct experience (Amrullah et al., 2024). The curriculum also encourages play-based learning as a core teaching strategy, allowing children to be physically active while exploring their environment. For example, traditional physical games can help children understand cultural heritage while developing physical and cognitive skills (Siregar et al., 2023).

By giving children the freedom to choose activities, the Independent Curriculum enables them to explore their environment based on their interests and developmental needs, thus fostering a meaningful learning experience (Trisnani et al., 2024). The curriculum's flexibility also allows teachers to evaluate children's progress through direct observations of motor skill development and social interactions within physical and exploratory activities.

Thus, this study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of how the Independent Curriculum shapes early childhood education, while also offering practical and empirical insights for educators and policymakers. The findings from this research are expected to generate recommendations for the further development of a responsive curriculum that meets the needs of early learners, ultimately

contributing to improving the quality of education in Indonesia.

### Methods

The research employed a qualitative method and was conducted at TK Swasta Jahari Stabat. Data collection was carried out through observations, interviews with the principal and teachers, as well as document analysis at the school. Additionally, field notes and relevant documentation were gathered throughout the study. For data analysis, this study utilized the Miles and Huberman (1992) model, which consists of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. Data reduction involves selecting, focusing, simplifying, abstracting, and transforming raw data obtained from field notes. The conclusions drawn were continuously verified throughout the research process to ensure accuracy and reliability. The collected data were then analyzed and narrated to provide a comprehensive understanding of the research subject.

### Results and Discussions

Before the implementation of the Independent Curriculum at TK Swasta Jahari Stabat, the school followed Curriculum 13, which had been in place from 2014 to 2018 but was still in the adjustment phase. While both curricula share some similarities, there are fundamental differences in their approach to gross motor skill development. Curriculum 13 was more structured, focusing on clearly defined competency achievements in all aspects of child development, including gross motor skills. According to *Permendikbud 137* (2014) in Aghnaita

(2017), gross motor skills in Curriculum 13 were classified into three categories: locomotor movements, non-locomotor movements, and manipulative movements.

At TK Swasta Jahari Stabat, the application of Curriculum 13 in developing gross motor skills for early childhood learners was limited to morning gymnastics without music, simple ice-breaking activities, outdoor educational play (APE), and dance practice, which was only conducted at the end of the academic year as a graduation performance.

**Figure 1. Learning Activities Before the Implementation of the Independent Curriculum**



However, Curriculum 13 lacked flexibility, restricting children's opportunities to freely explore physical movements creatively and spontaneously, as the activities were teacher-centered. From 2020 to the present, TK Swasta Jahari Stabat has adopted the Independent Curriculum, though still in the adaptation stage. This curriculum has brought significant improvements in gross motor skill development, compared to Curriculum 13. The Independent Curriculum adopts a more flexible, contextual, and play-based approach, allowing children

to engage more actively in physical activities that support gross motor skill development. This was confirmed in an interview with the school principal:

*"The Independent Curriculum allows for more variation and creativity, especially in the development of gross motor skills. Teachers are also expected to be more creative in designing lessons for early childhood learners."*

Although Curriculum 13 included gross motor skill development, the scope for exploration and child autonomy was limited. As an innovative approach in early childhood education, the Independent Curriculum embraces fundamental principles that emphasize learning freedom and holistic development. This study aims to analyze the phenomenon of the Independent Curriculum in enhancing gross motor skills among early childhood learners. The research explores how teachers implement this curriculum to foster motor skill development at TK Swasta Jahari Stabat. The following section presents the teaching modules used after adopting the Independent Curriculum.

**Figure 2. Teaching Module**

Modul Ajar TK Swasta Jahari Stabat Pembelajaran mengembangkan motorik kasar	
<b>A. Kegiatan Pembelajaran</b>	
Tema/Subtema/topik	: Kurikulum Merdeka/motorik kasar/berjalan diatas titian balok
Semester/kelompok	: 1/TK
Durasi kegiatan	: 30-40 menit
Tujuan Kegiatan	: ~Anak dapat berjalan diatas titian balok ~Anak dapat menjaga keseimbangan tubuh ~Anak dapat memperkuat otot-otot kaki, lutut dan pinggang
Alat	: Papan balok kayu dengan panjang sekitar 30cm dan lebar sekitar 3cm.
<b>B. Deskripsi Kegiatan Pembelajaran</b>	
<b>1. Penyambutan</b>	



- a. Anak mengucapkan salam kepada guru yang menyambut di halaman
- b. Anak mencuci tangan
- c. Anak berbaris di halaman melakukan senam pagi
- d. Anak masuk kelas

**2. Pembukaan**

- a. Anak dan guru duduk melingkar
- b. Guru mengucapkan salam dan menanyakan kabar kepada anak
- c. Anak berdo'a sebelum belajar
- d. Guru mengajak anak bertepuk tangan dengan tepuk semangat untuk memotivasi anak agar anak lebih bersemangat.
- e. Guru mengabsen anak
- f. Guru mengajak anak bercerita tentang tema dan topik hari ini
- g. Guru menjelaskan kegiatan yang dikerjakan hari ini

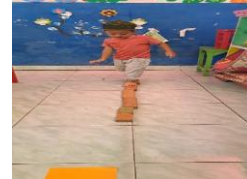
**3. Kegiatan Inti**

Pendahuluan (5-10menit)

- a. Guru memberikan penjelasan singkat kepada anak tentang kegiatan berjalan diatas titian papan balok dan fokus dengan menjaga keseimbangan tubuh.
- b. Guru memberikan contoh berjalan diatas titian papan balok dengan benar yaitu dengan berjalan perlahan, menjaga tubuh tegak dan langkah kaki seimbang.
- c. Anak melakukan pemanasan fisik dengan gerakan lengan berputar kedepan kebelakang, berjalan ditempat dan melompat-lompat.

Pelaksanaan kegiatan (20-25menit)

Ajak anak untuk berbaris dan guru memberikan intruksi kepada anak untuk bergantian berjalan diatas titian balok kayu. Jika anak masih kesulitan, guru memberikan bantuan dengan mendampingi atau memberikan intruksi tambahan seperti "ambil langkah perlahan dan fokus agar bisa menjaga keseimbangan tubuh". Setelah anak menguasai permainannya guru memberikan tantangan kepada mereka dengan berjalan mundur dan berjalan dengan mata tertutup.



**4. Recalling**

- ~Anak merapikan peralatan bermain
- ~Menanyakan perasaan anak selama kegiatan
- ~Memberikan pujian untuk usaha dan pencapaian anak
- ~Bila ada perilaku yang kurang tepat harus dibicarakan Bersama
- ~Istirahat makan
- ~Bermain bebas

**5. Kegiatan Akhir**

- a. Refleksi kegiatan hari ini
- b. Penyampaian pesan moral pada anak
- c. Penyampaian kegiatan esok hari
- d. Berdo'a pulang kemudian salam.

The Independent Curriculum at TK Swasta Jahari Stabat provides educators with greater flexibility in designing activities that promote gross motor development. Observations indicate that gross motor activities are no longer limited to gymnastics, throwing balls, jumping, or running. Instead, more creative activities have been introduced, such as balancing exercises by walking in a zigzag pattern while holding two

balls, walking on balance beams, and crawling through obstacles to enhance body coordination and movement control.

**Figure 3. Classroom-Based Learning Activities in the Independent Curriculum**



Data collected through observations show a significant improvement in children's gross motor skills after participating in Independent Curriculum activities. Children demonstrated higher engagement levels in physical play and exhibited greater confidence in performing various movements. Furthermore, interviews with teachers confirmed that the Independent Curriculum allows for more flexibility in adjusting schedules and activities to better align with children's individual needs and interests. The following section presents the results of the Independent Curriculum implementation in enhancing gross motor skills among early childhood learners at TK Swasta Jahari Stabat.

The findings highlighted the significant role of the Independent Curriculum in fostering gross motor skill development among early

childhood learners at TK Swasta Jahari Stabat. Prior to the implementation of the Independent Curriculum, physical activities were primarily structured and teacher-led, focusing on limited motor skill exercises such as morning gymnastics, outdoor educational play, and occasional dance practices. However, the shift to the Independent Curriculum introduced a more flexible, play-based approach, allowing children greater freedom to explore and develop their gross motor skills through active participation in creative physical activities. This aligns with Hikmah (2022), who emphasized that Merdeka Belajar (Independent Learning) fosters self-directed exploration and skill development through play-based education, providing children with an environment conducive to physical, cognitive, and socio-emotional growth.

Additionally, this study supports the findings of Nurani et al. (2020), which demonstrated that active play and exploration-based learning significantly enhance children's gross motor coordination. The integration of activities such as zigzag walking while holding two balls, balancing on wooden beams, and crawling through obstacles in TK Swasta Jahari Stabat mirrors the principles of dynamic, hands-on learning, as proposed by Trisnani et al. (2024). These activities actively engage multiple muscle groups, allowing children to refine body coordination, spatial awareness, and balance control. Furthermore, observations in this study revealed a notable increase in children's participation and enthusiasm in motor skill activities, reinforcing the

argument made by Munisa et al. (2024) that child-led physical activities contribute to higher levels of engagement and skill retention.

Moreover, the results align with the theory of motor skill development proposed by Beaty (2023), which categorizes gross motor growth as a progressive process requiring regular stimulation and a conducive environment. The Independent Curriculum, by promoting activity-based learning, fulfills these requirements by ensuring that movement-based tasks are integrated into daily learning activities. Similarly, Rozana et al. (2024) highlighted that learning environments encouraging movement and self-expression facilitate more rapid motor skill acquisition, which is consistent with the increased agility, coordination, and motor adaptability observed in this study.

Based on these findings, it can be concluded that the Independent Curriculum provides a substantial advantage in developing children's gross motor skills, as it allows for a balance between structured guidance and free exploration. By enabling teachers to design interactive and engaging activities, children experience holistic development, preparing them for higher levels of physical competence and cognitive engagement in future learning experiences.

### **Conclusion**

This study highlights the significant impact of the Independent Curriculum on the development of gross motor skills in early childhood education, particularly at TK Swasta Jahari Stabat. The results indicate that a flexible, play-based learning approach allows children to explore

and develop their physical abilities more effectively compared to traditional structured methods. The integration of movement-based activities, such as zigzag walking while holding balls, balancing on wooden beams, and crawling through obstacles, demonstrated notable improvements in children's coordination, balance, and motor adaptability.

These findings align with previous research emphasizing the importance of interactive and exploratory learning environments in fostering holistic child development. The Independent Curriculum provides educators with the flexibility to design engaging and developmentally appropriate activities, enabling children to enhance their gross motor skills through self-directed play. Given the positive outcomes observed, it is recommended that early childhood institutions continue to implement and refine activity-based learning strategies to support comprehensive child development. Future studies could further explore long-term effects and additional innovative approaches to enhance motor skill development in early childhood education.

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